



# Write Away: One Novelist's Approach to Fiction and the Writing Life

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## **Write Away: One Novelist's Approach to Fiction and the Writing Life Details**

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# From Reader Review Write Away: One Novelist's Approach to Fiction and the Writing Life for online ebook

## Cathy says

I love reading Elizabeth George's novels. They are, as she calls them, literary mysteries. And they are masterfully plotted. But also contain a lot of scene-setting verbiage that I regularly skip. These passages often seem to take me away from, rather than closer to, the dramatic tension of the current characters and plot.

But the passages remain in all of her best-selling books. So perhaps I should not have been surprised to find that she takes a great deal of time to craft those portions of the novels. It turns out, for example, that she goes to England and takes pictures of every major setting in her novels. And writes key scenes while reviewing her notes. She is impressively disciplined in her research and writing process, and the description of how she actually writes HER kind of novel was fascinating.

My biggest problem with this book though, is that she buries the lead. The interesting parts about her process are surrounded with a really boring English teacher like explanation of plot, character and setting. What we want to know is: How do you write your novels? What are your unique techniques/flaws/hangups? She reveals more in the small quotes in the head of each chapter than she does in 75% of the book. Her doubts, her daily fears, her huge admiration of other writers. This is what we crave - to learn about HER!

She finally includes two very small chapters on how she works, and how she organizes her day. They are followed by her admission that she finds it tough to let go of her left-brain organized self to get to the right brained creativity of writing. And that she has always lacked a lot of confidence about her talent. No kidding! A more confident writer would have started with the personal, and used it as a jumping off point for the theory and definitions.

So, a note to the author: as you write on p.168, Elizabeth, "when we care, we continue to read." I dropped this book twice early on because there was so little of your personality in it to motivate me to keep going. You are a best-selling writer who is hugely successful and anyone reading your book cares about YOU. Don't be afraid to put yourself front and center. This book seemed to have you hiding behind generic definitions way too long.

I did very much enjoy, though, the selections you chose of other writings, and disagree with other reviewers here that you shouldn't have included your own novels as examples. But you needn't pay homage to them in order to earn the right to tell us how you do what you do.

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## Angela says

I read mixed reviews of this but I'm so glad I read it, and more important own it. I haven't read any of Elizabeth George's novels because I don't care for mysteries but her information was so helpful and applicable to any type/genre of fiction writing. There were a few excerpts from books that I skimmed through because they were lengthy but I'm glad she included them so you could see what she was talking about. Not only does she talk about POV, grammar, research, character development, she walks you through her process and explains reasons for doing it the way she does. It was refreshing to read writing isn't just

about passion to tell a story or talent with words but mostly discipline and determination to reach that goal. I'm not a pantser - I like things planned, plotted before I start writing - and George offered wonderful tips and advice I'll definitely put to use. My copy of this book is all marked up!! If you want to write a novel, I recommend you read this first!!

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## Rose says

I was going to write a comprehensive review of this guide, but I decided to go for the short form version since Elizabeth George touches on a lot of topics like character, plotting, among others that are in other writing guides. If you read a lot of writing guides and are a veteran, there's not a lot here that comes across as new territory. I liked this guide and found it worth the read, but slightly cumbersome in some areas. It read a little longer than I thought it would, and part of that was due to the fact that she has long passages that she analyzes for certain topics, some of which are samples from her own writing. While on one hand I appreciate the samples, I think there are slightly too many here, and for me, that made it more difficult to get through than other guides of the same nature, though I appreciated certain things she had to say on structure. In the end, I liked it, but I didn't love it.

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## Michael says

(2.5 stars) Disappointing. Somehow the great ones who write about writing manage to speak mostly about other writers that they love (take Stephen King's *On Writing*, Orson Scott Card's *How to Write Science Fiction & Fantasy*, E.M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel*, etc.). But when a writer who is much less known takes many an excerpt from her own novels to exemplify whatever she is discussing, I usually do not stick around too long.

True, King and Card do make occasional references to their own novels. But they do so to exemplify their struggle with problems that they faced and how they tried solving them. It's *case studies*, usually recounted with self-deprecating humor and a good dose of humility. Elizabeth George, on the other hand, seems to love letting you understand what a swell writer she is. It's funny, by comparison, that most pages written by Card could make you think that he is an avid, intelligent reader who has no pretensions to write himself. And many pages written by King have to do with the overall life-diet that can lead you to get your writing done, as a great coach would write.

The real problem, though, is not ego. The truth is that *Write Away* reads too much like a book of "recipes" for writers (and not good ones). Indeed most of her own passages that Elizabeth George quotes (and some from other writers) smack of "writing". This is, in fact, a general problem facing creative writing in the USA, where it seems you cannot tell a story without giving every telling (sorry, *showing*) detail about every character and locale, without much care for the rhythm of the narration. The result is that you can almost hear the writer stopping and saying: "Ok, now let's do the description of the library". Great writers don't let you realize that it's written (think of Capote's unforgettable swan song *Music for Chameleons*, for instance). Or if they do, it's with such intelligence that you can actually take great pleasure in reading it (think of William Faulkner or George Eliot, for instance).

There are some redeeming elements about this book: George quotes, sometimes at length, excellent pieces from great writers. And her discussions might be useful to get you to think about different issues pertaining

to writing. But maybe keep this book for when you're done with the best ones.

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## **Science (Fiction) Comedy Horror and Fantasy Geek/Nerd says**

An illustrative description of how to create literature with the help of consistency, system, and perseverance

Please note that I put the original German text at the end of this review. Just if you might be interested.

First, it should be noted that less the unrealistic transfigured romanticism of the creative process than the rough and challenging way to a finished novel is relentlessly portrayed. Where other counselors tend to coquet with optimistic illusions, this work shows the hard and sometimes frustrating everyday life of a writer. It is safe to say that from the author's perspective, discipline seems even more important than talent. Indeed, a contentious issue in which Georges's systematic approach, however, breaks a gap for consistent development against overly spontaneous, creative writing. Nor is it the only way to follow the path it has embarked on, but it offers several options for solving problems. As a point of criticism, the overly excessive passages that she takes out for illustration from her novels are to mention. Shorter excerpts would undoubtedly have had the same benefit and above all left more room for further explanations and exercises. Even with the autobiographical details away from the writing process, less would have been up to the waiver more.

The plot and character development are well-explained, which unfortunately often undergo a step-by-step treatment by motivated beginners. To counteract this danger is a concern of Georges, which emphasizes her with a particular focus on this problem.

For people who prefer to work spontaneously and let things run their course and observe how plots, figures, and suspense slowly develop or sometimes radically change and hold nothing of too pedantic conception and structure, will find little help in this book. Those who are more focused on the creative process and the use of their original resources are advised to consult.

On the other hand, planners who appreciate advice on well-structured exercise processes and meticulously trained work instructions and can learn from this for their work can find extensive suggestions. Thus, the specific research is presented step by step, illustrated and made comprehensibly, the working structure and the daily routine is illustrated by Georges and emphasizes the importance of structure and accuracy.

It would be all too illusory to want to profile yourself in the free-spirited, creative field as well as in the pedantic elaboration. Because a lot depends on individual preferences and talents. From this point of view, the book does another valuable service. It animates due to its systematics to the consideration, to which camp one should count oneself.

A fundamental and perhaps unprecedented trade-off involving no less than potential success or frustration. In the knowledge of the personal strengths and weaknesses, one should in their interest mercilessly deal with their way of working. Moreover, start to sift out the appropriate exercise and learning methods.

With this widely diversified guidebook for more precise work, it is still possible to discover the potential for improvement and to gain insights into the everyday life of a writer and to find inspiration from that place.

Anschauliche Beschreibung, wie mit Hilfe von Konsequenz, System und Beharrlichkeit Literatur entsteht

Vorab sei angemerkt, dass weniger die verklarte Romantik des kreativen Prozesses glorifiziert als mehr der steinige und schwierige Weg hin zu einem vollendeten Roman schonungslos dargestellt wird. Wo andere Ratgeber zur Kokettierung mit optimistischen Illusionen neigen, zeigt sich in diesem Werk der harte und mitunter auch frustrierende Alltag eines Schriftstellers.

Man kann getrost sagen, dass aus dem Blickwinkel der Autorin betrachtet Disziplin noch wichtiger als

Talent erscheint. Gewiss ein strittiges Thema, bei dem die systematische Herangehensweise Georges jedoch eine Bresche für die konsequente Erarbeitung wider allzu spontanem, kreativen Schreiben bricht. Auch stellt sie den von ihr beschrittenen Weg nie als einzige Option dar, sondern bietet mehrere Möglichkeiten für die Lösung von Problemstellungen.

Als Kritikpunkt sind die allzu ausschweifenden Passagen, die sie zur Veranschaulichung aus ihren eigenen Romanen heraus nimmt, zu erwähnen. Kürzere Ausschnitte hätten gewiss den gleichen Nutzen gehabt und vor allem mehr Platz für weitere Erklärungen und Übungen gelassen. Auch bei den autobiografischen Details abseits des Schreibprozesses wäre weniger bis hin zum Verzicht darauf mehr gewesen.

Gut erklärt sind Plot- und Charakterentwicklung, die eine leider häufig stiefkindliche Behandlung durch motivierte Anfänger erfahren. Gerade dieser Gefahr entgegen zu wirken ist ein Anliegen Georges, das sie mit einem besonderen Fokus auf diese Problemstellung hervorhebt.

Für Menschen, die lieber spontan drauf los arbeiten und den Dingen ihren Lauf lassen und beobachten, wie sich Plot, Figuren und Spannungsbogen langsam entwickeln oder auch mal radikal verändern und die generell nichts von allzu pedantischer Konzeption und Struktur halten, wird sich wenig Hilfreiches in diesem Buch finden. Denen seien eher auf den kreativen Schaffungsprozess und die Nutzung der eigenen schöpferischen Ressourcen fokussierte Ratgeber empfohlen.

Planer hingegen, die Ratschläge zu durchstrukturierten Übungsprozessen und minutiös durchexerzierten Arbeitsanleitungen schätzen und daraus für die eigene Arbeit lernen können, finden umfangreiche Anregungen.

So wird die genaue Recherche Schritt für Schritt dargestellt, illustriert und nachvollziehbar gemacht, die Arbeitsstruktur und der Tagesablauf Georges veranschaulicht und die Wichtigkeit von Struktur und Genauigkeit betont.

Es wäre allzu illusorisch sich sowohl im freigeistigen, kreativen Bereich als auch in der pedantischen Erarbeitung profilieren zu wollen. Denn vieles hängt mit individuellen Vorlieben und Talenten zusammen. Unter diesem Aspekt leistet das Buch einen weiteren wertvollen Dienst. Es animiert aufgrund seiner Systematik zur Überlegung, zu welchem Lager man sich selbst zählen sollte.

Eine überaus wichtige und vielleicht bisher nicht erfolgte Abwägung, mit der nicht weniger als der potentielle Erfolg oder Frustration einhergehen. Im Wissen über die persönlichen Stärken und Schwächen sollte man sich im eigenen Interesse schonungslos mit der eigenen Arbeitsweise auseinander setzen. Und beginnen, die passenden Übungs- und Lernmethoden auszusieben.

Mit diesem breit gestreuten Ratgeber für genaueres Arbeiten lassen sich durchaus noch Verbesserungspotentiale entdecken und aus dem Lebensalltag einer Schriftstellerin Einblicke erlangen und daraus Anregungen finden.

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## **Claudia says**

As a fan of Inspector Lynley, I was intrigued to read about Elizabeth George's process and how she has developed her craft. I enjoyed the varied examples she shared from other authors too. I'll always remember "bum glue." I now like Lynley and Havers even more!

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## **Bob Mayer says**

I taught with Elizabeth for 7 straight years at the Maui Writers Conference and we now both live on Whidbey Island, a few miles apart. She came and spoke to my last Writers Workshop here on the island and outlined her creative process and it was fascinating as she laid it out. She kept saying the #1 trait to be

successful as a writer is the ability to be ruthless. What she meant was ruthless was oneself. To sit and work hard. The one common trait I see in every successful writer I know is the ability to work very hard.

Note the title says "One Novelist's Approach". It's one reason I call my book on writing a Toolkit. I don't believe there are black or white, hard and fast rules.

However, if you read a lot of books on writing by authors, you will see some common threads. I think the key is to find those threads, then develop your own tapestry.

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## **Bill says**

### A Beginner's How-To on Writing

George, Elizabeth. (2004) Write Away. New York: Harper Collins.

There are a lot of how-to books on writing out there. If you haven't read any, this one is a reasonable place to start. It's easy to read, encouraging in tone, covers most of the basics, and has plenty of examples. George is a well-known writer of mysteries and thrillers, and a teacher of writing. She describes her personal understanding of writing fundamentals and her own writing process. The result is a solid overview for a beginning writer.

On the down side, the information content is low and conversely, redundancy and irrelevance are high. That's what makes the book easy to read, but a more experienced writer would be better off with a genre-specific how-to book, or a more rigorous treatment, such as "Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft," by Burroway and Stuckey-French.

George offers a "Seven step story line" guide, based on common sense and apparently derived, as much modern writing method is, from Aristotle's Poetics. In short, a story should have a beginning, a middle, and an end; the dramatic tension reaches an apex in the middle; the main character makes a critical choice that leads to a climactic confrontation, a reversal, an epiphany, and establishment of a new status quo. There's nothing wrong with that formula. It seems like common knowledge, but maybe it isn't if you're just starting out.

George's examples are way, way too long, often two or three pages, when a couple of well-selected paragraphs would have done the trick. Most of the examples are extremely boring, almost unreadable, especially those taken from her own works, which is the majority of them. Hundreds and hundreds of words illustrate nothing but generic prose. The examples illustrating dialog are especially uninformative. These excessive excerpts seem like filler to me.

When George gets down to specifics, which is not often, I usually found her explanations lacking. For example, concerning the difficult problem of creating a character's voice, she says merely that the voice arises "naturally" from the character's biography that you have previously written. At a very high level of abstraction, that's true. A garbage man is not going to talk like an Oxford don. But an interesting voice does NOT arise "naturally" from a specific biography. It must be explicitly created by the author and George offers no clue about how one does that.

The last third of the book covers George's writing process, how she actually goes about writing a novel from

start to finish. Most of that material is idiosyncratic and of little interest to anyone else. For example, she is extremely keen on researching locations for her novels. She flies off to Europe to make extensive tours of old castles, wineries, and government institutions. Nice work if you can get it. She takes photos and records her impressions. However, she never mentions why she does all this. Is a novel an exercise of the imagination or is it a travelogue? Yes, readers appreciate accuracy, but for a how-to book published in 2004, this one seems curiously uninformed about the virtues of internet searches.

Besides, the best stories are about characters, and in some important sense, location hardly matters. Maybe this is one reason I do not enjoy George's novels. I have found them to be long on costumes and scenery and short on character-based drama. I often find that in her novels, what's at stake comes down to some wrinkle in family systems involving other siblings, half-siblings, long-lost siblings, twins, paternity, maternity, illegitimacy, abandonment, disownings, etc. Kinship relations are about as interesting to me as digestion. I'm sure others differ, as she is a best-selling author, so somebody likes that stuff.

George's best advice comes in her final words. "You WILL be published if you possess...talent, passion, and discipline. You will PROBABLY be published if you possess... talent and discipline or passion and discipline. You will LIKELY be published if you possess [only] discipline." In other words, writing discipline is necessary and sufficient, the other two qualities only helpful.

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## **Josie says**

DNFed when the author started snippeting sex scenes to illustrate character voice. :/

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## **Lisa Reads & Reviews says**

I find hope and encouragement in Elizabeth George's assertion that writing can be taught. For me, this means that writing is something I can learn, and can continue to improve as long as I put work into it. Elizabeth George's philosophy states that a writer will be published if they possess three qualities: talent, passion and discipline. I'm reminded, therefore, to focus on those qualities and nourish them.

I've followed a process similar to George's: conduct research, profile characters, and plot, all in advance. George says this the writer to focus on the art of writing. While I'm not likely to follow her step by step process, certain aspects of it appealed to me. I also loved that she included Bryce Courtenay's quote, "He who possesses bum glue wins."

Noteworthy:

George gave examples from her own work on how to create settings that feel real. She described how she conducts research and intertwines actual and fictional settings. Her settings provide more than a background for her characters; settings can become another character in the story.

I've enjoyed writing in the POV George calls "Shifting third person." She writes a good summary of the pitfalls: 1) each different POV needs a subtle difference in voice and tone, 2) one must be careful about pace because too many narrators can slow the novel down.



Hooking the reader isn't enough. The writer must use suspense to maintain the reader's interest. To do this, the writer has to make the reader care and identify with something.

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### **Kim Fay says**

It's been a while since I've read a writing book, and this one hit the spot. I'm trying to understand the fundamentals of mystery writing, and while Elizabeth George is undoubtedly a mystery writer, this book uses much broader strokes, exploring what make any good story work. She is clear that the processes she describes are what work for her, and that every writer will have his or her own unique process. At the same time, her lessons are reminders of the importance of certain elements, such as developing characters before you even begin to write your story. George's advice is practical and is complemented with extensive examples from published fiction (both her own and others'). I highly recommend this book for writers who need a bit of inspiration or a nudge back on track, or who are looking to take their skills in developing characters and plot to the next level.

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### **Lewis Weinstein says**

7/4/17 ... I posted my comments to my author blog ... <https://lewweinsteinauthorblog.com/> ... and marked the book to re-read again ... there is always something important to remember, or a new perspective to learn

6/23/17 ... reading again ... bringing back to mind the wonderful advice Elizabeth offers on every page.

Terrific book for any writer. Full of the techniques as well as the angst of writing. Ms. George is a meticulous writer; this book explains how she does it.

Jan 28, 2014 ...

I just referred to this book again - now autographed by Elizabeth in Key West - for her comments on the point of view of the omniscient narrator ...

OMNISCIENT NARRATOR · Must be adept to remain truly omniscient and not just slip in and out of different characters points of view · the narrator knows, sees, hears all · the narrator enters into the mind of every character · the viewpoint of the narrator is not necessarily that of the author · omniscient narrator is a story teller ... the narrator is not confined to the time or place of the individual scene (like a reporter would be) but can provide history about the characters as well as what's in their hearts and minds

That's what I'm trying to do as I write my novel-in-progress.

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### **Keryn says**

I wrote copious notes from this book for use in my own writing development. Halfway through, I rushed out and bought one of Elizabeth George's novels ('Careless in Red' published after this novel) because I wanted to read it in parallel, in order to experience her craft in action. For she definitely separates art from craft in writing, and this was an 'Aha!' moment for me. I was so fascinated by the aspects of craft illustrated through

the excerpts she quotes from her work that I needed to follow them through into a full novel. And oh, she is good. This book is easy to read, well-structured and practical. The author's ability to teach writing shines through. I especially loved her character prompt sheet (not to be filled in, only to prompt your stream-of-consciousness writing on the characters before starting the novel!), her creation of truly memorable settings (I forget that people tell me how real I make a place') and her philosophy of writing: 'You will be published if you possess three qualities: talent, passion and discipline...But if all you possess is talent and passion, you will not be published...A lot of writing is simply showing up. A lot of writing is being willing to show up, day after day, same time and same place.' I believe Elizabeth George's novel 'Write Away' is food for any aspiring writer. Feast on it!

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### **Nick Duretta says**

This an excellent volume of practical, solid advice for any prospective author. George is a superb writer herself (I love her Lynley/Havers mysteries) and a former English teacher who knows how to get a point across (I participated in a writing group with her years ago). She also includes many fine examples from her own books and those of others. This is definitely a book I'll be returning to as I make my way through my next novel--I made many, many notations and underscoring as I went through it.

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### **Jocelyn Bailey says**

Two main exceptions I took with this book:

- 1) When writing about writing, do not include as examples numerous lengthy excerpts from your own fiction books. Especially when the excerpts are so long that, by the end of them, the reader has forgotten the purpose of reading them in the first place. I find this objectionable in its tackiness.
- 2) When writing to writers about writing, do not assume that your readers do not know the difference between first and third person. This is inane. Rather than insulting everyone's intelligence, kindly direct said writer-hopefuls to a grammar course.

Slightly patronizing. There are a few jewels of wisdom here, but one must wade through pages of excerpts from George's novels to discover them. Read Francise Prose's book on writing instead.

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