

Writing resources

I have a section on my web site which information and references that may be useful to writers. They have certainly been useful to me.

About writing: On-line and off-line resources for aspiring and published writers.

Reference materials: Links to on-line resources such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, thesauruses, and other things where the plural is difficult to agree on.

Other Doctor Who sites: My own favourite links to resources on the web. These include pointers to other authors' web pages, as well as the review sites from which I quote elsewhere on this site.

Obviously, the best way to reach the web sites I describe in this document is to link to them from my web site at <http://anghelides.org>.

About writing

I'm flattered that I'm asked about writing by would-be DW novelists. So here (and on my web site) is what I hope will be information useful for any writer. For what it's worth, this article is informed by my experience in writing franchise fiction for Virgin Publishing, BBC Worldwide, and Big Finish Productions.

And besides, you've probably come to my site because you're interested in *Doctor Who* fiction, and maybe want to write a novel yourself.

So you want to write a Doctor Who novel?

Eric Saward is a former *Doctor Who* script editor, TV script writer, and novelist. His advice to aspiring *Doctor Who* writers (in a *Doctor Who Magazine* interview) was "don't". By which he meant, "don't just want to write *Doctor Who*." You have to want to be a writer first, and specifically a *Doctor Who* writer second.

But suppose you enjoy writing, and you do particularly want to write a *Doctor Who* novel. You should put this ambition in perspective:

1. BBC Worldwide is unusual, in that it *sometimes* commissions unsolicited proposals for the *Doctor Who* range. If you don't believe that the BBC offers an almost unique genre opportunity, read the article here by published author Roger MacBride Allen about how other media franchises like *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* handle their commissions: <http://www.sfw.org/writing/media.htm>
2. In 2000, the BBC received 500 unsolicited proposals—that's two for every working day. Fewer than 10% of those got past the first reader to the commissioning editor. The large majority fail the basic requirements of good writing.
3. In 2001, the BBC published 22 novels (one eighth Doctor novel and one past Doctor novel every month except December). Most of these were by people who had already written for the series before, or who were already published writers elsewhere. We aren't guaranteed acceptances, and we've all had rejections. But we've shown in the past that we can deliver a publishable book on time. Sometimes we are commissioned directly.
4. In 2002, the BBC announced that from September onwards it would publish only 12

Doctor Who novels each year.

So your chances of getting your BBC *Doctor Who* book published are better than any other franchise. But that doesn't mean it's easy, the odds are against you. There's competition not only from the existing authors, and not only from published novelists who have not yet written for *Doctor Who*, but also from all those other enthusiastic would-be novelists—people like you. However, writing is a skill that can be taught, and it's a skill that everyone (including published authors) can improve.

Incidentally, Big Finish Productions do not consider unsolicited proposals as they explain [on their website](#) and in their [FAQ](#). They will return unsolicited proposals unread.

An obvious starting point for *Doctor Who* authors is to find out what the BBC are looking for. Perhaps you'll find it useful to research what the commissioning editor has said (for example, Justin Richards was [interviewed](#) in March 2001 on the [amazon.co.uk](#) site). But the best starting point is certainly: read and adhere to the BBC's [Submission Guidelines](#) and consider their [FAQ](#).

Even if you think you can work around the guidelines, why risk it? The small BBC staff working on *Doctor Who* books have those ten submissions every working week to look at *as well as* everything else they need to do to plan, negotiate, edit, design, publicise, pay for the rest of the ongoing series. If you don't follow the guidelines in the first place, then you give them the excuse they're looking for. Because the bad news is, they are...

Looking for reasons to reject you

It sounds unfair, doesn't it? But if publishers' readers can't quickly reach a point where they can say *perhaps without reading your entire proposal* that "this won't do", then they'd do nothing else but read proposals all week and the other books would never get published!

A really good book to read is Noah Lukeman's **The First Five Pages** (ISBN 0-684-85743-X). It's subtitled "A Writer's Guide to Staying Out of the Rejection Pile". Lukeman has worked as a literary agent, and he explains the brutal truth about unsolicited manuscripts: when publishers' readers read them, they're *looking for a reason to reject*. And if that's not disheartening enough, Lukeman says in his *Introduction* (so, that's before the book even gets going):

You'll come to see why this book should not have been titled *The First Five Pages* but *The First Five Sentences*.

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to prevent the publisher's reader ever reaching "this won't do". Keep your proposal in that reader's hand. Don't put *anything* in your submission that will give that reader an excuse to discard it.

And Noah Lukeman's book explains step-by-step how a publisher's reader will look for reasons to reject your manuscript. So now you'll know how to avoid that! There's a [web site](#) for Lukeman's book, too.

OK, now you *shouldn't* be disheartened. You should see this as a challenge. Besides which, there are plenty of books about writing that can help you avoid the usual pitfalls of the first-time novelist. Here are the ones that I found most useful.

Books about writing

There are loads of these. In the US, in particular, books about writing are a minor industry. And there are courses, classes, web sites, fee-paying services, free resources, and goodness knows

what else. These are just the things I found most useful. And since I'm still trying to improve my writing skills, I'd love to hear from you if you have further suggestions—let me know via my [website](#).

The Elements of Style, by William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White (ISBN 0-02-418200-1, but republished frequently). The classic text for simple, clear writing. A standard for anyone who wants to write well in any field.

The Art of Fiction, by John Gardner (ISBN 0-679-73403-1). This explains the basic skills, genre, common errors, techniques, plotting... It's one of the most widely-referenced books for new writers.

Writing Fiction, by Janet Burroway (ISBN 0-316-11770-6). "A Guide to Narrative Craft". Burroway is an author and teacher, and has taught a course on Narrative Technique at Florida State University. This book explains and exemplifies form, structure, showing and telling, atmosphere, point of view, comparison, and theme. She also makes the observation: "The quality of the communication is under judgement; the author's character is not." Bear this in mind when you get your rejection letter. And when you review people's published books!

The Weekend Novelist, by Robert J. Ray (ISBN 0-440-50594-1). If, like me, you are not a full-time writer, you may find this staged approach to novel-writing is useful. It talks in turn about character, scene building, plotting, drafting, and rewriting.

The Novelist's Guide, by Margret Geraghty (ISBN 0-7499-1441-6). A straightforward approach to characters, identification, dialogue, plot, symbolism, and closure from a UK-based columnist for *Writer's News*.

The Writer's Journey, by Christopher Vogler (ISBN 0-330-37591-1). "Mythic structure for storytellers and screenwriters." Although it has screenwriters as a large part of its target audience, this book is useful for novelists too. It's inspired by the work of mythologist Joseph Campbell—he of "The Hero's Journey" which has defined so much of contemporary Hollywood film making. It's good because it explains how stories work. Vogler has also worked on scripts for Disney, Warner Bros., United Artists, Touchstone Pictures, and Twentieth Century Fox.

The books I've referenced above are about the *basics* of good writing, because that's where at least 90% of submissions fail, and fail badly. There are other books about the legal, contractual, pitching, and marketing aspects of novel writing. Personally, I think if you're worrying about those instead of about the basics of writing, you're already planning to fail.

The other thing that these books don't really address is verbal criticism and analysis of other writers' work, though that is inherent any time you read something. The best book for that, if you feel the need, is Wayne C. Booth's **The Rhetoric of Fiction** (ISBN 0-14-055221-9), an analysis of narrative from Homer to Joyce which provides examples in literary fiction of telling/showing, authorial voice, etc.

Web sites about writing

Again, there are loads. These are just the ones I thought were particularly useful. The links for these are provided on my [web site](#).

SFWA: The Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America Inc. This is the site's list of articles about writing, organized into Basics, Intermediate, and Advanced. Everything from "basic mistakes" and "how do I learn" to "writer's block" and "worldbuilding"!

The Eclectic Writer: Well over 100 great links for writers. These include articles about presentation, setting, endings, writing synopses, overcoming writer's block; there are genre resources (including sf and fantasy, horror, mystery); there are online journals, awards, technical writing, screenwriting; reference sites; research sites; organisations...

The Write Page: An online newsletter containing over 300 pages of author and book information for readers and how-to-information for writers—including loads of stuff about genre fiction.

Pure Fiction: A rare UK site (well, OK, a rare *useful* UK site). Unashamedly aimed at people who want to write bestsellers, it features reviews, previews, writing advice, writers' showcase, internet links, etc.

Zoetrope: Yes, *that* Zoetrope. Subscribe to the on-line publication that features new fiction from (among others) Francis Ford Coppola. And while you're there, check out their writing classes.

NovelAdvice: Three publications, open message board, broad range of classes, frequent open chat sessions with "leaders in the field" but, best of all, a fantastic set of [resources](#) specifically for writers.

Plot: Damon Knight's excellent online summary, excerpted from his book *Creating Short Fiction*.

Seven suggestions: Worth mentioning specifically from the PureFiction site. John Ross's seven suggestions for writing a novel is a succinct online summary which prints on two sheets what most writing books will tell you in at least seven chapters.

Science Fiction Clichés: A very funny summary by John VanSickle of cliché, baloney, lame plotting, sexism, bigotry, and contradictions of the laws of nature in science fiction with particular reference to *Star Trek*. The full title is "The Grand List of Overused Science Fiction Clichés". And there are accompanying summaries for:

1. [The Things I Will Do if I am Ever the Hero](#) ("Tired of the hero making the same stupid mistakes?")
2. [The Things I Will Do if I am Ever the Sidekick](#) ("Dying is easy; comedy is difficult")
3. [The Things I Will Do if I am Ever the True Love](#) ("Just in case...")
4. [The Evil Henchman's Guide](#) ("Life as cannon-fodder sucks")
5. [Survival Guide for Innocent Bystanders](#) ("Hints for the rest of us")
6. [The Evil Overlord Inc. Web Site](#) by Peter Anspach (broken last time I looked, unfortunately)
7. [Things I Will Do When I Become Evil Empress](#) (Noam Izenberg's "Gender alternate")

Reference materials

I cannot hope to list all the useful web sites that writers can find, so I've listed sites that I have found useful. If you think there are others I should include, please let me know via my [web site](#). Most of these are collections of links to further pages.

[LibrarySpot](#): A great starting point for lots of links, including dictionaries, encyclopedias, thesauruses, etc.

[RefDesk](#): An even bigger, more general site, which also contains the excellent [Google](#) search engine.

[Robin's Nest](#): This writing site also contains information about books, creative writing, and articles. This link is for dictionaries, phrase-finders, and language styles.

[bartleby.com](#): A straightforward and useful set of links to encyclopedia, dictionary, quotations, Bible, Shakespeare, Gray's Anatomy, and the indispensable Strunk & White..

[Virtual Sites](#): More than 500 helpful page links representing 12,000 sites. This is the page for English, but there are other pages for Books, Dictionaries, Encyclopedias, etc. only one click away. Hidden at the bottom of the page is the even better [Mamma](#) search engine.

[Word Play](#): More than 100 links to sites that feature fun with words. Some are useful, some are funny, some are plain daft. It's a celebration of language—acronyms, ambigrams, slanguages, clichés, common errors, crossword solver, translations (including Klingon), malapropisms, idiom, neologisms, UKUS, ...

[Sites for writers](#): Around 100 links to other writing sites, including different genres, writing groups, author organizations, and online advice.

[Writing Corner](#): A US site for writers (formerly known as "Electric Ink"), with a newsletter, writers' resources, features, a chat room, contests, Q&A, and invitations to contribute.

[Inkspot](#): Canadian site containing essays, articles, and columns for all kinds of writers. Organised by author, web site, and article.

[SFWA](#): The Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America Inc.

[SFF Net](#): Science Fiction and fantasy, but also Horror and Mystery, Military and Romance, reading and Writing and Publishing. Somewhat unexpectedly owned by Greyware Automation Products in Plano, Texas.

Other Doctor Who sites

There are loads of useful and interesting *Doctor Who* web sites. These include reference works, reviews, image and sounds resources, conventions, news, and general larking about. A number of the other *Doctor Who* authors also have their own web sites. Here are my favourites.

Official sites

[BBC](#) Contains links to merchandise news, trivia, and news. It's heavy on the graphics, and its discussion groups are rather hard to navigate, but it's the main site for the franchise owner and therefore worth a look.

[Big Finish](#) Home of the officially-licensed audio productions, which star the original Doctors and companions. They have a companion site for the [Professor Bernice Summerfield](#) novels and audios.

[Dapol models](#): Find out about the realistic plastic toys based on *Doctor Who*. (There is no truth in the rumour that their Sylvester McCoy model is life-sized.)

[BBV Productions](#): News and information about more spin-offs from *Doctor Who*, including recurring monsters and characters from the TV series and novels for which the BBC, inconveniently for the Corporation but helpfully for the rest of us, does not control the copyright.

[DWAS](#): The *Doctor Who* Appreciation Society Site. I like this better than their printed publications.

Portals

[GallifreyOne](#): There are lots of portals, news sites, and review sites, but GallifreyOne is the brightest, the most up-to-date, and one of the best designed for appearance, content management, and ease-of-use. Start here for news, reviews, history, convention information, discussion forums, and more references than you can shake a perigosto stick at. Quite simply, it's the *Doctor Who* portal for the web.

[The](#) Contains a splendid list of links, with helpful ratings—it does link to some *Who* related XXX sites, in case you thought such things didn't exist, though it does warn you about these.

[Nitro9](#): The original huge links collection, and still very impressive.

[Doctor Who](#) Another interesting starting point, which has the advantage of a more memorable URL, and the disadvantage of an insane colour scheme.

[The](#) rather a cluttered site when I last looked, but that's because they have so much stuff crammed in there. As you'll gather from the title, it has a sense of humour too.

[WhoFind](#): A *Doctor Who* search site, in case you're tired of Google. Another labour of love, this time quite a smart technological one too.

[Time Lord Departure Lounge](#): Do you want aisle or window?

Reference and resources

Video

[The Restoration Team](#): News and information about the crack squad who scour the world for missing Doctor Who TV programmes. When they find them, they lavish care and attention on them to restore them to broadcast standard. They have done more than any group to recover the original shows and make them widely available to the general public. Their attention to detail borders on the obsessive and the fanatical (fortunately for us *Doctor Who* fans). Nicely designed site.

[Telesnap Reconstructions](#): the next best thing when even the Restoration Team (see above) can't track down the original is to see these reconstructions, which use contemporary off-screen stills in an imaginative way. They no longer distribute the reconstructions, however.

Scripts

[Doctor Who](#) The best and most comprehensive summaries of all *Doctor Who* stories—TV, film, video, novels, short fiction, comics, etc. A splendid piece of work by Dominique Boies.

[Earthbound Time Lords](#): scripts of the TV show.

[The cuttings archive](#): Electronic scissors and paste scrapbook for printed *Doctor Who* press and magazine articles.

Images and sounds

[Doctor Who](#) Lots of fascinating stuff. The ingenuity of fans constantly amazes me.

[Desktop themes](#): Jason Fraser's site has lots of these, and links to other people's too.

[The Cosmic Library](#): Brian Taylor's splendid site. Brian is the smart fellow who produced the stylish book images you see on my site.

[Michael Rogers' .WAV pages](#): Sounds like you should visit this site.

[DW image archive](#): Steve Hill's huge collection of pictures. And just when you thought it couldn't get any better, he bought a new scanner. (Steve Hill)

[Mark Ayres](#): He is the music man.

Other fun stuff

[Kursaal Entertainment](#): The Southend-on-Sea original.

[Doctor Who](#) Want to be a real-life Doctor or Master? Check out this academic course.

[Destiny of the Doctors](#): Cheats for the video game. After struggling with this game on an under-powered PC for a long time, I decided I was with the Master on this one.

Book reference sites

Authors

There are over 100 authors who have written Doctor Who novels, short fiction, audios, or reference books. And that's before you count those who have written for tie-in or spin-off series like Bernice Summerfield or the various BBV series. About 10% of those Who authors also have web sites, most of which contain thoughts or suggestions for other aspiring writers. Here are the sites that I know about.

[Kate Orman and Jon Blum](#): They come from a land down under. Lots of useful info about their books, plus other writing resources. Check out their [ButterflyRoom](#) newsletter, too. Kate writes an e-mail column called [LemnisKate](#) full of information and advice about her writing. She also offers a reading and commentary service on DW proposals.

[David Howe](#): *Howe's Who* leads you to book covers and information about David's many DW splendid reference works.

[Martin Day](#): Interesting stuff about Martin's non-DW and TV work here, too.

[Keith Topping](#): Keith's written a variety of TV tie-in stuff, which is described here.

[Justin Richards](#): Justin keeps promising to launch his web site. This is a pointer to remind him to get on with it. You can read an [interview](#) with him on the amazon.co.uk site.

[Steve Emmerson](#): Good insights into writing a first novel, on simple-to-navigate pages that inspired the redesign of this site.

[Gary Russell](#): Contains lots of stuff about Gary's original proposals to Virgin and the BBC, plus his non-DW stuff. The generosity of this approach to sharing stuff with writers and would-be writers inspired me to create my web site.

[Jean Marc Lofficier](#): Terrestrial Index author and producer of other, non-DW stuff. His [Terrestrial Index](#) is also on-line.

[Dave Stone](#): Is so-good fun, no?

[Mark Michalowski](#): The luminous Mark M in his alarmingly yellow t-shirt says bright things about his writing.

[Paul Leonard](#): He's Paul Leonard, he's Paul Hinder, he's here to help you with your writing. (Or he was until his URL went AWOL.) Paul also offers a reading and commentary service on fiction writing.

[Lawrence Miles](#): The Faction Paradox site contains information about Lawrence's spin-off audios and fiction.

[Daniel O'Mahony](#): Includes the story of how Daniel's novels and short fiction were commissioned, with appropriate reference to Andrea Dworkin, humanoid rabbits, and battling large pizza.

[Jonathan Miller](#): Heeeeere's Jonny!

[Craig Hinton](#): You can see the original outline for Craig's novel [The Crystal Bucephalus](#) and the Prologue for his novel [The Quantum Archangel](#) online.

[Author interviews](#): Lots of them at the splendid GallifreyOne portal.

Reviews and information

[GallifreyOne](#) remains your starting point for most information, but the following are interesting too...

[Broadsword](#): Once the doyen of *Doctor Who* book sites, now getting rather out of date. Once merited a mention in a Paul Cornell novel.

[Doctor Who](#) A bit more up-to-date.

[DevaLoka](#): Reviews and interviews, not just DW.

[Varos](#): Jason Fraser's site contains a review section.

[Terminus Reviews](#): Not the end of the line for DW books. Hosted by Andrew Vogel.

[The Cosmic Café](#): I'll have a Cericola please, waiter.

[Jagaroth](#): Matt Marshall keeps an eye on the books. (The index file for this site seems to crash Internet Explorer at the moment.)

[Happy Guy](#): Where cheerful Sean Gaffney reviews DW books.

[The](#) Robert Smith's review site for all things DW. Reviews vary between thoughtful critique to foaming rant, with everything in between.

[Doctor Who](#) Published monthly by Shannon Patrick Sullivan, this is an unscientific but interesting cross-section of online opinion about the books. Last time I looked, all my books were adrift in the middle of the rankings. Shannon also has...

[The Land of Fiction](#): Shannon Patrick Sullivan reviews some of the books, and rates the rest.

[DreamWatch](#): Newsstand fantasy magazine, publishes monthly DW reviews.

[TVZone](#): Newsstand telefantasy magazine, published monthly DW reviews.

[alphabetstreet](#): Part of *streetsonline*, where you can see reviews and order the books (post and packing is free).

[amazon.co.uk](#): More reviews, and another place to buy the books

[amazon.com](#): US version of *amazon.co.uk*.

[barnesandnoble.com](#): The online version of the big book store, biggest in the world, where there are reviews and you can order the books.

[bol](#): Books online, the euro bookseller owned by German media giant Bertlesmann.

[Waterstones online](#): The UK chain has an easy-to-use online site.

[bookshop.co.uk](#): Owned by WHSmith.

[Ottakars online](#): Another UK chain with an online presence.

Other fiction

[7th Door Fanzines](#): Original home of Lance Parkin's *History of the Universe*, and other fun stuff.

Discussion groups

You may enjoy the various *Doctor Who* usenet groups—there are many, though I tend not to frequent them any more. Best-known is rec.arts.drwho, a somewhat anarchic free-form anything-goes news group, but I found the signal-to-noise ratio made it more trouble than it was worth. A moderated r.a.dw is supposed to be along any day: we'll see. Meanwhile, here's where I drop in occasionally for a virtual chat:

[Jade Pagoda](#): A Yahoo Group which discusses the published DW books, and to which you need to subscribe.

[Down Among the Dead Men](#): A Yahoo Group where people discuss the worlds of Professor Bernice Summerfield. Moderated, you need to subscribe.

[GallifreyOne forums](#): Just when you think they can't improve things, those GallifreyOne guys set up a load of forums. There are lots—possibly more than you can hope to follow. Anyone can read the forum contents as a Guest, but you need to register if you want to post to them.