

*Writing as a Ministry for God's Glory*

by **Kathy Collard Miller**

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## Introduction and Welcome

I can tell you want to be a writer! You are reading this book! You have a worthy desire inspired by God. It may be His will to use you in wonderful ways to minister to many people. I know! I've seen God's work through me and it's thrilling to look back and be surprised by God's orchestration of my own beginnings into writing as a ministry.

My interest in writing goes all the way back to my childhood. I loved being at my desk and touching paper. I didn't know what a writer was back then but I loved to put words on paper. I excelled in my English writing classes and even tried writing a novel while in high school. Also in high school, I was editor of our school newspaper.

As an adult, that dream of writing was put on a back burner because I really didn't know how to make a writer's life come true. Then a traumatic experience turned my life around. I had been married seven years to Larry, and I was the mother of a two-year-old daughter named Darcy and an infant named Mark. I couldn't handle life, marriage, or mothering and physically and emotionally abused my two-year-old daughter.

But God was faithful and after showing me the underlying causes and solutions for my problem, awoke within me a desire to share my story after I attended an community adult education writing class. I wrote a query letter to *Moody Monthly* magazine and they wanted to hear about my story. After I wrote it, they purchased it. I was thrilled.

Some time after that, with trepidation I attended a writer's conference and began considering writing a book. That first book, entitled *Out of Control* came out in 1984. It recently has been updated and republished as *No More Anger: Hope for an Out-of-Control Mom* with Elk Lake Publishing, Inc.

After *Out of Control* was published, I continued to attend writers conferences and grow in my understanding. Doors of opportunities through books, articles, and then speaking opened up. I could see God leading me more deeply into a writing ministry. I considered myself the most fortunate of all people.

I still am most fortunate because I love what I'm doing. I'm the author of over 50 books and over 1,000 magazine articles, blog posts, guest posts, and contributions to other books.

I'm thrilled to share with you what I have learned which I trust will support and inspire you if God is calling you to a ministry of writing.

—Kathy Collard Miller, [www.KathyCollardMiller.com](http://www.KathyCollardMiller.com)

Kathy Collard Miller is the author of over 50 books and can be reached through [www.KathyCollardMiller.com](http://www.KathyCollardMiller.com). Her books are available on [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) She is also a speaker who has spoken in over 30 US States and 8 foreign countries. As a lay counselor, she meets frequently with those looking for greater sanctification.

## Chapter 1 Writing an Article

by **Kathy Collard Miller**

*Go now, write it on a tablet for them, inscribe it on a scroll, that for the days to come it may be an everlasting witness.—Isaiah 30:8*

This first chapter covers a basic that will help you fulfill your calling. Most beginning writers find it hard to believe God wants them to write an article first. They believe only a book will be a witness to God. But consider this: for most of us, our book might sell 10,000 copies but usually it's less than 5,000. In contrast, an article usually reaches a much wider audience of readers than that. Especially with on-line magazines and blogs, etc, your article will reach many more people than your book ever could.

Don't discount the value of an article for reaching people. Plus, you will accomplish an article's completion more quickly. And thirdly, each of your articles on the same topic could become the chapters of your book. You are writing your book as you are writing chapters and creating interest.

But before you can write an article, you'll need to consider the topics you could write about. Here are some potential article ideas. You may or may not feel qualified to write about one or many of them at this moment, but have no fear. You can still consider writing about a topic in the future as you continue studying and researching on the topic.

### **Topics for Articles**

From this list, indicate which of these subjects you have an initial interest in:

- Bible application
- Business
- Celebrities
- Children's stories/articles
- Christian character development
- Christian education
- Contentment
- Cults/Occult
- Devotional readings
- Divorce
- Emotions
- Environment
- Family
- Finances
- Grieving
- Handicapped individuals
- Healing
- Health
- Home schooling
- Marriage
- Missions/Missionaries
- Parenting
- Personal experience

Relationships  
 Salvation story  
 Self esteem  
 Single life  
 Sports  
 Stress  
 Successful people  
 Theology  
 Witnessing  
 Worship  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

In the beginning, it's best to write about what you know. As you research other areas, you'll write about those because you can become an expert through research and experience.

In order to write an article, we need to research. There are two primary ways for gathering your material: in a physical file and in a virtual file. You'll use both. As you read through the following information, apply it to your physical or virtual file.

Label a physical or digital file folder for each area you've picked from the above list. Every time you find something about one of your chosen topics, insert it into the appropriate folder. If you find something that applies to more than one area, make a copy and put it in both folders. You never know whether something you see could be of importance for an article or book later. It is a much bigger problem to have too much material to choose from, rather than too little.

And yes, you are gathering material for both an article and a book at the same time.

### **Permissions Information**

As you do your research, you'll most likely find a lot of your material comes from books you read. It's important to be accurate in recording where you found your material. It can be very time consuming later if you don't know where you found something and then have to try to find it by flipping through a book. And often, we can't even remember what book we found it in.

In order to prevent that kind of problem, track the Permissions Information by including this information with each piece of research from a book, article, or any kind of virtual, digital source:

- a. title
- b. author/writer
- c. quote by original author/writer (if the author is quoting someone else)
- d. year the book, article, etc. published
- e. publishing company and its city
- f. page(s) number; for Kindle or ebook, note the page or Location.

If using material from a blog or other source, copy the link in your search bar and make a note of that.

If your material is from a magazine, then you would record similar data, except you will also note the magazine name and page number(s).

Later, as you write your article or book manuscript, include this information in your manuscript so that it will always be available. The final article may not include that information, but it will be up to the editor whether he wants to include it or not.

### **Ideas for Researching**

Here are some ideas for researching. You can find material in:

- a. Pastor's sermon. This may be an important source, especially if you're writing something based on a particular passage of Scripture and your pastor address those verses. It's amazing how the Lord often works that way. Or it may be he'll say a quote or quip that applies to your material.

If he doesn't give the source of his material, it would be wise to check with him later for that information.

b. Television. You never can tell what you'll find of value, even from watching television. I remember hearing a cute quote about worry while watching TV and have been able to use it for years. Some informative, instructional kind of programs even make transcripts of the program available. That would be a valuable resource, especially on projects dealing with scientific information.

c. Radio. Just like television, the radio can be an important source. Some writers I know carry a small, portable tape recorder with them, especially in the car. Of course, your cell phone is always a valuable source for recording information.

d. Books. Books are usually the best source of information. I have found my church library to be an important research resource. I don't have to buy the books and if something is lengthy, I can just make a copy. If your own church doesn't have a big library, see whether a large church in your area won't mind having you check materials out of their library.

If there is a publisher who tends to publish books regularly on the topics you cover, write them to see whether you can receive free review copies, especially if you are willing to write an on-line review, for instance, on Amazon. A writer friend of mine who frequently writes on parenting receives books about her favored subject. The publishing company knows she is a good person to receive their books because she also leads seminars on that topic and recommends books to others. That relationship was of benefit to both my friend and the publisher.

e. Personal Bible study. As Christian writers, much of our material will be based on Scripture. As we study the Word, we will have insights and ideas that will later be used in our articles, books, and blog posts.

But if we don't write down or record our thoughts and ideas, it will be lost to us. Therefore, it's a very good idea to have some sort of file where you can list the different topics and ideas you have covered in your Bible study work and in your journal. If you have recorded your thoughts and insights in your journal, you could jot that date on a piece of paper and drop it into the file folder referring to the topic you wrote about in your journal. That way you will not have to rewrite all of the information.

On my e-reader, I have categories/collections of e-books. I highlight or highlight and make a note in the e-book the information I want to remember for possible use.

Another idea is to have a virtual file folders with the name of every book in the Bible. This can become an important place for putting information about a particular verse or passage you are studying. Then when you want to refer in an article or book about a particular verse or passage, you can pull up the file for that particular book of the Bible and have it available.

It is a good idea to have paper and pen or pencil always available. It's particularly important to have your paper and pen or pencil on your night stand beside your bed. Writers know we often get our best ideas in the middle of the night. We wake up with this brilliant idea knowing it's so wonderful we could never forget it. But of course in the morning, we've forgotten the idea and are kicking ourselves trying to remember such brilliance. You never know when a wonderful idea will spring into your brain, so have the ability to make note of it all the time.

### **Self Help Article**

Self help encourage and inspire a reader to deal with an area of need in their lives with practical ideas and instruction.

As you think of this kind of article, and actually any kind of article, consider these possible openings. I'll also include examples of each.

*1. Examples of other people struggling.* "Ray and Jean have two children and a fairly satisfying marriage yet Jean is troubled by one aspect of their relationship. 'Ray sometimes get stressed out from his work,' Jean told us, 'or he feels depressed about something. I know when something is bothering him, but I'm never sure what it is. It could be me, for all I know. When I

ask him about it, I always get the same reply: he insists nothing is wrong."

2. *Anecdote of personal struggle.* "I had prayed so many times asking God for an instantaneous deliverance of my anger. I just didn't understand why He didn't answer my plea. But in time, God revealed the underlying causes of my anger and empowered me to steadily become more patient. Now I have more to share with others."

3. *Refer to reader directly.* "We all face job stress from time to time, but when that stress follows you home, your marriage can suffer."

4. *Statistic about the need.* "In 1981, there were 2.4 million marriages and 1.2 million divorces. So people assumed half of all marriages ended in divorce. But such conclusions were erroneous because they overlooked more than 50 million established marriages. Lou Harris says only one in eight marriages end in divorce, and only two percent of all marriages break up in any single year."

5. *Generalization about the need.* "I know a place in North Carolina where two rivers come together. From the top of a high bluff, you can watch the rivers move calmly toward their meeting point. But where they converge, the real battle takes place. One strong, independent stream meets an equally strong, independent stream, and water from the two churns and foams in a noisy, rushing current.

"A good marriage is similar to the merging of those two rivers. One independent person meets another independent person, and they decide to join their lives into one. Like the rivers, two marriage partners become a separate creation. But two people do not join their lives easily or without conflict."

6. *Quote about the need.* "Someone has said, 'Worry is like a rocking chair; it gives you something to do but you don't go anywhere.' We can easily think worrying is necessary, but it leaves out trust in God."

7. *Ask a question.* "How can a woman keep marital romance alive?"

### **Develop the Body of the Article**

Years ago, Marita Littauer Tedder created a formula to make this part of our writing simple. I have continued to use it both for articles and book chapters. Marita wrote, "We want our article or chapter to stand out in the minds of our audience like a pier stands out in the ocean."

She developed the acrostic P.I.E.R. to tell us the main ingredients for every main idea in our article or book chapter. PIER stands for:

P: Point: the basic idea

I: Instruction: specific ideas for dealing with the problem

E: Example: anecdotes and stories (either your own or others)

R: Reference: the authority behind your point including a Scripture, quote, or statistic.

Here's how to use the acrostic. You may be writing an article about dealing with stress, and the three main topics of your article are time pressures, worry, and unrealistic expectations. In writing about time pressures, give your basic point (P), then an anecdote (E), then a Scripture (R), and end with some practical instruction (I).

For your second main point, worry, mix up the order of PIER. The same goes for the third main category of unrealistic expectations. If you follow this formula of including those four basic areas of PIER, you will write a body of the article.

### **Potential Article Conclusions**

Here are some possibilities:

1. *A circle ending.* This is where the ending refers to what you wrote about in beginning. For instance, the article starts with how Bill and Jane are struggling in their relationship. Close the article by referring back to them with how they are applying the information in your article and thriving.

2. *A summary.* Mentions briefly each point made in the article.

3. *A future-looking perspective.* For instance, in an article about a ministry or an organization, you could write about what the group will be doing in the future. If your article is about a problem, you could say how experts anticipate it being addressed in the future by a group or ministry.

4. *An invitation to change.* This is where you would challenge the reader to make a change in their life by addressing them directly.

### **The Train Metaphor**

William Zinsser, author and writing teacher, wrote, "The most important sentence in any article is the first one. If it doesn't induce the reader to proceed to the second sentence, your article is dead. And if the second sentence doesn't induce him to continue to the third sentence, it's equally dead. Of such a progression of sentences, each tugging the reader forward until he is safely hooked, a writer constructs that fateful unit: the 'lead.'" (pg. 80, *Writer to Writer*, Bodie and Brock Thoene, Bethany House Publishers, 1990, Minneapolis, MN)

As you write any article, think of it being constructed like the components of a train. Each component of the train represents a part of the article, such as:

*The Cow Catcher* represents the first sentence. It should grab the readers' interest.

*The Engine* is the Lead paragraph(s). It empowers the article to continue.

*The Passenger Cars* represent the body of the article. Each passenger car includes the P. I.

E. R.

Finally, we have the *Caboose* as the Ending.

I'm confident you'll find with more and more practice, writing an article will become easier. Don't give up if it's discouraging in the beginning. Keep at it.

In time you will experience the joy of receiving emails from the readers of your articles telling you how your words touched and changed her heart. Hone your skills and write your ideas down. Your readers will thank you.

Kathy Collard Miller is the author of over 50 books and can be reached through [www.KathyCollardMiller.com](http://www.KathyCollardMiller.com). Her books are available on [amazon.com](http://amazon.com). She is also a speaker who has spoken in over 30 US States and 8 foreign countries. As a lay counselor, she meets frequently with those looking for greater sanctification.

## Chapter 2 Writing Personal Experience Articles

by Kathy Collard Miller

*For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.—Acts 4:20*

The personal experience article is often the first way a new writer begins her writing career. Not only is it an important place to start, it is an essential tool for any writer to communicate what God has done in her life. Because of its importance, we will spend an entire chapter focusing on this important vehicle for writers.

My own writing career began with writing my personal experience, as I shared with you in the first chapter. That article, which was the first article I ever sold, has been reprinted many times. I've also rewritten that story in other ways from different angles for other articles. In addition, those stories have been reprinted numerous times. Personal experience stories are used by many print magazines, online magazines and blogs.

A personal experience article tells yours or someone else's story. After writing my own story, I went on to find other people who had good stories and wrote about them.

One day I read in the newspaper about a woman who had a ministry to people with a certain disease which she had. It sounded like she was a Christian and I wondered whether I should try to contact her and write an article about her. But I felt hesitant. Thinking my husband would give me an excuse because he wouldn't think it was a good idea, I asked him what he thought of it. He immediately said, "Sounds great. Go for it!" Now I would have to do it. I was able to contact her, interview her, write up her story, and sell the article.

The main goal of Christian personal experience articles is to impact a reader's thinking and feeling so they are inspired by the spiritual journey of another Christian and learn to trust God more themselves.

### **The Key Elements**

The key elements of the personal experience story are:

1. *Identification.* Identification means we want the reader to identify with us by having his or her emotions involved. We want to involve the readers' mind, emotions, heart, and senses. This is why in many ways personal experience stories resemble fiction. Fictional techniques like dialogue, plot, description, suspense, and creating scenes are used for full effect.

What if the reader has never experienced what you are writing about? Through writing techniques, we want to make them think, "This could happen to me" or "I'm experiencing similar feelings in my challenge right now." We desire the reader to think, "If this ever does happen to me, I want to remember what I've learned" and "if this person learned to trust God more then I can too in what I'm currently going through."

2. *Benefits for reader.* Through a personal experience story, some word or encouragement will help the reader in her own life. Although personal experience stories aren't usually thought of as a kind of "self help article," they often have that effect anyway, whether the help is offered overtly or subtly.

3. *Spiritual or moral take-a-way.* Not only do we want emotional encouragement for our reader, we want to encourage her to grow closer to the Lord by making wise, righteous choices. We want her to have greater faith in God's power and think, "If God can work in that person's life, I can trust Him with my problem."

Every personal experience story may not have all three elements, but the more elements a story has, the more powerful and effective it will be.



### **Types of Personal Experience Stories**

Here are the types of personal experience stories:

1. *Physical Healing/Coping*: stories about illness, death, handicaps, or injuries.
2. *Emotional Healing/Coping*: problems of fear, loneliness, widowhood, job loss, or addictions like it alcohol, drugs, gambling, pornography.
3. *Relationships*: how relationship were healed or improved; or how acceptance of a poor relationship brought greater dependence on God.
4. *Adventure*: people in dangerous situations, or maybe a situation not having as much danger but still strong suspense.
5. *Conversion*: shows how someone came to know the Lord, often focusing on the "before" of their lifestyle and their "now" relationship with God. This is most likely the most common kind of personal experience story printed in Christian magazines.
6. *Personality profile*: includes a famous person or a person who has done something unique or important for the Lord. This can be written in the "as told to" or "with" style. But it could also be written in third person.

For instance, I once wrote a personal experience story about a woman who overcame bulimia and then began a ministry to women suffering from eating disorders. I wrote this story in first person from her perspective and the byline included her name and then "as told to Kathy Collard Miller." The phrase "as told to" indicates the article was written by someone else but with a the first person style.

In the personality profile, be sure to include descriptions of your subject's appearance and show their personality through mannerisms and the actions or decisions they make. Be true to their way of talking in any dialogue yet do not make them look ridiculous with bad grammar or inappropriate word usage.

It's appropriate to show them as human with imperfections or weaknesses. But if you tell about them making a poor decision, include some "redemption:" in other words, that person learning from the experience and indicating it was ungodly.

7. *Organization/Ministry/Service*: this article tells about the efforts of a group who is serving the Lord in some way or an individual who is ministering for God in personal ministry.

With an organization, it's usually a good idea to tell the story through the eyes of one person who is a part of that group because it seems more personal and interesting. The person could be the founder, president, or a person benefiting from their services, or some volunteer working with them.

Even though in a sense you are "reporting," don't make it sound like that. You will still want to use fiction techniques, which we will explain later.

It may be appropriate to make a composite "person" of many people involved if there needs to be anonymity or privacy.

Look at the list of the seven types of personal experience stories. Which ones could you immediately begin to write about? Make plans now and as you do, keep in mind the following ideas for writing such a story in a powerful way.

### **Writing the Personal Experience Story**

The most important concept you must remember is "Show—Don't Tell." If you have been to any kind of writing conference or seminar, you've heard this concept before but we can never hear it enough.

"Telling" uses passive verbs like "be" and "was." "Showing" uses powerful verbs. The concept of "showing" is especially important in writing personal experience stories because it's through "showing" that the reader will become involved and touched at an emotional level.

Here are some examples:

*Instead of writing "I was afraid" write: My throat felt dry and I couldn't swallow. "What*

am I doing here?" I wondered, as I rubbed my sweat-soaked hands on my jeans.

*Instead of writing "She was uncomfortable" write:* She wiggled in her chair as if she were sitting on an anthill. Her eyes darted back and forth between me and the minister.

*Instead of writing "The mountain was very high" write:* My eyes kept looking farther and farther up trying to find the peak of the snow-covered mountain. "It'll most likely take me a year to climb it," I muttered out loud to anyone standing close.

Can you see the difference? *Telling* kind of writing is passive and boring. But when we *show*, we more powerfully communicate through the senses.

### **DEA Elements**

I like to use the acrostic DEA to help us remember elements of *showing*.

D: dialogue and detail

E: emotion

A: action

Here are more examples. Find the DEA elements:

*Instead of writing, "Tony said he was angry" write:* Tony slammed the slim, tan-colored phone down and screamed, "I can't believe she did that!"

*Instead of writing, "I was afraid" write:* My throat felt dry and I couldn't swallow. "What am I doing here?" I wondered, as I rubbed my sweat-soaked hands on my jeans.

I used the DEA elements when writing the opening paragraphs of my personal experience story telling how God delivered me from being a child abuser. Instead of writing, "I was a child abuser," I wrote:

I rounded the corner of our living room and stopped. My two-year-old daughter, Darcy, sat on the edge of the fireplace sifting ashes through her fingers. The black cinders littered the carpet and bricks.

"Darcy!" I yelled. "I've told you three times today, don't play in the fireplace!"

Anger boiled within me. I didn't need another mess to clean up with company coming that evening. I strode over to her, yanked her up by her arm, and began hitting her bottom and legs. "Look at the mess you've made," I shrieked as my hand slapped against her skin again and again. "Why do you keep disobeying me?"

Darcy's hysterical screaming finally brought me back to reason. I sank to the floor beside her and cradled my head in my hands. "Oh God," I pleaded, "I did it again! I promised I would control myself today. What happened?"

If you would like practice writing powerfully using "showing" instead of "telling," rewrite these "telling" statements in a more powerful way by using active verbs and descriptive words:

"He was sad"

"Carla felt delighted"

"Fred was tense"

### **Expanded Elements of DEA**

*An important way to "show" is to use dialogue frequently.* Show personality and choices through interaction with others. Obviously, this takes more words and space on a page and in a limited-word article this could be a problem. But still use it as much as possible.

For instance, in an article I found entitled "My Mother Has Alzheimer's," the author, Sharon Fish, effectively uses dialogue to describe the condition of her mother. She wrote,

I can still remember that day in the doctor's office when Mom was diagnosed. Her conversation with a young neurology resident served to reinforce their findings:

"I just want to ask you a few questions, Mrs. Fish," he began.

"Okay," my mother replied.

"What year is it?" He asked.  
 "It's 1960," she said.  
 "No, it's 1980," he corrected. "What month is it?"  
 "May," she answered.  
 "No, it's December. What's today's date?"  
 "The first. Is that right?"  
 "No, it's the 10th. What is the day of the week?"  
 "You're so smart, you tell me," my mother said.

I hope you can see the value of such dialogue. Sharon Fish effectively used dialogue to communicate her mother's condition. She could have written, "It was sad when my mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's by a young neurology doctor." That statement lacks the power that was communicated through the dialogue between the doctor and Sharon's mother.

*Another way to "show" is to write about action/emotion.* If a person is angry, show them throwing something or yelling. If they are feeling depressed, show them staring at the TV hour after hour. Use strong emotional words like: "furious," "despairing," "jubilant," or "broken-hearted."

*In personal experience stories, instruction should be subtle.* Don't refer directly to the reader using the word "you." If you do, it will come across as "preaching" and turn the reader off. Also it can destroy the atmosphere of having the reader feel they are a part of the story.

We don't even want to write something like, "If you ever experience something similar." Don't worry; you're going to teach them without actually pointing out to them what they're supposed to learn.

I struggled with that concept early in my writing. My first book idea was to instruct parents on how to deal with their parenting frustrations. But the editors I contacted said I was not qualified to give such instruction. Instead they suggested I write my story in book form. I resisted that idea because I wanted to give practical ideas that would help people.

When I finally gave up, I wrote my personal experience book and I've found that parents have still been helped as they read it. Today, that book is titled *No More Anger: Hope for an Out-of-Control Mom*. The reader experiences and learns from what I went through. The "teaching" is included without it being direct instruction. The reader learns through my example.

In other words, I don't tell the reader how to discipline her child better to deal with frustration. I "show" techniques I used to have more patience from disciplining my daughter effectively.

If you're feeling fearful that your strong message isn't going to get across without "preaching" to the reader, remember it's the Holy Spirit who will actually do the teaching within their hearts, using your written words.

If both you and your editor believe the practical instruction is necessary, an option to consider is the "sidebar." A sidebar is information encased in a border, separate from the article. It can be a useful way to communicate further information or suggestions for change.

*Avoid the temptation to include every little detail of your story.* Yes, that detail may have significance for you but unless it's truly significant to the story, edit it out. Be very selective. A good idea is to get the input of an objective reader or critique group. In a later lesson, we will talk in more depth about a critique group.

*Don't get distracted onto "rabbit trails."* Rabbit trail writing goes off in a different direction than the purpose of your article. Keep to your point. Have only one main theme or focus.

*Help the reader "see" the story as much as possible.* Give short, concise descriptions of the surroundings. Describe clothing, appearance, facial expressions, or other facts that will help the reader's "mental eye." For an article, these must be short but therefore powerful, including what's really important. For a book, you can go into more detail.

*Dive right into your story.* Sometimes the hardest thing to do is get the story started. It is

best not to give a lot of background at first. Dive right into your story to quickly involve your reader.

When I am first working on a personal experience story, or any article for that matter, I usually end up cutting the first two paragraphs out of the first draft. It seemed like I was cutting information the reader should know, but usually the story was fine without it. If not, I could put it in later.

For instance: here's a first draft for my personal experience story about being an angry mother:

I didn't know how I'd become so angry after becoming a mother, but just gradually I'd become a screaming meanie. All day long it seemed like I couldn't say a positive thing to my two-year-old daughter. Why was I acting like this?

One day I found Darcy playing in the fireplace for the third time that day and I screamed, "Darcy, how many times do I have to tell you. Don't play in the fireplace."

I edited that to:

"I marched over to two-year-old Darcy and screamed, "Darcy, how many times do I have to tell you? Don't play in the fireplace."

### **Cautions for Personal Experience Articles**

Here are some additional cautions to consider.

*There should be a certain amount of emotional healing* before the story is told about those who have experienced trauma or victimization. Total healing isn't necessary or possible in most cases, but there must be a certain amount of objectivity from your subject in order for you to be able to share their story without other issues clouding the purpose and message.

For instance, if you are a victim in the story and you haven't forgiven the perpetrator, bitterness and resentment may come across in your story.

It's alright to identify and admit where healing still needs to occur. You could write: "Although I'm not totally healed yet from this experience, I have seen the Lord work on a lot of issues in my life and I'm confident He'll continue to do that."

*No happy ending is required.* You don't have to give a happy ending if that's not true. "They lived happily ever after" stories can sometimes be a disservice because a reader wonders why her life isn't working out the same way. Be real and honest about any continuing struggles or weaknesses if they are pertinent to the story.

### **Additional Instruction**

As you write your personal experience article—or any article—keep the following rules in mind. They were written by Susan Titus Osborn for an article in *The Christian Communicator*. You'll find instruction for good writing within these tongue-in-cheek guidelines. She has entitled it, "Avoid Bad Writing." You may have to think about these instructions twice, but it will be worth it. *Remember: these are actually pointing out the wrong way of writing.*

1. Use strong vocabulary words instead of *gimmicks* like "underlining," "bold face," "italics," "quote marks," or "exclamation marks"!!!!!!
2. Don't mix your metaphors or your writing will sound like a cat out of water.
3. Don't be a writer who uses "their" or "they" with a singular noun because they don't know if the writer is a male or a female.
4. Don't any words out.
5. But be sure not to start your sentences with a conjunction.
6. Learn the difference between its and it's. Its not too hard.
7. Don't pepper, your writing, with commas, especially, ones you don't, need.
8. Don't ever, under any circumstances, make hasty generalizations like everybody does all the time.
9. Communicate comprehensively with noncomplex verbiage.

10. Avoid contractions in formal writing. They're distracting and we won't take your writing seriously.
11. Don't use vague referents. They'll look funny on your end.
12. Abbrevs. are infrml. and confus.
13. Don't have more than one main idea in your sentence or you will have a run on sentence and people won't be able to follow what you are saying and they will forget what they are reading so you should avoid that.
14. Double negatives are sneaky. You don't notice them because they aren't far apart and don't get lost from each other.
15. Like get real! Don't use cool language that's outta here before you get your story hot off the press.
16. Avoid incorrect forms of verbs even if they snuck into our everyday language.
17. Don't lie the misuse of lay and lie only on people who lay around without using correct grammar.
18. People who write good know how to use good and well.
19. Obviously, there's no need to use terms like "it goes without saying," "obviously," "as you well know."
20. Remember, computer spell checkers can only tell ewe that all you're words are reel words, knot if they are the words ewer looking fore.
21. Writers should never shift your point of view.
22. Don't assume.
23. Be sure pronouns are near in the sentence, like often before the verb, their antecedents.
24. Avoid repetition since repeating yourself, or saying things in too many different ways, so that you go over the same thing again and again and again, frustrates, angers, and irritates your reader or listener.
25. Like the saying goes, avoid cliches like the plague.
26. If you end a sentence with a preposition, make sure it is clear what it refers to.
27. Do not forget to be sure not to write in negative form when you can write in positive form.
28. Bad sentence fragments.  
(Used by permission, *The Christian Communicator*, May, 1992.)

I hope these rules and the information you've received in this chapter for writing a personal experience story will inspire you. Whether or not you have written before, or been published, the personal experience story is a powerful way to show God working in our lives. I encourage you to make plans to write such a story.

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## Chapter 3 Writing the Devotional Article

by **Kathy Collard Miller**

*My mouth will speak words of wisdom, the utterance from my heart will give understanding.—Psalm 49:3*

In our last chapter, we talked about how the personal experience article is a wonderful way to begin writing or to continue our writing ministry. The same thing applies to writing the devotional article. It is a quick yet challenging form of writing. Because the devotional article tends to be a short piece, you might expect it would be easier to write. But that isn't always the case. Yet this genre of writing is still often used by beginning writers as a way to effectively communicate their message. It is a powerful way for any writer to share their message. The genre of the devotional can be used for either articles or books.

### **Attractions of Devotional Writing**

I think we all appreciate the devotional style because we can read about an important spiritual truth and have our heart impacted in a short amount of time. And of benefit to us writers is the fact that devotionals are in demand both for magazines and for books.

A former editor of *The Upper Room*, which publishes only devotionals, said, "Good devotional writing helps readers connect the events of their daily lives with the ongoing activity of God. It causes readers to reflect on ordinary events as a means of understanding supernatural truths. It feeds the interior life, causing readers to examine their commitment to God's ways. As humans, we perceive the abstract routes through concrete experiences, and so devotional writing must be concrete. It must be authentic."

Devotional writing is significant because it is quick reading for busy people. There is a tendency these days for people to want to read short pieces of writing because of their heavy schedules. The current popularity of books which compile people's stories are a good example of this. Although books of compilations are not technically devotionals, they do show the desire for short, powerful writing.

Devotionals also touch people at the heart level, and that brings change to lives. They are appropriate for both men and women. Both men and women read devotional magazines and devotional books. And the "take away" is often practical because it refers to common experiences of life and helps the reader see themselves or circumstances in a new way. The best part for the writer is that it is a good way to break into writing.

### **Basic Components**

Here are the basic components of a devotional in its proper order:

1. *Title*

2. *Byline*

3. *Scripture verse.* It is better to pick the Bible verse first and then write the devotional. This may not always be possible, but it can help to avoid stretching the meaning of the verse to try to make it fit into the pre-determined anecdote we want to write about. But if we are careful with the use of the verse, it's fine to have the anecdote in mind and then find the verse to go with it.

4. *Personal experience or anecdotal material.* This material can be from your own experience or from someone else's. It can be written in first person or third person. But a good

anecdote is vital to quickly catch the reader's attention. First person anecdotes are most effective. Any anecdote should be written with the fiction techniques we talked about in the previous chapter: techniques such as dialogue, description, action, and emotion, making sure we "show" instead of "tell."

After giving the anecdote, we need to tie it into a spiritual application. This is where we can say something like, "I learned..." or "God taught me..." or "I've always remembered..."

5. *Prayer.* This prayer is very short. Usually the idea is boiled down to two or three sentences.

Although I've given you the five most common components for devotionals, many magazines, on-line opportunities, compilation books, and other places for devotionals have their own chosen format. Keep that in mind as you look for opportunities.

### **Devotional Details**

1. *Most devotionals are approximately 250-400 words long.*

2. *Devotionals must have an emotional tie-in.* The experience you write about must have been something that touched you or it will not catch the reader's attention.

3. *Most devotionals are based on everyday occurrences,* things like interaction with people, going to an amusement park, referring to something someone said to you, and other common sources. But even though devotionals are based on everyday occurrences, the examples must be general enough to relate to many. Therefore, universal themes are best.

Writing about abstract things may take away from the reader's ability to apply your point to them. For instance, if you write about something unusual, for instance, climbing Mt. Everest, you must have a common application. If you write about something most people haven't experienced, be specific in describing what it meant and how it applies to them.

4. *Devotionals are very concise and to the point.* There is no room available for rambling or unnecessary words. Therefore devotionals must be skillfully written because the writer is forced to edit it down to the shortest form.

### **Characteristics of Good Devotional Writing**

1. *Use Scripture responsibly.* We need to be careful not to use Scripture out of context or by stretching its meaning. Checking with commentators on the meaning of a verse is an important idea.

2. *Devotionals are short but powerful.* The reader must relate immediately to it.

3. *Write concretely.* It emphasizes specific themes, not vague ones. Therefore it tends to be practical.

4. *The purpose is to touch the mind through teaching or the heart through emotions.*

Because of the short word length for devotionals, you will often have only one of those purposes as your goal.

5. *Be concise.* Edit, re-write, and edit again.

6. *Be authentic, not preachy.* Be vulnerable by drawing from your own experiences and often sharing your struggles. We want the reader to think: "That's how I feel," or "that's what I needed today." Don't write in such a way we give the impression we're telling the reader we never struggle with a particular difficulty—or that we've "arrived."

7. *Don't offer pat answers.* The attitude resembling "if only you'll do this, you'll never struggle again." Or, "This always works." The Christian life rarely includes cliches or formulas. Omit "all or nothing" words like always, never, all the time, etc.

8. *Watch for terms or phrases that are common to Christians* but may not be understood by unbelievers or new Christians. Phrases like, "walk in the Spirit," or "know Jesus," or "accept Christ," may be familiar to someone going to church, but if we want to reach out to others, we'll need to use words anyone can understand.

### Devotional Formats

Here are several devotional formats you can choose from. I'm including examples from my old (and now out of print) book, *Your View of God...God's View of You*. But because it's a devotional book I think the examples will be helpful. The two themes of the book are: who God is and who we are in Christ.

*1. Interior monologue: this highlights a person thinking.* Here's a sample of that from my devotion on "God Is Love":

One afternoon after I'd been a Christian for about five years, I drove home from church feeling downhearted. "Why can't I love God enough?" I asked myself over and over again. I was afraid that if I didn't love Him "enough," He would never fully accept me as His child.

I remembered 1 John 4:18, and it seemed to scream at me of my need to have a perfect love toward God: "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear."

"See, Kathy," I berated myself, "if your love for God was perfect, you wouldn't have any fear of Him."

*Lord, it's just hopeless. I can never love You enough to take away this fear of what You might do to me if I don't measure up,*

Then as I stopped the car at a red light, the correct meaning of that verse broke open in my mind like the sun bursting forth from behind a black cloud blown away by the wind. *Wait a minute, Lord. That verse isn't talking about my love for You, but Your love for me. Now I understand. Your perfect love can cast out my fear because You only want what's best for me. Oh, thank You!*

That thought revolutionized my thinking. No longer was I required to "love enough." God's unconditional and never ending love-His perfect love-could take away my fears and assure *me* He has only good plans in mind for me.

Then I continue on to address God's love.

*2. Interaction between people: two or more people talking.* Here's the example from my devotion, "God Is Joy":

My sister-in-law, Leslie, said to me, "Kathy, you'll never guess what Chuck said about our Bible study the other night after you left our house."

I cringed inside, wondering what my brother might have said, since he didn't come to the study. "Oh, what?" I hesitantly asked, thinking maybe I shouldn't hear.

"He said, 'Boy, you guys sure laughed a lot.' Isn't that great he noticed?"

I smiled. "Leslie, you should have told him, 'Kathy was nice to us tonight; she let us get off our knees for once.'"

Leslie grinned back at me.

Chuck couldn't believe that we could have so much fun studying the Bible. Similarly, some people find it hard to believe that God is joyful.

I've been in that category before. Because of my serious nature, as a child I envisioned God as a strict taskmaster who was always frowning and saying, "You should have done better." But in the last several years, it's been easier for me to think of God as joyful and actually *smiling!*

Then I continue the devotion with a short discussion of God's joy.

*3. Third person reporting or making observations.* Here's an example from "God Views You with a New Name.":

What's in a name? Ask the clerk at the Los Angeles Superior Court, where, for \$108 plus the cost of a legal advertisement, anyone over the age of 18 can have his name changed.

Georgia Ricotta wanted her name changed. After all, who would want to be identified with a cheese? Her new name? Anna Novelli. "I picked my last name from a TV series," the new Anna says.

Clifford Morong also filled out the form and commented, "I dislike Morong, as it is often misspelled Moron." He came up with the name Cliff Michaels after looking through the telephone white pages.



Iranian-born Esmaeli Sabaghi Khiyabani said his birth name was too long and difficult. He wants to be called Oliver Twist.

"Nice, short names" are what a couple with a long last name wanted. They became Witt and Gibb McDee.

The clerk who processes all the applications has already decided what her favorite new name request is: some man wanted to be renamed Zenith Ray Blitz. She comments, "I think he was in show business."

Then I continue on talking about God has given us each new identities.

4. *Lesson from nature.* Here's how I used this type in my devotion, "God Is Merciful:"

I've been told that the river leaving Niagara Falls has some interesting safeguards for any who might fall into the river and be swept away. At several places down the river, walk-ways extend across the river with ropes hanging down into the water. Each knotted rope gives any poor soul being tossed down the river an opportunity to grab hold and stop his descent to destruction.

These opportunities to be saved from the rushing river are a fitting example of God's mercy.

I continue on addressing God's mercy.

5. *Phrase or motto.* I didn't use this technique in my book as it's a commonly used one and I tried to avoid anything too trite. But a good example could be something like "Bloom where you're planted," yet you will want to come up with something more original.

6. *Retelling Bible story or using a story that most people know.* This can be tricky since we could assume the story is well-known and it may not be. If it is not well-known, you will need to share the story and do it quickly.

Here's how I used this technique in the devotion, entitled, "God Views You as Precious."

Imagine for a moment that you are on the streets of Jerusalem at the time of Jesus' triumphal entry as the Messiah. The crowd is buzzing with excitement. Thousands are choked into the small avenues of the city and the outlying areas. Rumors have been flying through the crowd all morning. "Jesus is on His way to declare His Messiahship."

Finally in the distance, you hear a mounting roar. Jesus is coming. A feeling of electricity spreads through the crowd. As the noise grows closer, someone shouts, "There He is. There's Jesus, riding a donkey's colt."

Standing on your tiptoes, you finally see Him. He's sitting regally upon the donkey, smiling at the praises toward Him as the Messiah. You hear your own voice shouting out, "Hosanna! Hosanna! Praise to the Messiah!" You're waving the palm branch that someone has handed you, but you're so far back in the crowd, you despair of having the privilege of setting it down so that Jesus can be transported over it.

You think, *Oh, if only, I could get closer. I want Him to know I'm praising Him. I want Him to know I believe He's my Messiah.*

He's coming closer now, and the noise is incredible. Everyone is trying to get His attention. "Hosanna! Hosanna!"

*How can He hear my voice with everyone else calling out? If only I could get closer. If I could just have Him look at me and know I'm here. Then I'd be sure He knows I truly want to believe.*

*Wait. Maybe I don't want Him to see me. I'm so sinful. I'm just a nobody. How can I even think that He'd notice me with so many important people surrounding Him?*

By now Jesus' donkey is in front of the crowd before you, and He's scanning the crowd with a calm, confident smile. You can tell He's absorbing the praise, and it seems absolutely appropriate. Your arms are swinging back and forth, the palm branch making a half circle above your head, as you hope He'll look over and give you a passing glance.

What's this? Jesus has stopped His donkey. Yes, it's true. He's getting off, and it looks like He's walking toward you. *Me? Can't be. There's so many people around. He must be looking for someone else. He can't even know I'm here. I've never met Him before. But look, He is coming in*

*my direction, right toward me, and everyone is making a path for Him, even as they keep right on praising Him. Incredible!*

With a broad smile on His face, He walks up to you and reaches out His hands to lay them gently on your shoulders. A deep peace settles in your soul. If you'd known something like this was going to happen, you would have anticipated being terrified, but there is no fear in you. Your soul is melted into love and surrender as Jesus' eyes look deeply into yours.

*He seems to know everything about me, but I feel His unconditional love and acceptance. He knows me! He knows everything about me, yet He still loves me!*

Then His golden voice speaks, and even though the crowd is tumultuous in their praise, His words are clear in your ears. "My child, I love you. I forgive you for all your wrongdoings, and I want to give you the power to live obediently in Me. I'm going to die soon, but just remember that I'm dying for you so that you can be reconciled to God. If you were the only person alive, I would still be dying just for you. You are precious in My sight."

You stand in awe and soak up each word. His attention seems completely normal and expected. You don't understand everything He's said, but there's an inner knowledge that everything will be revealed eventually.

You whisper, "Thank You," but Jesus is instantly back on the colt, continuing His way through the crowd. A cocoon of love surrounds you as you calmly wave good-bye. You will never be the same. *I am loved. He knows who I am, and I'm precious to Him. That's all I need.*

I've read for you the entire devotion except for the title and Bible verse at the beginning. Let me also include the closing prayer as an example of that part of the devotion: "All-knowing God, I praise You for your ability to make me feel special and distinct from so many other people. I am important and precious to You. Thank You for knowing and yet accepting me. Amen."

7. *Children's quotes or anecdotes.* This is a source that is often overused so be careful to not use it too frequently. I didn't choose to use this technique in my book, but I'm sure you can think of examples.

8. *Writing techniques like quotes, poetry, or rhetorical questions.* Here's how I used this technique in "God Views You as Blameless."

Are you like me? Do you blame yourself for everything? Over the years, I've developed an expertise about holding myself responsible for anything and everything. Did we plan a picnic and it rained? I must have done something to cause the weather to turn ugly. Did my child have a temper tantrum on the floor of the grocery store? Obviously, I must have pinched her. Did Larry arrive home from work grumpy? I must have displeased him in some way. My children not do their homework? I must be a terrible mother.

Going through life constantly blaming myself was a heavy burden to carry around. It reminds me of something I heard that happens in a foreign country named Abyssinia. When a man is convicted of an offense, he must be chained to a willing friend until he can pay the fine. Until then, the two connected men roam around, sharing one another's misfortunes, and if necessary, begging for the money to pay the fine so that they can regain their liberty.

What a vivid illustration of blame! It's like a constant burden that's chained to us, making joyful walking and living difficult. It flavors a person's view of life and creates resentment and insecurity.

I then go on to encourage the reader to stop blaming themselves.

9. *Direct teaching about Scripture.* This possibility is not used too frequently because it can come across as preachy. Sometimes it is also hard to be concrete if the Scripture contains an abstract thought.

Here's a sample from my devotion, "God Is Patient."

Sometimes I think if God weren't so patient, things would get done faster. But then I remember what Dr. A. H. Strong said: "When God wants to make an oak, He takes a hundred years; but when He wants to make a squash, He takes six months." So I must admit that maybe

He knows what He's doing.

I can certainly see the results of His patience as I flip through the Bible. Here are some examples of God's patient dealings with men:

God took six days to create our world, when He could have called it into existence in one second.

God provided Noah 120 years to build the ark and give people an opportunity to turn to Him.

God caused Isaac to be born to Abraham 25 years after He promised it would happen.

God took almost two decades for Joseph to see his dreams of greatness come true.

Moses spent 40 years in the wilderness being groomed to be a great leader.

God patiently disciplined the Israelites for 40 years in the wilderness.

Joshua spent many years as Moses' number one man before he was called to be head of the Israelites.

David wandered in the wilderness for over a decade before his rightful place as king was fulfilled.

The Old Testament prophets never saw most of their prophecies fulfilled in their lifetimes.

God waited 400 years between the last Old Testament prophets and the coming of Jesus.

Jesus didn't start His ministry until the age of 30.

It took 14 years after the apostle Paul was converted before God used him extensively in missionary work.

And, of course, I continue by talking about God's patience.

As you look over the types of devotional formats we have available to us, which could you use immediately? You may have even found a nugget of an idea for a devotional as we've gone over them. Write down that idea right now, because otherwise it may be forgotten.

### **Marketing devotionals**

For both magazine writing and book writing, refer to the marketing resource, *The Christian Writers Market Guide*. We will talk in more detail in a later chapter about that resource.

As you refer to *The Christian Writers Market Guide*, you will discover many magazines which feature devotionals exclusively also give assignments. They will want you to write two or three devotionals using their format, send them as samples on speculation, and they will consider you for future assignments. "On speculation" means they are not obligated to buy what you have submitted.

Because magazines which use devotionals use a lot of them, it's a constant market for writers. Also, some devotional guides are for every day of the year, therefore they need 365 devotionals a year. That's a good source for our work.

Another positive about devotionals is that magazines are open to having first time writers submit their work. Because these devotional pieces are short, the pay is little, but it can be a consistent source. And even if the money is not great, it is a way to name publications where your work has appeared.

Now that you learned about writing devotionals, what would you like to write about in the devotionals format? You may find you will see the most daily, common occurrences in a new light as you see how they can become the source of devotionals.

Kathy Collard Miller is the author of over 50 books and can be reached through [www.KathyCollardMiller.com](http://www.KathyCollardMiller.com). Her books are available on [amazon.com](http://amazon.com). She is also a speaker who has spoken in over 30 US States and 8 foreign countries. As a lay counselor, she meets frequently with those looking for greater sanctification.

## Chapter 4 Balancing Non-Writing Duties

by Kathy Collard Miller

*I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.*—1 Corinthians 9:23

we are going to write articles and books, we're going to need to balance our writing life with our personal life, ministry, and other responsibilities. Although there will be some men who use this resource of writing professionally, most are women and the following section is for you. Trying to write in the midst of being a wife and/or mother, grandmother, ministry leader, and work is a great challenge. What do you find are the difficulties or hindrances to fulfilling your call from God as a writer? Take a moment now to write think through those difficulties.

### Determining Priorities

The dictionary defines priority as "taking precedence in time, order, importance. A right to precedence over others in obtaining, buying, or doing something."

Ask yourself:

- Why do I want to write?
- Why do I think God wants me to write?
- Right now, what are my priorities and where does writing fit?

As you think of your schedule and/or choices of the use of your time, what might need to be changed or eliminated?

It could be helpful to keep a diary of what you do at half hour increments for a week. At the end of the week, make the list of all your activities in the order of their importance along with the amount of time consumed by each. What changes might need to be made? What ways you are wasting valuable time? Try to challenge yourself to cut down the time spent on an activity by an eighth or a fourth.

After this season of evaluating your priorities, and if you still believe writing is God's call upon your life, then you will need to make it a higher priority if it's not already.

### Ideas for Change

1. *Say no to the things not as important.* I often share with groups that "an opportunity is not necessarily God's opened door." We must learn to say no. Even Jesus said no at times to the needs around Him. In Mark 9:30-31, Jesus told people to not let others know He was in Galilee, so that He could teach His disciples. Jesus determined His priorities and said no to the people who had needs even though he could have met them. I'm sure many people were upset when they discovered later Jesus was nearby and he had not met their need. We should not let others dictate our priorities or how our time is used.

2. *God will give me enough time to do what He wants me to do.* I don't need to be anxious about getting the things done God wants me to do. As long as I follow His directions moment by moment, I will accomplish whatever God wants me to do.

As I currently prepare this material, I am faced with the wonderful challenge of having more projects to complete than it seems possible to fulfill. Yet I know God will make it possible as I abide in His power and follow His leading

In the past I've seen Him accomplish through me what I never could have imagined. One year, I was blessed to see seven books published yet as I had worked on them, I kept thinking, "There is absolutely not enough time for me to get them all done." Yet God in His graciousness, empowered me to get them all done and on time.

3. *Do not apologize for writing.* Other people may not consider it important. It may be just like a hobby to them. They may not consider it a "real job" or a "real ministry."

We must be convinced it is important and it is our calling from God. If people criticize you, don't give excuses or reasons. After all, as someone has said, "she who doesn't stand up for herself will fall down as a writer."

If your writing is indeed a call from God, isn't it important enough to:

- hire a baby sitter?
- ask friends to baby sit?
- hire a housecleaner, even if it is every other week?
- let other things go?

### **Evaluate Distractions**

Sometimes we give in to distractions because we are intimidated and feeling inadequate in our writing calling. It's easy to say, "I don't have time to write," when in fact our fear causes us to avoid writing by choosing to do the unimportant things of life.

Something as beneficial as a telephone and social media can become a problem. As soon as you hunker down at the computer to write, the telephone rings. Someone wants or even needs to talk, and it's hard to say, "I'm sorry, I must write right now." It seems selfish, yet you *are* working. If you were sitting in an office at a business, your friends would not feel free to call and chat, unburden their souls, or share their latest recipe. Yet because you and I work out of our homes, other people think we have the freedom to stop what we're doing.

It has taken me a long time to conquer my need to answer the telephone when I'm working. In the beginning, I had to turn off the ringer because I felt compelled to answer otherwise. Now of course we can know who is calling as indicated on our cell phone so that we can answer if we should.

Another important way to deal with distractions and set your priorities is to clearly state your boundaries. For instance, if you are going out to lunch with a friend, state clearly as you set the date, "I can only visit for one hour," or whatever time God is guiding. Don't assume your friend can read your mind and understand the demands upon your priorities. It boils down to: we must make our writing a priority because no one else will.

Jesus' invitation to abide in Him is the key to the priority of writing. As soon as any distraction comes, we must pray, "God, I know you are with me. You've asked me to abide in you and therefore I can be aware of your calling, your leading, and your guidance. Even if I don't respond to this needy person at your direction, I believe you can supply for her need."

### **Get Organized**

#### *1. Delegate*

Think again about your priorities list. What can be delegated, especially when you release demanding or expecting perfection?

Could you use catalogs for shopping?

Can you consolidate trips to stores to save time?

Could you use a personal shopper for clothing?

Don't be afraid to delegate things to your family. My husband graciously does the food shopping for me most of the time. When my two children were still living at home, I involved both them in doing some of my office work and paid them.

When we delegate to others, we will need to fight any perfectionist tendencies we have. When others help us, it may not get done exactly the way we would prefer and it may not be perfect. If something must be done perfectly, we must spend the time explaining and training our help, or do it ourselves.

#### *2. Write it down*

Are you using date books, lists, and schedules to get organized? If other activities take up the space in your schedule that should be dedicated to writing, determine how many days a week you will write, and then put a big W—for writing—on that many days in your date book or on your phone or other electronic device. When you think of that big W, don't just think of a complete day. I will write a W only on a morning or only an afternoon. Eliminate "all or nothing" thinking. Even an hour writing can be valuable.

I've encouraged a writer friend of mine who has a hard time choosing to write to just write fifteen minutes a day. That is reasonable for her. Fulfill small goals and they will add up.

### 3. *Communicate*

Are you communicating with your family the importance of your ministry?

One summer when my children were young teenagers, I announced that I was dedicating every Monday to my writing. Although I still wrote other times during the week, on Mondays I concentrated fully on writing. The other days I would agree to be more easily interrupted, but on Mondays the kids knew they should not interrupt except for something very important.

Now it may sound like I do not love my children or my husband, but I can assure you that's not true. I always have and continue to make them the highest priority, and I frequently interrupt my work to go places with them or to talk. But by setting down boundaries beforehand, the people around us will be more cooperative in working with our schedule. It also helps to tell them that we have a deadline and are working under pressure. That way they can understand what we're facing.

But also make sure you include them in the fun and joy. I keep my family informed about the good things happen with my books, articles and speaking so that they can feel a part of it.

Years ago, my daughter Darcy and I co-authored a book together called, *Staying Friends with Your Kids*. That was fun working together. Today she is an aspiring novelist who has completed a novel. I believe that one day she will become published.

### 4. *Evaluate*

In order to get organized and spend time on our writing, we've got to evaluate the importance of housework and meals. If no one in your family really notices what you're doing, stop doing it. Do they really appreciate gourmet meals or having no dust on the coffee table? Is your fantastic looking yard more important than seeing an article published or a book printed?

Re-evaluate those necessary chores to see if you can do them more efficiently or not as often. Years ago I always washed all our sheets every week because that was the way my mother taught me. I felt compelled to do that and if I didn't, I felt like a failure.

I happened to be talking to a neighbor and she mentioned she washed her sheets about every two weeks. I was shocked. I blurted out, "You mean it's okay to do that?" I laugh now because my strong reaction seems so ludicrous. But then I was shocked to hear of such an idea. I learned no one will ever know how often my sheets are washed but many will be reading my books.

Ask your husband for the three house work chores that are most important to him. There is a good chance what he says will not be the same as yours. By only doing what's important to him, you will have less to do and still keep peace in the family.

Another idea is to combine mindless tasks. Try to find two things you can do at once like folding laundry and talking on the telephone or folding laundry and watching the news. If you are waiting in line or on the telephone to make an appointment, always have something to read, especially if its research for your latest project. And clutter? Throw out as much as possible. The more you have, the more there is to dust or continue reorganizing.

## **Office Space**

Few freelance writers have an office outside their homes. It's just too convenient to keep it inside the home and readily available, although there are disadvantages to that also. In a way you are never away from your office, and for those of us who are also domestic engineers, that can be

a disadvantage. For we will be tempted to do house work when we should be writing, and will be tempted to write when we should be paying attention to our family or home.

### **Set Realistic Goals**

What is your maximum functioning time?

When do you have trouble concentrating?

I am a morning person and therefore my best work gets done early in the day. As the day goes on, I'm more tired and have a harder time concentrating. How about you? Notice your creative writing patterns for your maximum functioning time. Use your minimum functioning time for mindless tasks that do not need your full attention.

As you set goals, remember there is a difference between desires and goals. Desires are what you would like to accomplish; goals are what you actually have the power to control. You could have a desire to have a book published by the end of this year, but you cannot guarantee it will happen because it involves other people like publishers and editors. But you can set a realistic goal toward the possibility by determining to write for two hours each day.

Only set as a goal what you actually have control over then you will not be setting yourself up for failure by trying to make something happen that is beyond your control.

I recommend that your goals be

- realistic
- specific
- measurable

Start small, succeed, and be encouraged to continue. Also find someone who will keep you accountable and then rejoice with you in your successes.

What could be a realistic goal for your writing? Do you feel comfortable determining a set number of pages or times to work on a project? What will be your:

- daily goal:
- weekly goal:
- monthly goal:
- one year goal:
- five-year goal:
- ten year goal:

Are you ready to begin? Good. Then pray for God to guide you, determine your priorities, get organized, and set realistic goals. I know He will. Press on.

Kathy Collard Miller is the author of over 50 books and can be reached through [www.KathyCollardMiller.com](http://www.KathyCollardMiller.com). Her books are available on [amazon.com](http://amazon.com). She is also a speaker who has spoken in over 30 US States and 8 foreign countries. As a lay counselor, she meets frequently with those looking for greater sanctification.

## Chapter 5 Write a Non-fiction Book

by **Kathy Collard Miller**

*Write in a book all the words I have spoken to you.—Jeremiah 30:2*

I'll never forget attending my first writer's conference. I was terrified and believed I didn't deserve to be there. I'd only had two articles published and it seemed like everyone else was a pro.

By the end of the conference, I found out there were others there who were as new in writing as I was. Yet the staff and other more accomplished writers were there to help me and the other attendees become a success. It was there I knew what God wanted me to write for my first book. That was a thrill and the beginning of many books. I hope you have similar positive experiences as you work on your book.

### **Evaluate Your Book Idea**

Ask yourself:

1. What is out there already?
2. How is my book going to be different?
3. Who will benefit from my book?
4. What style do I want the book to be?
  - Content: what you write
  - Style: how you write it
5. What do I want my reader to know, feel, do, be?

As you begin and continue working on your book, look for and seek out opportunities to speak on your topic. You'll be working on your material and you can also receive the feedback from your audience.

Be able to describe your book idea in one sentence. If you have an opportunity at a writer's conference to talk with an editor, you'll want to share your idea as concisely as possible.

### **Research**

Apply the information on researching from the chapter on writing articles, but here are some reminders.

1. *Create physical and virtual files on your topics of interest.* Use the list from the first chapter on writing articles to find out which topics are important to you.
2. *Clip! Clip! Clip!* Look for information you'll use later and file each piece.
3. *Subscribe to magazines and online sources that cover your topics of interest.*
4. *We also need to know our library.* Although the library may seem antiquated by now, it is still a source for every writer. Finding books on your topic will save you from buying books.

### **Interviewing**

Interviewing can also supply much of the information we need for each writing project. How can you find experts for these interviews?

- Contact the author of the article you've clipped
- Ask your pastor for leads



- Interview your pastor
- Ask experts for recommendations of other experts
- Check at local colleges or universities for professors

When your research and interviewing keep turning up the same information, it is time to start writing.

### **Nine Steps for Organizing Your Material**

Here is a step by step method for organizing your material for a non-fiction book.

*1. Most of the time we start out with a single folder or virtual file for our book idea.* All along we have been entering information into that one file. We don't know yet what our chapter titles will be or even the direction of the book. We just know this is a topic we are interested in.

Right now I am gathering information on the topic of abiding. For the last two years I have been deeply stirred by the Holy Spirit to meditate and apply Jesus' command of abiding. I haven't been completely clear what that looks like nor how exactly to do it, so I've been alert to information about it.

As a result, I have a computer folder labeled "Abiding" and only a few files within that folder, one of which is labeled "abiding research." I put everything I find in there. I also have a physical file in my desk files labeled "Abiding." When I come across something from another source or I think of ideas the Holy Spirit seems to pop into my mind, I put those notes in there, in no particular order.

*2. When I'm ready to work on a book topic,* I pull out the file folder or open the computer file containing research for the subject, like abiding. As I go through each piece of information, I ask the Holy Spirit to begin to organize the material for possible chapter themes.

If it's a physical piece like an article from a magazine, I'll put it on a part of my desk. As I pull out each bit of research, I look for similarities with the other information and any of the piles of information.

As I go through the virtual file, I begin to create and label computer files within the main folder for possible chapter themes. Maybe I'm beginning to see ideas for how abiding involves awareness of the Holy Spirit. That can become a possible chapter.

As I go through any of the research, whether a physical piece or virtual, I often will make a copy and put it in several places, not knowing exactly where I might end up using it. After I've placed every piece into one or more files, I'm ready for the next step.

*3. Begin working on one of the chapters.* Have a piece of paper available and as you go through each piece of information from that one chapter's research, write down one or two key words on the sheet trying to group ideas together.

*4. Yellow highlight the important information on each piece of research, when it is a piece of paper.* You can also highlight in a color on your electronic device. The purpose of this is so that you can go back and find the information easily. If you have a full article from a magazine, without marking it, you may have to re-read the whole article.

*5. Review the key words on your sheet and write out a broad outline from it.*

*6. Put any quotes from others on 3X5 cards.* Place these cards on a bulletin board in front of you (or in a file in your computer) as you write. After including a quote in your manuscript, pull the quote down and file it. That way you'll know which quotes you have available left to use.

*7. Put the research into piles that correspond to main points listed on your broad chapter outline.*

*8. List synonyms for words you'll use a lot by using a Thesaurus or Synonym Finder.* For instance, I wrote a book about having an eternal perspective. Of course, I'm using the word "perspective" a lot along with "eternal" and "earthly." I looked those words up in the *Synonym Finder* and wrote down in list of synonyms for those words. I have that list posted in front of me as I write so that I don't have to constantly flip through the *Synonym Finder* or even look things up on the internet.

9. Use "P.I.E.R." If you read the chapter on writing an article, you learned about this acrostic which was developed by Marita Littauer Tedder. It stands for:

- Point: the key principle(s) you want to communicate. There will be more than one in each chapter.
- Instruction: practical ideas for putting your principles into action
- Examples: anecdotes and stories (preferably your own personal ones) that make your point come alive.
- References: the validations that make your point credible: quotes, statistics, Bible verses, etc.

To use the PIER, take as many sheets of paper for as many main topics you'll cover in the chapter. Put the letters P...I...E...R... down the side of each sheet, underneath each other.

Again go through each piece of research and put a notation of only one word or phrase by one of those letters (PIER) depending upon whether it refers to the main point you want to make, or its instruction, or an example, or a reference.

For instance, if you have a quote, write "quote" by the "R". If you have an anecdote, write your name or the other person's name by the "E." If you have a practical idea, write one word referring to it by the "I."

Then you can begin writing from that sheet because you have all your information listed by a brief word in front of you. As you write, you'll want to mix up the P ... I ... E ... R in different order so that you have a variety. And of course, you won't write, "So my point is ..." and "the instruction is ..." and "example is ..." You want to help it flow smoothly with transitions.

### **Write Each Chapter**

Think of the ingredients of your chapter from the metaphor of the train (cow catcher, engine, passenger cars, caboose). Also use Marita Littauer's idea of PIER (point, instruction, example and reference). If you need refreshing about those concepts, check again in the first chapter on writing articles.

Some of the choices you have for beginning your chapter are:

- riveting anecdote
- quote
- statistic
- shocking statement

*Use headings throughout the chapter.* This format is quite popular these days because people want a chapter broken up by headings. Then reading it doesn't seem so intimidating.

*Use "circle endings" for a finished feeling to your chapter.* A circle ending is when you finish the chapter by referring to what you wrote about at the beginning of the chapter.

### **Editing**

Rewriting can be fun! When I first began to write, I didn't think rewriting was fun at all. In fact, I dreaded it. I much preferred the original composition.

But now, I think editing is like being a detective, trying to find the best possible words and also working with concepts to make them clear and powerful. Now the original composition seems the most difficult part of writing.

*As you edit, evaluate each word, phrase, paragraph:*

- is it essential?
- is it redundant?
- is it repetitious?
- is it clear?
- Is it vague?

*Rewrite anything that is unclear and delete anything not needed.*

*Read your chapter to yourself out loud.* You'll be surprised what faulty writing you find that way.

*Use the Synonym Finder* to polish your words and make them even more powerful.

If we wait until everything is written perfectly, we'll never get anything marketed. Write it as well as you can and then send it out. If the idea is good and the publisher takes it, you'll receive the help of an editor to make it even better.

### **Critique Groups**

A way to help you get your manuscript ready for your publisher or editor is to attend a critique group.

*The advantages are:*

- You will learn immeasurably from the suggestions of other people.
- You may have to develop a tough hide to have your work critiqued which you will need throughout your writing career.
- Each group has a different personality. Some read the manuscripts out loud, some read them silently and then write down comments on copies of the manuscript
- You don't have to be a "pro" or published to contribute value to a critique group. The fact that you are an objective reader gives your opinion value.
- You are important to the success of others and they have a stake in your success.

I have fond memories of my many years in a critique group which started from the very first of my ministry. That small group of women became best friends and they are a part of the success I have today. In fact, I dedicated one of my books to them.

### **Working with Editors**

It may sound scary, but eventually you should get an opportunity to work with editors.

When you do, remember:

- An editor is not your adversary, he or she is your friend.
- An editor is objective, something writers have a hard time being with regard to their own work.
- An editor has an opinion, and most often the best one, but you don't have to agree with everything. You really do have the final say.

I remember receiving a ten page single spaced letter from my publisher's editor regarding a book manuscript I'd turned in. Those ten pages pointed out all the ways my manuscript needed to be corrected. I thought my manuscript was ready to be published. Obviously, she felt otherwise.

I was initially totally overwhelmed with the idea of rewriting with so many things wrong, but the Lord assured me of the necessity of it. I rewrote that book, taking one of her suggestions at a time. It took me two weeks, but as a result, that book was much improved.

Another challenge was after I turned in a completed manuscript and within a few weeks received a phone call from the main editor for my publisher. She explained that my final manuscript was not what they wanted nor had expected from the book proposal. I could either completely re-write it or withdraw it from them. When I said I would rewrite it according to their desires, she was surprised, yet pleased. I did totally rewrite the book and I then was pleased with the result and could see it was a better book.

### **Permissions To Use Material**

Generally speaking, quotes are considered "fair use" when less than 250 words are used from one source like a book or feature length article. Short non-fiction pieces, poems and songs are different because of their length and you should request permission regardless of how much you use. Using a line(s) from a song is very expensive and most people avoid using them because

of that.

If you write about someone, quote someone else over 250 words, or use their story, send a copy of the material that refers to them. Also send a release form for them to sign and send back to you. Give them an opportunity of having their name(s) or details changed. The quotes I'm referring to are not the one sentence kind of quips that you find in quote books, but quotes that you have because of interviewing someone.

*Here's a sample email for requesting permission from a publisher to use material.* You'll find out the person and email address on the publisher's website.

(Date)

Dear Permissions Editor:

In my forthcoming book, tentatively titled, *Looking at Life With Eternity in Mind*, I quote from one or more of your books.

I am requesting nonexclusive world rights to use this material as part of my work in all languages and for all editions.

I anticipate my book will be \_\_\_\_\_ pages, published in \_\_\_\_\_ (date), in hardback/paperback, at an approximate list of price of \_\_\_\_\_ in a press run of \_\_\_\_\_.

I would like permission to use the enclosed material.

Thank you in advance for your help.

Sincerely,

Kathy Collard Miller

(email, address and phone number)

With your letter, enclose the copy or print out of the quoted portion from your manuscript. Since that information has the book title, author, page, publisher and year already entered into the material, as you learned in the chapter on writing an article, you can send along such a vague letter and they'll have the details they need.

You are responsible (not your publisher) to pay any permissions fees.

Are you ready to tackle writing a book? I hope so. Just remember, especially if it seems overwhelming, you aren't writing a book, you are writing one word at a time. I know the Lord can strengthen you to complete the work He's given you to do.

Kathy Collard Miller is the author of over 50 books and can be reached through [www.KathyCollardMiller.com](http://www.KathyCollardMiller.com). Her books are available on [amazon.com](http://amazon.com). She is also a speaker who has spoken in over 30 US States and 8 foreign countries. As a lay counselor, she meets frequently with those looking for greater sanctification.

## Chapter 6 Basic Writing Skills, Techniques and Editing

by **Kathy Collard Miller**

*The more the words, the less the meaning, and how does that profit anyone?—Ecclesiastes 6:11*

As you plan your book or article, or anything you write, you'll need basic writing skills and techniques. Let's talk now about those elements so that our writing will be powerful and effective.

### **Use Forceful Verbs**

Look at this sentence. "Susan walked up the street, talking under her breath as she thought about what Jake had just told her." It's pretty plain, isn't it? Let's see if we can jazz it up.

Editing possibilities by looking up words in a *Synonym Finder* or *Thesaurus*:

"walk" to: stomp, stumble, step, stride, pace, tread, stretch one's legs, stroll, ramble, saunter, promenade.

"talking under her breath" to: mutter, mumble, murmur, grumble, complain, whine.

"as she thought" to: mulled, evaluated, chewed on, reviewed, considered, wondered about, brooded, dwelled on.

"what Jake had just told her" to: revealed, reported, recounted, described, explained, disclosed, announced.

By choosing more powerful words from those possibilities, we have the final result: "Susan stomped up the street, muttering, as she brooded about what Jake had just revealed."

### **Verbal Word Pictures**

Paint verbal word pictures with writing tools. For instance,

- Metaphors compare two different things. "Susan had a heart of stone when it came to Jake."
- Similes also express comparisons but use the words "like" or "as." "The sidewalk under Susan reflected like glass in the sun"
- Onomatopoeia uses words that imitate the sounds of the object. "The buzz of the saw..." or words like "hiss," "hum," "cuckoo," or "pop."
- Alliteration is a technique of using repetition in the first sound of each word. "Susan stumbled along the sidewalk" or "Susan sang sweetly."

### **Avoid Ambiguity And The Obvious**

As we think of writing effectively, we need to avoid ambiguity and what is obvious. For instance, how would you rewrite these ambiguous statements?

"This afternoon there will be meetings in the south and north ends of the church. Children will be baptized at both ends."

CORRECTED "This afternoon there will be meetings in the south and north ends of the church where children will be baptized."

"This being Easter Sunday, we will ask Mrs. Brown to come forward and lay an egg on the altar."

CORRECTED "This being Easter Sunday, we will ask Mrs. Brown to come forward and place an egg on the altar."

"The ladies of the church have cast off clothing of every kind and they can be seen in the

church basement on Friday afternoon."

CORRECTED "The ladies of the church have used clothing of every kind and the clothing can be seen in the church basement on Friday afternoon."

"On Sunday, a special collection will be taken up to defray the expense of a new carpet. Will those wishing to do something on the carpet please come forward and get a piece of paper?"

CORRECTED "On Sunday, a special collection will be taken up to defray the expense of a new carpet. Will those wishing to contribute money for the carpet please come forward and get a piece of paper to make their pledge?"

A sign in a laundry: "We don't tear your laundry in our machines, we do it by hand."

CORRECTED A sign in a laundry: "We don't tear your laundry in our machines because we launder it by hand."

In our writing, we want to make sure that unclear, ambiguous sentences are not making our readers wrinkle their foreheads and scratch their heads wondering what we really mean.

### **Don't Use the Obvious**

In our everyday language we use words and phrases that are common but aren't necessary. Look at the following.

"Baby puppies:" Are puppies anything but young? Omit "baby."

"Young child:" Is a child old? Omit "young" or be very specific with the age.

"Raining drops of water:" What else would it rain? Just say "rain."

"Snow falling to the earth:" Were you expecting it to fall upward? Just say "snowing."

"The plane fell to the earth below:" Is the earth going to be up in the sky? Just say, "the plane plummeted to the earth."

Unfortunately, we can write those kinds of phrases and they sound perfectly all right. We need to be looking for them all the time or have someone critique our work for us.

### **Incorrectly Placed Pronouns**

Another common mistake is incorrectly placed pronouns.

Rewrite these:

"The policeman tried to shoot the criminal as he raced around the corner."

CORRECTED "The policeman tried to shoot the criminal as the criminal raced around the corner."

"Shortly after giving birth to my only child the doctor informed me he was having some breathing problems."

CORRECTED "Shortly after giving birth to my only child the doctor informed me my son was having breathing difficulties."

### **Avoid Wordiness and Rabbit Trails**

Author and editor Susan Titus Osborn says (with tongue in cheek): "Avoid repetition since repeating yourself or saying something in several different ways, so that you go over the same thing again and again, may possibly tend to frustrate, anger, and/or irritate your reader or listening audience." She advises: "eliminate unnecessary words."

Sidney Smith said, "In composing, as a general rule, run a pen through every other word you've written. You have no idea what vigor it will give your style."

In order to avoid repetition and rambling, write out the one theme or purpose of your article or chapter and post it in front of you. Make sure everything you write refers to that theme and purpose.

### **Sentence Variety and Length**

Another aspect of good writing is using variety. We should aim for sixth grade comprehension which means shorter sentence length. Here are some guidelines for sentence

length evaluation from Rudolf Flesch in his book, *How to Write, Speak and Think More Effectively*.

Average sentence length in words:

Very easy: 8 or less

Easy: 11

Fairly easy: 14

Standard: 17

Fairly difficult: 21

Difficult: 25

Very difficult: 29 or more.

If you have too many short sentences, join some together with "and" or "but" or other conjunctions. If you have too many long sentences, break them into smaller sentences. The rule of thumb, though: shorter is better.

Gustave Flubert said, "When you can shorten a sentence, do. The best sentence? The shortest."

### **Active Verbs**

Our next challenge is choosing active verbs rather than passive ones. Unfortunately, writing in the passive voice is the easiest way to write and is most often the way we talk. Choosing active verbs is more difficult and requires more thought.

Which sentence stands out as being more powerful?

"The typewriter was being used by Jill" or "Jill pounded away on the typewriter."

"Jeff was struggling to ride the bike up the hill" or "Jeff struggled to ride the bike up the hill."

Passive verbs are weak but active verbs sprinkle your writing with power. Passive verbs are those using words like, "was," "were," "is," "had," "become," and other forms of the verb "to be."

Another indication of passive verbs is when you see the word "by" along with "was."

### **"Show," Don't "Tell"**

We've talked about this in other chapters but here's more on this concept. We can never talk about it enough.

Here's an example of telling, which is what I could have written for an article about how God delivered me from being a child abuser:

Many years ago, I abused my daughter Darcy. I remember one day that I was out of control. Darcy had wet her training pants and I was angry. She made me mad all the time and I had had enough. I spanked her on her bare bottom over and over again. I didn't want to be a mother anymore.

In contrast, here's an example of the same material in "showing" mode:

Darcy's training pants were wet again. Again!

Marching over to my two-year-old daughter, I directed her into the bathroom. As I struggled to pull down the soaking pants, I felt a rush of frustration and a sense of failure.

"Darcy, you're supposed to come in the bathroom and go in the potty chair. Why can't you learn?" I continued to berate her. As I began spanking her with my hand, my tension and tiredness found an outlet. Spanking changed to hitting.

Darcy's uncontrollable screaming brought me back to reason. Seeing the red blister on her bottom, I dropped to my knees.

"How can I act like this?" I sobbed. "I love Jesus. I don't really want to hurt my child."

I'm sure you're not surprised to learn that I used the second example in that article that has sold several times.

### **Techniques For "Showing"**

*1. Use the five senses.* Use a description that will help the reader see, smell, hear, touch, and taste what is happening.

Rewrite this "telling" sentence as a "showing" sentence:

"The two-year-old knew how to wave but when her granny waved goodbye, the toddler refused."

CORRECTED Grandma waved at little Jessie trying to coax her into responding. "Jessie, I know you can wave at Grandma. See, I'm waving at you." Jessie clung to her mother's skirts, hiding her face.

*2. Use dialogue. Let us hear the words spoken.*

Rewrite: Dan told Susan he didn't want to date her anymore.

CORRECTED "I'm so sorry, Susan, but..." he paused, searching for the right word, the right word that wouldn't hurt Susan's feelings. He knew there weren't such words but he agonized over saying them anyway. Frustrated, he blurted out, "I don't want to date you anymore."

*3. Use emotion.* Use powerful words that will let us know how the subject of your story is feeling during that time.

*4. Use concrete and active words:*

"marching" instead of "walking"

"soaking pants" instead of "wet pants"

"uncontrollable screaming" rather than "crying"

"red blister" rather than "mark"

"I sobbed" instead of "I cried"

Rewrite this paragraph using all the techniques I indicated:

"Sally sat at the table in front of me telling me she wanted to be a Christian. I couldn't have been more thrilled. I prayed silently for the right words."

CORRECTED "Kathy," my friend, Sally, began. "You've been telling me about Jesus for so long. Do you really think He wants to come into my life? It just seems too wonderful."

My heart beat faster as I realized God was finally answering my prayers. My palms felt sweaty as I thought, "Kathy, don't blow it now. Oh, Lord, give me the right words to say."

### **Transitions**

Once we've put those tools into action, we need to make our writing sound smooth. There are two ways to use transitions to do that.

*1. Refer to the idea or significant word from the previous paragraph to begin the new paragraph.* For instance, write, "All those missionaries..." The word "missionaries" refers to the missionaries named in the previous paragraph.

*2. Use transitional sounding words like:*

Besides

Today

Meanwhile

Later

On the other hand

Eventually

Again

Finally

For example

Consequently

Still

To illustrate

But

Actually

Smooth writing uses transitions to create bridges between thoughts, paragraphs and ideas.



If we don't use transitions, our writing sounds choppy and identifies us as lazy writers.

### **Be Specific Rather Than General**

Another way we can be a lazy writer (did you notice that transition?) is to write in general terms. Instead, we can be specific rather than general in the use of our words.

For instance:

"food" is general. "salad" is more specific but... (drum roll) "Chinese cashew salad" is superior.

### **Now It's Your Turn!**

Using all the techniques you've learned in this chapter and all the book, rewrite:

"Let's try to plan what we need to be doing." CORRECTED: Let's plan.

"We're glad to have you joining us." CORRECTED: Welcome

"What can stop you in your tracks a few days, weeks or months into your new program is slipping into the old patterns, attitudes and mistakes you made before?" CORRECTED: Your old patterns will try to prevent you from going forward in your thinking.

We covered a lot, didn't we? In our next chapter, we'll talk about how to market all the wonderful things you've written. See you then!

Kathy Collard Miller is the author of over 50 books and can be reached through [www.KathyCollardMiller.com](http://www.KathyCollardMiller.com). Her books are available on [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) She is also a speaker who has spoken in over 30 US States and 8 foreign countries. As a lay counselor, she meets frequently with those looking for greater sanctification.

## **Chapter 7** **Marketing Your Written Works**

**by Kathy Collard Miller**

*For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand and I hope you will understand until the end.—2 Corinthians 1:13*

Our potential readers won't have the joy of understanding what we've written unless we market it. Marketing means we make editors aware of our project. That's what this chapter is all about.

### **Breaking In**

Appear professional is very important because the competition is strong. In order to be professional, we will need to buy printed stationary and business cards. Your local printer can help you with those. But that is only necessary if you don't have a computer that prints with many different kinds of fonts. Most of the time, you can design your own and print it out each time.

### **The Christian Writer's Market Guide**

Market guides are like a writer's Bible: you can't get along without one. It is a book a writer uses to find the different markets for her writings. It has sections on publishers, magazines, greeting card companies, agents, writers' conferences, writers' groups, and editing services. It lists publishers and magazines' needs and any information you need to reach them, such as addresses, telephone numbers, etc. Search on the internet for this book and you'll find several ways to find it.

### **Sample Copies**

Sample copies of magazines and publishers' catalogues are available, simply by writing and requesting them, and enclosing an SASE (self addressed stamped envelope). Sometimes there is a slight cost.

These copies help us evaluate that publisher's or magazine's style so that we can conform our writing to their needs. I suggest you subscribe to the magazines you want to concentrate on writing for. By reading online magazines and blogs, you can become familiar with the kind of writing they desire. Every opportunity has unique purposes, goals, and formats. It's important to do your research.

### **Writer's Guidelines**

Another helpful resource is a magazine's and publisher's writer's guidelines. You can find them on their website.

### **Writers' Magazines**

Magazines written with the purpose of instructing writers are essential for success. I highly recommend you subscribe to at least one. They will give instruction and marketing information. Again use the internet to search for those.

### **Critique Groups**

A critique group is a group of writers who meet regularly to offer suggestions and support for beginning and professional writers. Each one has its own flavor and methods. Some have the

writer read their material out loud and participants offer suggestions. Others pass around copies of their manuscripts and have the participant make written comments.

As I mentioned before, I was a part of a critique group and it contributed to my growth as a writer and to my success. You don't need a published writer to be a part of the group necessarily in order for it to be helpful. Having someone's objective opinion as a reader is valuable enough to justify its value.

If you can't find a critique group in your area and can't form one yourself, you can choose to pay for a qualified person's critique through the critique services which are listed in *The Christian Writers Market Guide*.

### **Writers Seminars and Conferences**

These seminars and conferences are held across the country and *The Christian Writers Market* has a complete list. Not only do you receive valuable instruction through the workshops, but you have opportunities to mingle and network with other writers and editors. That's crucial!

It is quite common for individual appointments to be available with editors. This is a wonderful opportunity to dialogue with an editor and show them your material.

Arrive at the conference prepared to give your idea for an article or book in one or two sentences so that even if you have an opportunity to talk even as you walk to a session, you'll concisely give your idea.

Also come with printed marketing materials like a query (for an article or a book) and/or book proposal.

When you know the publishing company the editors and publishers at the conference will represent, research on the internet the magazine, book publisher, greeting card company, etc, to know what they are interested in.

For instance, not every publisher publishes all genres. A publisher might not publish children's books. Or another doesn't publish a particular kind of fiction like graphic novels for teens. You want to know ahead of time so that you don't waste an appointment time trying to pitch an idea they will never accept.

### **Query Letter**

This tool is used primarily for articles but it's also for books.

When I first started writing, I wrote down the dates of every Monday for six months on one piece of paper with a space after each one, with the goal of sending out a new query letter every Monday. I did that but before the six months could pass, I was too busy with assignments to continue sending out the query letters.

If that sounds like a reasonable expectation for you, or some variation of it, I'd highly recommend it.

### **Advantages Of A Query Letter**

Here are the advantages of sending a query letter if a magazine or book publisher wants this kind of initial connection. Many do not and want the complete manuscript sent from the beginning. Do your internet research.

1. You may be able to sell the article before you write it.
2. You may receive a faster response from the editor than a complete manuscript.
3. A query is more efficient because you can send out simultaneously submitted query letters. "Simultaneously submitted" means you can send out more than one query letter at a time to different magazine editors or publishing houses.

*For a query letter, include:*

- Proposed title
- Basic idea with 2-3 paragraphs explanation
- Your qualifications for writing

- Your writing credits. If you haven't been published before, don't even mention this part.
- Proposed word count of an article or number of pages for a book.
- Indicate whether it's a simultaneous submission
- e-mail contact information for responding

Here is a Sample Query letter which I used to get an article sold:

(date)

(Editor's Name), Editor

(Name of Magazine)

(Address)

Dear Mr./Ms. (Editor's name):

As a teacher/seminar leader on the topic of parenting for over ten years, I often come into contact with parents who have a hard time letting their children grow up. They often think they will release them when they turn eighteen. But actually "letting go" starts much earlier than that. I've recently written an article entitled, "Letting Go Starts Earlier Than You Think," and in it I will encourage parents to consider that positive parenting perspective.

First I'll talk about why we find it difficult to let go:

\*It's a dangerous world.

\*I know what happened to me when I was their age!

\*But they won't do it right!

\*Can I really trust God to watch over them?

\*But I don't want them to be needy.

Then I give practical ideas with powerful anecdotes about how to release our children throughout their growing up years. Some of the points I'll cover include:

1. Acknowledge the disadvantages of holding on.
2. Allow them to make choices.
3. Give logical consequences for poor choices.
4. Provide an allowance.
5. Let them make mistakes.
6. Trust God to protect and guide our children.
7. Be comforted knowing they go through stages.

This article is about 1870 words. I am a freelance writer of over 1,000 articles, guest posts and my website blog posts. I'm also the author of over 50 books.

I look forward to hearing from you about my simultaneously submitted query.

Sincerely,

Kathy Collard Miller

KathyCollardMiller@gmail.com

Now, here is a "NO NO" QUERY LETTER:

Dear Editor:

I don't read your magazine but I know your readers will love the idea for my article.

Besides, God told me to write this article and He gave me every word and I didn't even have to rewrite it.

Even though the market books say you prefer articles at 1500 words, this article is 3000 but because the words are from God I know you won't edit any out.

Please tell me immediately whether you plan to print my article. This will be my very first printed article and I'm so excited that I'm already telling everyone about my future article in your magazine.

God bless you!

What did that writer do wrong?

### **Book Proposal**

Another marketing tool we have available to us is a book proposal. Because every publisher has varying components they want, be sure to do your research. But most of the time, this marketing tool includes:

1. *Cover Letter*: the beginning of your email briefly introduces yourself and your book idea along with your proposed title.

2. *Summary*: this is a double-spaced summary explaining your book idea, why it's unique from books already published on the same subject, and why it's needed by readers.

3. *Marketing angle*: the typical person or group of people you envision buying your book.

4. *Your qualifications or experience with the subject matter*. Indicate any training or schooling you've received. And include any titles or positions.

5. *Indicate your "platform."* Your platform includes the ways you are known to others through speaking and social media. Indicate how many followers or friends you have on various means of social media. Tell how many followers or hits you receive from your blog.

It is particularly important to indicate whether you speak publicly and professionally. Publishers are looking for writers who also speak because they know that person will be selling their book. If you are not currently speaking, you will need to make every effort to begin a speaking ministry.

6. *Writing credits*. Just like the query letter, if you aren't previously published, just omit this part.

7. *Indicate any ways you plan to market your book*. For instance, you might be a part of a ministry or organization which could publicize your book in their newsletter or through a mailing. Or maybe you have your own mailing list or newsletter that could make it available for sale. Having a listing of organizations that are interested in your topic is another attractive point to publishers.

8. *Proposed book length*. State the possible length in manuscript pages or word count.

9. *Outline*. An outline gives a 2-3 paragraph description of the contents of each chapter.

10. *2-3 Sample Chapters*. It is possible for a book proposal to be complete without the sample chapters but check in *The Christian Writers Market Guide* to find out what a publisher wants in a book proposal. Plus, a publisher's guidelines online.

Like the query letter, book proposals can be simultaneously sent; complete manuscripts can't be.

### **Manuscript Preparation**

*Here's a Sample format for the first page of your manuscript:*

Name	Approximate Word Count
Address	Rights Offered
Telephone	Whether pictures are included

Title (Begin slightly below half page)  
byline

(Begin text)

*Heading for remaining pages:*

Miller/(2-3 words of title)

Page \_\_

*Other style rules:*

1. Allow at least one inch margins on sides, top and bottom.

2. Double space each line
3. Use one side of paper (if paper is used)
4. Indent the first line of the paragraph by .25

### **Offered Rights**

Understanding the rights for an article is essential in marketing. Here are the options you have:

*First Rights:* Writer offers the newspaper or magazine the right to publish the article, story or poem the first time. All other rights belong to the writer.

*Reprint (Second Serial) Rights:* Gives a newspaper or amagazine the right to print an article, poem or story after it has already appeared elsewhere.

*All rights:* Magazine or newspaper purchases article, poem or story and author no longer has right to use it again.

*Simultaneous Rights:* Articles and stories which are sold at the same time to publications which do not have overlapping circulations.

These days, blog posts are used on blogs but each one should be changed to some degree each time you offer it to other blogs.

### **Persistence! Persistence! Persistence!**

Because much of our work will be rejected, we need to have persistence! It's difficult and discouraging to receive a rejection letter, but we should try to not take it personally. Most of the time, that rejection has nothing to do with our writing abilities or the topic, but the fact that the magazine or publisher doesn't need that material right now. It could even be because you wrote about marriage and the editor had a fight with his wife that morning! It's often a very subjective thing and yet we feel as if an editor has personally slapped us in the face. If we will persist and our writing is truly good, we will find a place for our article or book.

My book, *Your View of God...God's View of You* was rejected by 22 publishers. But my most recent rejection record was a book that was rejected by 43 publishers. And guess what? It was published in 1997 as *The Useful Proverbs*. It just had to find the right place.

Even rejection can bring other opportunities. Some time ago, I sent a book proposal to Accent Publications. I received it back but the editor said that they were looking for someone to write a women's Bible study series. Would I be interested? I certainly was. I sent off some ideas and they ended up publishing the twelve Bible studies in my Daughters of the King Bible study series. You never know when even a rejection will turn into an opportunity.

Today that women's Bible study series is being published by a different publisher: Elk Lake Publishing, Inc. It is continuing to have a long life.

I recently wrote an article about letting go of our children. You may remember we covered my query letter about it earlier this chapter. That idea was rejected several times. I finally submitted it to *Single Parents Magazine*, writing it from their slant of single parenting and it sold.

### **Commitment**

Here's a poem that expresses my thoughts about commitment to God's call in my life:

I Would Love

I would love to take the time to knit a beautiful sweater  
but I choose to fashion words together instead.

I would love to take the time to crochet a delicate doily  
but I choose to weave words into a book instead.

I would love to take the time to cook a gourmet meal  
but I choose to create a delicious article instead.

I would love to take the time to deepen my tan  
but I choose to strengthen my writing skills instead.

I guess it's all a matter of priorities  
and I choose to use my God-given writing talents primarily.  
—Kathy Collard Miller

How about you? Are you willing to make the commitment, if God is truly calling you to this worthy goal of writing? God wants you to obey Him. Don't compare yourself to other writers, just obey what He wants you to do. Then you will find success and great pleasure. As the missionary said in Chariots of Fire: "When I run I feel His pleasure." For me, "When I write, I feel His pleasure." I hope you'll find the same thing.

Kathy Collard Miller is the author of over 50 books and can be reached through [www.KathyCollardMiller.com](http://www.KathyCollardMiller.com). Her books are available on [amazon.com](http://amazon.com). She is also a speaker who has spoken in over 30 US States and 8 foreign countries. As a lay counselor, she meets frequently with those looking for greater sanctification.

## Chapter 8 Writing Fiction

by **Kathy Collard Miller**

*Of making many books there is no end...— Ecclesiastes 12:12b*

In this last chapter, we'll talk about writing fiction. Fiction can be a useful tool in the Master's hands to touch the hearts of people, draw them closer to God, and also communicate the good news of Jesus Christ. The second piece of writing I sold was a short story for a Sunday school take-home paper. It was fun to write fiction and see how some important principles could be communicated. Recently, I've worked on a novel, and look forward to seeing how God wants to use that.

You may or may not be interested in writing fiction, but the techniques used for writing this genre can also be useful in writing nonfiction. When I wrote my first book, *Help for Hurting Moms* (now entitled *No More Anger*), I used fictional techniques even though it was a non-fiction book. So I encourage you to read this last chapter whether or not you plan to write fiction.

There are five major elements of writing fiction, whether you want to write short stories or novels. They are the premise, perspective, personalities, plot and place. Let's talk first about the premise of your fictional piece.

### **Premise**

What is it that you want to communicate through your short story or novel? What theme do you want to address? These are the questions you will need to answer to be effective in writing a fiction piece. As you do, you will want to read widely in the same genre you want to write in.

For instance, if you want to write a romance novel, then those are the kinds of novels you'll want to read extensively. If you want to write a short story for a woman's magazine, you'll need to subscribe to that magazine and read all the fiction pieces they include.

Of course, there are many premises to choose from like: good versus evil, dishonesty doesn't pay, God's love is never ending, love conquers all, and others. As you begin writing, determine what you want your reader to conclude when he or she finishes your piece of fiction.

Ideas for a premise surround you. It could be based on your own life experiences or something important you want to communicate. In an article in *The Christian Communicator*, Dorothy Boone Kidney shares several unique ways she uses to find ideas for her fictional projects. She looks in the telephone book and as she sees a name, asks herself, "What sort of woman might have that name?" For instance, she once found the name Selinda. In her mind that name conjured a sly, slippery type, charming but also scheming. As she thought about the meaning of that name, she imagined circumstances involving such a person.

Another bold place for ideas, she says, is the personal columns in magazines and newspapers. She clips out those advertisements for possible story sources. She clipped the following:

Will trade a two-week vacation in my Venice, Florida, apartment for a two-week vacation in your Washington, D.C. apartment.

Dorothy went on to ask herself, "What kind of adventure could spring from an apartment or house swap?"

Dorothy also finds valuable brain-starter ideas in conversations overheard in hotel lobbies. She says, "Pick up a snatch of conversation and work it into your lively lead, then let the dialogue carry the rising tide of the story."



Dorothy even finds Christmas cards provide ready-made settings for fiction. She writes, "The picture on a card catches my interest more often than the sentimental message inside. An old-fashioned Cape Cod house with a wreath on the door and smoke rising from the chimney became the home for the major characters in my novel, *Portrait of Debec* (Moody Press)."

She also suggests an art show or museum as other places yielding valuable ideas. She says, "Paintings are powerful imagination stimulators. Whenever I leave an art gallery, my head is brimming with ideas." Dorothy also suggests watching people, observing changing scenery, and striking up conversations with strangers.

Dorothy has given us some excellent ideas. To give birth to new ideas, a good question to ask yourself is: "what if...?" You can use this seminal question by making two columns, one for listing characters like a secretary, young mom, paperboy, writer, college student, etc. The other column lists situations, challenges, or problems like: financial problems, holidays, relationship problems, death, murder, etc. Then begin to brainstorm ideas combining items from each column and using the "What if...?" Like, "What if a college student was hired for the summer to be a nanny and she couldn't get along with the mother?" Or "What if a paperboy is saving for Christmas presents but a bully steals his money?"

Don't be afraid to let your imagination flow. All of your ideas won't be useable, but you could come up with a very unique one that becomes the premise for your fictional short story, novella or novel.

I encourage you to write down now the premise of a fiction piece you're currently working on.

Secondly, write down one that you'd like to work on in the future.

### **Point of View**

As you prepare the premise of your story and then write it out, you'll need to determine the "point of view." The point of view refers to whose eyes you are writing through. There are three basic methods: first person, third person, and the omniscient perspective. Although some writers change the point of view during the story, it's best to keep consistent with one throughout the story.

Let's look at each one separately.

*First person is when we tell the story from within the mind of one character*—whether it's the main character or another person. As a result, it is from the "I, me, my" perspective. First person is a simple way to write and has great strength. It does have the limitation of a restricted point of view, because the author cannot include information known by other characters.

For instance, that character cannot know what another person is thinking or what is happening at another location unless he or she is told that information. As a result, the story is told through a narrow window of knowledge, but that is not necessarily a disadvantage. The first person perspective is popular because it gives the reader an intimate sense of that character.

*The third person perspective refers to all characters with "he, him, his" or by using a character's name.* The story is seemingly told from an outside source. Unlike the first person perspective, the narrator can know everything and refer to it.

*The omniscient point of view is when the story is told from inside the mind of all the different characters at different times.* This perspective is more difficult to carry off well and should be avoided by most writers.

Author Ruth Vaughn, in her book, *Write to Discover Yourself*, suggests this for determining which perspective to use: "If it is basically one person's story, First Person is your strongest tool. If you are dealing with a saga that embraces a lot of life in dramatic incidents taking place hundreds of miles apart, Third Person, or Omniscience, is almost imperative." (page 214)

If you are unsure as to which point of view to use, write a chapter of your novel or short story from each of the three perspectives. See which one works best.

### **Personalities**

For most fiction, the most important element is writing about the people in your story. The personalities of the characters you create will keep the reader reading. You need to create characters who are comprehensible, compelling, and congruent. Let's look at each of those three aspects.

First of all, they need to be comprehensible, in the sense of being believable. We don't want the reader to think, "I can't comprehend there's actually anyone like this." If your created personality isn't believable, the reader will be constantly jerked back into the reality of knowing they are reading fiction, rather than being swept up in the fictional world you've created.

In order for them to be comprehensible, they must be human. They can't be perfect. They must make mistakes and also learn from their mistakes. A good story exhibits the character changing in some way.

The second aspect of creating good characterization is the personalities need to be compelling. The reader must care about them, motivated to continue to read to see what happens to this person. The character must have qualities making the reader care, while yet making them believable, as I mentioned before. Therefore, they must be likable in spite of their faults. This is why the villain of fiction is rarely the main character because we're not supposed to like them. We want to read about a hero or heroine, even if they have faults and weaknesses.

Another aspect of making personalities compelling is to make their lives significant. If a character's problems are portrayed as too light or too easily overcome, the reader will have a "ho-hum" attitude and find it easy to put the book down and not pick it up again because there's no real drama.

Finally, as we study fictional personalities, the character must be congruent. By this I mean, responding in such a way that is in harmony with his or her temperament and former reactions. If the character doesn't respond consistently with who the author has portrayed him, the reader won't trust what they are reading. They'll feel like the story is contrived. They know the author didn't make the effort to create a story true to life.

As I said earlier, that doesn't mean the character can't change. And certainly, he or she will be varied in their responses. But overall, his or her responses and the changes occurring in his or her perspective of life, must also be appropriate within a person's personality and temperament.

In order for your character to be comprehensible, compelling and congruent, you must know their basic temperament and personality.

### **The Temperaments**

In order to determine the personality of your character, it's helpful to be aware of the four main temperaments. By choosing a temperament for your character based on what you want to communicate through them, it will be easier to keep him or her congruent. Here are the basic four temperaments. After I describe them, we'll talk about how to use this knowledge.

*The first personality we could choose from is the Expressive.* This person's main goal in life is to have fun. They are the life of any party. Expressives love people, places and adventures. Their weaknesses include not liking details or being organized.

Here is a listing of the Expressive's basic characteristics:

- Friendly and talkative
- Good sense of humor
- Creative and charming
- Energetic and restless
- Thrives on compliments
- Exaggerates
- Undisciplined
- Easily distracted
- Loves approval, attention, and applause

*The second temperament we could choose from is the Driver.* This person's main goal is to control, both themselves and others. They sincerely believe their opinion is the only right one and they are very assertive in expressing it. They can make fast decisions and believe that a hurting person should "just do it—get over it." These characteristics can be both positive and negative, but when used negatively, the Driver must learn compassion.

Here are the basic characteristics of the Driver:

- Dynamic leader
- Unemotional
- Domineering and independent
- Sees big picture
- Determined to succeed
- Likes opposition
- Quick thinker
- Lacks empathy
- Intolerant

*The third possibility is the Analytical.* This person's main goal is to make everything and everyone perfect. Although any temperament can have perfectionist tendencies, the Analytical is the natural perfectionist. Analyticals are detailed-oriented and very organized. Because they analyze everything in minute detail, they can have "analysis paralysis" and be slow at making decisions.

Here is a listing of the basic characteristics of the Analytical:

- Conscientious
- Perfectionistic
- Loves to think
- Appreciates culture and the arts
- Thorough and organized
- Loves details
- Good listener and loyal friend
- Compassionate
- Easily depressed
- Remembers hurts/easily resentful
- Has unrealistic expectations

*Finally, we could choose the temperament of the Amiable.* This person's main goal is to have peace, sometimes at any cost. They are laid back and seem to lack having strong opinions. Very little is truly motivating to them. They evaluate everything from a "how much energy will this take?" perspective. But their primary strength is their ability to mediate between disagreeing people or groups. They are the natural ambassadors of the world.

The Amiable's basic characteristics are:

- Easy-going and calm
- Quick wit
- Low awareness of own emotions
- Excellent mediator
- Capable
- Compassionate, listens patiently
- More a watcher than a doer
- Low energy level
- Worrier
- Lacks self motivation
- Easily judges others
- Loves to tease

### **No Ideal Temperament**

Although no one, including our fictional personalities is purely one temperament. We may have a sprinkling of three out of the four, but every person tends to operate in their temperament's strengths and weaknesses most of the time, especially when they are under stress.

But no temperament is perfect. Every one of our fictional personalities must exhibit both good and bad in order to be comprehensible.

Once you understand the temperaments, it'll be easy to choose the personality you need, depending upon the premise you want to communicate through your short story, novella or novel. For instance, if your premise is people can change, you could have a Driver become more compassionate, an Analytical become less perfectionistic, an Expressive become more others-centered, or an Amiable become more assertive. The reader is eager to see how they change.

These changes can happen, not because their basic, internal personality has changed, but because they are becoming more "versatile." The concept of "versatility" means a person chooses to operate in the strengths of another temperament through the power of the Holy Spirit. This will not come across as incongruent because we will portray the changes taking place over a period of time. It can be incongruent if a character responds outside of their temperament without anything prompting him or her to change.

For instance, an Amiable won't naturally jump up to voluntarily give a speech before a group, but the story could include the challenge of an Amiable character having to learn to speak because of his job. Overcoming his fear would be one of the obstacles he resolves as a part of the plot.

### **Develop Their Background**

Besides knowing your characters' temperaments, you'll need to know their background: their history, childhood, likes, dislikes, view of life, etc.

Most fiction authors create a whole history of all their main personalities in their story. Though they will actually use little of this information in the book, the knowledge will empower them to make the character real in their own minds. Unless it is real in their own minds, it will never be real in their reader's minds.

For instance, here is a basic list of information you should know about your character.

- Name:
- Nickname:

Make sure that the name and nickname fit the character and the time frame of your story. You might also consider asking your friends what a particular name means to them as names often communicate certain personalities or characteristics.

- Age:
- Birthday:
- Where they were born:
- Physical attributes such as
  - color of hair:
  - color of eyes:
- What they like about themselves:
- What they don't like about themselves:
- Level of self-esteem:
- View of self:
- Unique characteristics of their voice:
- Unique characteristics of their sentence structure:
- Unique words or phrases they use:

You'll need to know where your character was raised in order to determine their speech patterns. For instance, if your character was raised in the South, you'll need to know words and

the dialect from that area. There may also be unique expressions that represent a particular geographical area. Check in your local library for books about dialect.

Returning to the list... we should determine:

- Traumatic childhood experiences:
- Happy childhood experiences:
- Information about their parents including national heritage:
- Names and ages of siblings:
- Preferences for:
  - car
  - clothing
  - home
  - hair style
  - hobbies
  - friends
  - recreation
  - colors
  - art
  - reading

For many of those preferences, you may want to develop a reason from their childhood they have a particular preference.

Sketch the kind of education your character has experienced: did she attend preschool? Was she a good student or a poor student?

And then also create their

- Job experiences:

Make your character unique by knowing her gestures, mannerisms, and unique habits. You'll want to look at the people around you with a new eye looking for things you want to incorporate into your fictional character.

Another area of information is how your character responds to others. Are there things people do always making him or her angry, sad, or frustrated? Such information may be crucial to how he or she responds to other characters in the book and for the formation of the plot.

Those categories I've listed are only the beginning of the information you should know about each main character. Some authors develop twenty pages of information about their main character. They know this character as well as they know themselves.

Author Ruth Vaughn writes, "Only through such thorough understanding of your personalities can you provide true motivation for their behavior and human relations in your story." (page 206, *Write to Discover Yourself*).

Another way to make your character come alive is to find a picture or photograph representing your image of him or her. It could be a picture from a magazine, a photograph of a friend, or a picture of a celebrity. Place that picture in front of you as you write.

If you are basing your character on a known person, it's all right to do that, but you must change enough of the information to disguise it.

I trust as you work on developing your fictional personalities, you'll develop a love for your heroes and a disdain for your villains. It's fun to create them, but as you can tell, it does take work.

### **Plot**

The fourth element of fiction is plot. Plot is the story line, blueprint, and strategy for communicating the conflicts and problems making up your fictional story. Every story must have a strong plot in order to be effective and compelling. It's the conflict and problems the personalities face making your story powerful. Without conflict, your fictional piece will not

motivate your reader to continue reading.

Prolific author and writing teacher Norm Rohrer says, "A story without a plot is simply an incident. The plot is the plan, design or blueprint for a story. The plot provides a super-structure for creating a beautiful piece of art."

Most fictional authors write a three to five page general plot description so they know where they're going and what they intend to convey. Some authors say they do not know the ending until they get there, but for the beginning writer that's a dangerous way to start. The general plot description will become your working outline and give you confidence in writing your story. A good exercise for developing your knowledge of plot is to read a short story or novel and then write out your own plot synopsis of that story.

There should be four general components of your outline:

*Introduction.* The beginning of your story must immediately introduce the main characters and some point of conflict. Immediately show the personalities confronted by the basic problem the main character will face throughout the book.

*Body of the story or novel.* This is made up of a succession of obstacles and resolutions, only to have a new set of problems face the main character. Each chapter must end on a note of suspense so the reader will be motivated to continue reading onto the next chapter. But within each chapter the hero or heroine must have minor victories and then face new obstacles.

Author Margaret J. Anderson writes, "Whatever problem your lead character faces, be sure it is vitally significant and it grows increasingly urgent, perhaps also more complicated as your story unfolds."

*Climax.* In the body of the story, the resolution of each obstacle does not solve the main problem of the story, but instead builds to the third element of the plot. The climax is the point of highest dramatic intensity. It is the major turning point of the story bringing the final complete resolution of the big problem. The climax must come at the point where there seems to be no hope for the hero or heroine. It is his or her darkest moment when there doesn't seem to be any way out of the horrible situation they face.

*Resolution.* Then in a short burst of writing, we have the fourth and final component of the plot: the resolution and satisfying conclusion to the story. At this point, any unaddressed barriers or obstacles previously put in the way of the hero must be addressed and resolved. As I'll mention later, the resolution must be satisfying by having reasons behind it.

*As you develop your plot more specifically, your preliminary plans should include a synopsis for each chapter.* Author Elaine Schulte recommends it should include the following information:

- Opening scene:
- Middle scene or scenes:
- Final scene:
- This chapter accomplishes:
- It says this one thing:
- Strings left dangling:
- It furthers the plot by:
- Character development:
- It deals with this one facet of the problem:
- It resolves or complicates this facet of the problem:
- It brings up this new problem as a result:
- Why is this chapter necessary to the novel?

Knowing all that information about every chapter will make writing your novel easier.

### **ABC's of Plot**

Knowledge of the ABC's of plot will also make your writing go more smoothly. The ABC's of plot are: action, background, and conversation.

### *Action*

Let's look first at the "A" of plot: action. The action takes place as a central problem is faced and along the way, smaller obstacles block the path of the character who is trying to solve the central problem. The character should have one dominant desire. The main character and the problem must be equally strong for conflict to result. There are four basic scenarios to bring about the action of plot:

1. a person in conflict with another person
2. a person in conflict with self
3. a person in conflict with circumstances
4. a person in conflict with nature

If you are writing a short story of 5,000 words or less, there should only be one of those scenarios addressed. In a longer short story or novella, you can include more of those elements. In a novel, it's effective to use as many as possible—as long as it's natural and not forced. Here are some possible complications:

- misunderstandings
- believing gossip
- spiritual warfare
- personality difficulties
- past traumas (divorce, abuse, etc.)
- differences of opinion
- religious differences
- cultural differences
- wrong attitudes or assumptions about God
- opposite temperaments
- emotions, such as fear, loneliness, greed, lust, etc.

As you develop the action, remember it must be believable and strong enough to compel the reader to continue reading. It should not be contrived; in other words, things shouldn't happen without a reason or cause. Many beginning fiction writers make the mistake of having the supernatural hand of God miraculously solve the heroine's problems. That could easily seem unsatisfying, like a cop-out. As if the writer couldn't figure out an inventive solution so she just sent an angel to make everything better.

For instance, if your plot needs a piece of evidence destroyed, it may be convenient for you as the writer to have a fire start in a house for no apparent reason and burn up the evidence. But that would not be satisfying to the reader. Instead, you'll need to set up a cause of the fire. Maybe a minor character could stuff Christmas wrapping paper into a fireplace thinking that's the way to get rid of wrapping paper. But as the papers burn, flames shoot out and start a fire that quickly spreads to the nearby Christmas tree. As a result the house burns down and with it the piece of evidence.

The best action writing prepares for something to happen much earlier in the story before it's needed. For instance, in our example of the fire, earlier in the story that minor character could mention how his family always got rid of the problem of the wrapping paper by burning it in the fireplace. That way when he later stuffs the fireplace with wrapping paper, it will seem believable because there was a reason for him to do that.

Another unsatisfying point of action is when a character suddenly makes a major decision and nothing has prompted her to change her mind. Whenever something happens in the plot, especially when a personality makes a decision and *especially* for the conclusion of the story, there needs to be sufficient basis for him making that decision.

*The "B" of the ABC's of plot is the background information.* This explains the plot. There are two ways to communicate background. The first is *telling* it and the second is through *showing* it. In our previous chapters we talked a lot about telling and showing. Please also refer

back there, especially for the examples given.

Telling information about the personalities, place, and plot of your story is an acceptable way to communicate but it is not the superior way. It should be used as sparsely as possible. As the word explains, "telling" just means you come right out and say it. Do you want the reader to know your main character was an only child? You could write, "Cynthia was an only child." Unfortunately, such writing is passive and uncreative.

A slightly better way to tell your information is through a flashback. The flash back is when the author describes an earlier event through a character remembering and describing it. If Cynthia being an only child is important enough to use a flashback, you could have Cynthia visiting a friend who has only one child. As she observes how the child has a hard time sharing her toys, Cynthia could remember the day in her childhood when a neighbor called her selfish because she was an only child who wouldn't share her toys. If her trying to be less selfish is one of the challenges in the story, so much the better. The flashback has become an important part of the plot.

At times flashbacks can be tricky because if it is not used correctly it can come across sounding contrived. To prevent that from happening, we must have a smooth transition into the flashback. A transition is something making the character think of the previous event. In our example of Cynthia, it's the fact she's observing another only child. If she had just remembered the incident of the neighbor without anything causing her to recall it, it would sound manipulated. There must be something jogging the character's memory.

Another way to give background, which is the superior method, is through *showing*. As we've learned in previous chapters, the "show, don't tell," technique is a valuable one for writers and it's just as valuable in writing fiction.

In order to communicate the plot and background information through showing, we should give information in a subtle way rather than just stating it outright. For instance, to show a character's devious nature, instead of writing, "He was a devious kind of person," you could have him telling a lie.

As you write, make every effort to "show" background information, rather than just telling it.

*The "C" of plot is conversation.* Conversation between our fictional personalities is also an excellent way to "show, rather than tell."

Conversation between characters is an effective and superior means of moving the plot along. Many short stories, novellas, and novels are written with dialogue taking up a major part of the writing. In some books it can be 90 percent of the writing. And in fact, in young adult novels, it should be 90 percent. The next time you read a short story or you flip through a novel, notice specifically how much of the book is written in dialogue form.

Any dialogue you write must serve a purpose. If it doesn't make the plot proceed or give essential information, it should be omitted.

Here are some guidelines for making your dialogue well-written.

*Craft the verbal words to fit each character.* You already know the character's background and temperament, therefore you can write according to the way he would speak. Each of your characters will be distinct and unique in the way they speak. They should have their own special phrases. For instance, if they are witty, they should be telling jokes or poking fun. If they are serious, they will speak more slowly and thoughtfully.

By having unique ways of speaking, your characters will be even more real for your readers.

*Also combine mannerisms with the character's speech.* Maybe your character who speaks slowly will scratch his head frequently. Or the character who is witty has a tendency to nod her head whenever she's telling a joke. Find something that goes along with their unique talking which will help the reader to visualize that character.

Obviously you must know your character to do all of this. Walk around looking at life



through your main character's eyes. Ask yourself, "What would my character be thinking in this situation or saying about this? How would they respond?"

Remember your characters' verbal comments will be impacted by their background, education, self concept, and the period your story is written in. Obviously someone in the Civil War will speak differently than a person from Roman times.

*Read the dialogue out loud.* Ask yourself whether it sounds awkward or stilted. A significant way to make dialogue sound natural is to use contractions. Instead of writing, "I will not," you would write, "I won't." Instead of "I am going home," you'd write, "I'm going home."

*Break up the conversation with short bits of description.* Describe what else is going on, where the characters are, what they're doing, or what's happening around them.

*Learn how to use "speech tags."* Speech tags are the "he said" and "she replied" telling the reader who is speaking. Once you have established in a conversation who is speaking, you don't need to use a speech tag every time the conversation changes to a different person. But every once in a while you can include one of the speech tags to make sure the reader hasn't lost track. We may also use too many synonyms for the word "said."

The next time you read fiction, notice the way speech tags are handled.

*Communicate the emotions through the actual words being said and in descriptions of body language.* Don't use a lot of adverbs.

As an example, here is a portion of conversation written poorly.

Connie looked at Joe and cried out, "I can't believe you didn't tell me this before."

Joe replied, "Well, I would have if I didn't think you would overreact."

Connie shot back, "If you want to know why I always overreact, it's because you're always doing such crazy things."

"Crazy things, huh?" Joe laughed quizzically. "Anyone would do crazy things if they were married to you."

Connie gasped, her mouth opened in shock. "I've had enough of this. I'm getting out of here!" She walked to the door and slammed it behind her.

Before I give my own improved edit of that section, rewrite that section using the ideas you have already learned.

Here's how I would clean up that conversation to make it flow better.

Connie looked at Joe and cried out, "I can't believe you didn't tell me this before."

"Well, I would have if I didn't think you would overreact," Joe replied.

"If you want to know why I always overreact, it's because you're always doing such crazy things."

"Crazy things, huh?" Joe laughed. "Anyone would do crazy things if they were married to you."

"I've had enough of this. I'm getting out of here!" Connie walked to the door and slammed it behind her.

I've been able to improve it a bit, but I'm sure you did an even better job.

From that example of conversation, notice the correct way to write the punctuation marks for conversation. The quotation marks at the end of the sentence are on the outside of the period, question mark, or exclamation point.

## **Place**

*The final aspect of planning our short story, novella or novel is deciding on the place where the story will be situated.* To be authentic, if it is placed in a real geographical area, you will need to research that area, ideally by traveling there. When you are there, be sure to take copious notes along with photographs to help your memory as you write later. Purchase professionally prepared maps but also draw a map of the area so that you can remember where things like buildings and other objects are located. There may also be tourist brochures available.

An important part of your research will be to check out the history of the area. As with

knowing your characters, you'll need to learn much more about the area than you'll ever put into the actual manuscript. But you never know what important tidbits of information will later be useful to make the book more real in the mind of the reader.

*If you're creating the place from your own imagination, you may even need to be more diligent in preparing material about the location.* You'll need to plan where everything is located geographically. Again, draw a map you'll place in front of you as you write. Readers will be disappointed if they identify inconsistencies in a book. We don't want them to find mistakes.

Just as your characters have a personality, so does a town, city or locale. Write as much as you can about your imaginary setting, determining its personality and the unique possibilities of the area. Are the people friendly or distant? Is the climate tropical or desert? What is its background and history?

In the past most books were written with long descriptions of the book's setting. In today's writing, the descriptions are not long. It's best to describe the setting in the context of the action. For instance, you may have a character who is feeling confused. They're trying to make a decision. You could have them look around and notice the countryside or notice the room they're in. Something in the room or something about the countryside could become a catalyst for helping them to make their decision. This subtle way of describing the surroundings communicates best rather than a lengthy narration of the setting.

That wraps up the five major elements of fiction writing.

### **Marketing**

You'll market your short stories, novellas and novels in the same way I described in our previous sessions for nonfiction works. *The Christian Writers Market Guide* lists the markets considering fiction. Many publishers are developing new lines of fiction books and many are expanding their lines. It's a good time to communicate scriptural ideas through fiction as many people buy novels and many magazines print fiction short stories.

I wish you the best in placing your fiction pieces. I know our almighty, powerful, sovereign God will glorify Himself through every project He desires to reach others. Continue to seek Him and be confident He is guiding you, step by step.

Our chapters about professional writing have concluded and I've been delighted to share with you. If God has called you to be a professional writer, He has given you a special and treasured talent He wants to be used in a giving and generous manner. I encourage you to:

*Seek* a servant's heart desiring God's glory along with benefits for others through your written words.

*Strive* to represent God's message in a clear, concise, and honest way that communicates truth to the best of your ability.

*Stretch* your abilities and skills continually. Have an attitude open to constructive criticism and helpful evaluation from others, whether in a critique group or from seeking editing from qualified writers and editors.

*Select* carefully those who will be valuable mentors and honest encouragers in your work. Writing can be a solitary profession, so understand you need others to fill the well of creativity.

*See* yourself as God's vessel, constantly evaluating your heart for dependence upon God's Spirit to write His message. Remember Satan would like to use the temptations of having your words in print to create an arrogant writer who needs to be the center of attention.

*Set* your heart on having a humble spirit not needing to be constantly stroked through a byline. Focus on ways you can build up others instead of drawing attention to yourself.

### **Here is my prayer for you.**

*Heavenly Father, thank you for this privilege of sharing the joy of writing. You've given us*

*writers a wonderful challenge and blessing. Thank you for being willing to use our inadequate efforts and for the power of your Holy Spirit to make an impact in reader's hearts and minds. I pray for each reader of this information to be strengthened and equipped to fulfill the plan you have for her. Guide her in her writing and open the doors of publishing you have planned for her. We know you will complete your plan because you are a Mighty, Awesome God, whom we can trust. You deserve all the praise and glory for anything accomplished through us. We love you, Lord. Thank you for loving us first. In Jesus' holy name we pray, Amen.*

Kathy Collard Miller is the author of over 50 books and can be reached through [www.KathyCollardMiller.com](http://www.KathyCollardMiller.com). Her books are available on [amazon.com](http://amazon.com). She is also a speaker who has spoken in over 30 US States and 8 foreign countries. As a lay counselor, she meets frequently with those looking for greater sanctification.