

## Readers and why they matter

New writers are often so full of enthusiasm and gung-ho, go-get-em attitudes that their writing is fresh and, sometimes, inspiring. Yet many of these writers find that they are unable to gain a publisher, that for some reason their work just isn't hitting the mark.

It is true that for a publisher to pick up a piece it needs to have a market, and to tie in with the reading public's current demands. But it is also true that you can't just write. You need to write for a reader.

Nearly everybody you talk to wants to write a book. It seems like an easy task to many people: sit down, write a story, throw in some action, and away you go. It **is** hard work, however. Compounding the apparent ease of writing a book is the often-banded-about phrase: 'everybody has a book in them'.

Interestingly, if you ask many of these aspiring writers whether or not they read novels, a very large proportion of them will look at you aghast, and frequently say something like, 'yeah, like I have time for that!'.

Yet they want to write books. Curious, no?

### Writers need to be readers

It is an old saying, but a true one, that a good writer is a voracious reader. Whether the writers read while they are writing books is another matter; but in their off-time they read thoroughly and widely. From this background of reading, a writer will have an innate sense of what works and what doesn't. He or she will have an internal meter that tells them what style works and why; what type of characterisation works and why; what makes a

feasible plot; and why, if a book is deemed 'crap', what made it so.

Those writers who read a lot can be said to have undergone the most effective training that there is. A voracious reader often has a strong sense of what needs to work well if a book is going to be a good one. In translation, this means that this reader knows what not to do if it is going to write its own book.

### You need a sense of audience

In your writing, strive always to create the book that you would ultimately love to read. Doing this achieves one of the key factors missing from many writers' works: a sense of audience. The feeling that the writer is writing for someone. The notion that the writing is important enough for someone else to read it.

If you are a writer, or an aspiring writer, a good rule of thumb is to write what you personally would want to read. You know what this target market likes, you know what irritates it. You know what would make this reader shake its head with contempt, and you know how to press its buttons to make it smile, or cry, or laugh, or tremble with excitement. You know the style of suspense it likes or hates, and what characters make it want to vomit.

Having a strong sense of readership is vital. Readers are (obviously) consumers of written work; but having this sense of audience allows you to target your writing. If you have ever read anything that was aimlessly written, you will understand how a piece of writing can, despite its other strengths, feel to the reader as though it was weakly or vaguely written.

### How can you create a sense of audience?

Some writers have been able to get around the 'audience factor' by drafting their stories as letters to an absent 'other'; some have written for themselves—indeed, the very famous J.K. Rowling wrote books that she herself would have enjoyed reading. Other writers have written for someone close to them. Some writers don't write with someone particular in mind, yet they have a strong sense of who they want to read their work.

### Ideas on method

If you are finding it difficult writing your piece of work, here are some tried-and-true ways to fix that 'gap':

- writer what you personally would want to read
- start writing the story as a letter
- start writing the story as a diary or journal entry
- think about the type of person you want to write for, and keep them consciously in your mind as you write—it will help you to avoid literary devices that might put your reader off, or to avoid vague material that might cause your reader to question you.

### Recommended reading

Disher, G. 2001. *Writing Fiction: an introduction to the craft*. Allen&Unwin: Crows Nest NSW.

Kane, T. 1988. *The New Oxford Guide to Writing*. Oxford University Press: Oxford. pp 43–45.