## The Writing Life by Jodi Rath

I

|  |
| --- |
| ELEMENTS OF STORIES |
| **Character** | **Theme** | **Plot** | **Point of****View** | **Setting** | **Conflict** | **Tone** | **Resolution** |
| Agatha Christie | SaraParetsky | AgathaChristie | HeatherBlake | Sue Grafton | Stephen King | Hunter S.Thompson | Sara Paretsky |
| FlanneryO’Connor | P.D.James | ElizabethGeorge | F. ScottFitzgerald | SherwoodAnderson | Shakespeare | Tom Waits | AgathaChristie |
| Sara Paretsky | Hunter S.Thompson | SaraParetsky | EdgarAllan Poe | Chaucer | KhaledHosseini | JanetEvanovich | Sue Grafton |

I’m a newbie when it comes to writing.

Well, I’ve had a work in progress I’ve been working on for seven years. That doesn’t seem like a rookie, but I know I’m a newbie.

I’m not published; I struggle with writ- er’s block. I’m not sure if I’m a panster or a planner. I question every single

thing I do when it comes to my WIP,

*Strange Blue*. By the way, here’s a shameless plug for my hope-

fully soon to be published cozy: *An introverted teacher seeks soli- tude to write, yet finds herself a suspect in a murder investigation in which she has to track down a dangerous blackmailer.* I’m proud of that line! I learned to write log lines from the Guppy class Introduction to Screenwriting with Sally J. Walker. I would advise any other newbies out there to take some online Guppy courses when you get the chance. It’s worth it!

Seven years ago, I was in a job that I hated. It was a teaching job. I *loved* teaching, but I hated the politics and there were some real- ly mean people who made my life miserable. I desperately needed an outlet. I turned to writing. It doesn’t surprise me. When I was a kid I converted my bedroom into a magazine company. I kept my mom’s old magazines and constantly begged her to buy me new ones. My dolls and stuffed animals were my staff. I would cut and paste from periodicals and create my own magazine. I wrote my own articles and then found pictures to cut out and patch together. I was the best six-year-old magazine mogul out there!

Later, in college, I took as many creative writing courses as I could find. For one assignment we had to write the longest sen- tence we could muster on the topic of our choice. I’ll never forget

my professor’s comment: “I’m impressed at how tongue-in-cheek your voice is; you have a very Twainish writing style filled with sarcasm and humor.” I mean, WOW, comparing me to Twain?

OKAY! So, it was only natural that when I needed an outlet to keep my sanity intact I turned to writing.

I’ve worked full time in education for close to two decades. This school year, I received an opportunity to go part time. This has allowed me more time to focus on my writing. Of course, some of the writing I’m doing is educational writing but I make more time

for my cozy mysteries, YA book, children’s book, poem, and short stories. yes, I have many writing projects that I’m juggling. I’m not sure this is the “right” way to approach writing, but I’m finding it to be my way—for now, at least. Isn’t that the truth about writing? It’s a journey, a wonderful adventure which we experience by trial and error. No one writer’s undertaking is the same as another’s. I’m

still working to find the best course for me. I tend to gravitate to- ward writing process threads on our Guppy list. I love to see the course of action other writers (published and unpublished) use when writing.

I’m good at teaching students how to write essays, edit, and re- vise. When it comes to my own work, revision is tough. I found

that combining my love of reading with revision works great as a

practice for me. I have a list of authors that I turn to when I get stuck on an element of my story (see chart).

I’ve read multiple works by these authors. My process is to high- light and take notes on how they write certain elements, and then I journal about what I read and their process as I observe it. When I get stuck on a component in my own writing, I revisit those notes and journal entries to help me work through my own issues. For example, while working on *Strange Blue*, I really struggled with setting. I found I was being very generic in mentioning places and not adding details. I went to my chart and back to my highlighted passages of Grafton, Anderson, and Chaucer (*Canterbury Tales*)

to revisit how these authors incorporated setting. I noted the de- tails of the prologue in *Canterbury Tales*, how Chaucer describes the spring with such grace and design. Grafton gets to the nitty-

gritty concerning her fictional town Santa Teresa in the likeness of Santa Barbara. Her description of setting almost becomes its own character, taking on a specific tone depending on time of day and what is happening in the story.

Sometimes, I find myself working to mimic some of my favorite authors. To fight writer’s block, I sit in quietude and copy their work to find a flow and let my mind wander. This always works for me. I can then reposition myself to my manuscript and get some ideas rolling.

I used to have this image in my head of being a writer. It was so glamorous. The actual doing is *very* different. Writing is a lonely business. It’s gruesome. All of my time is spent writing, rewriting, researching, reading, revising, editing, and pulling my hair out. But here’s the thing, I *love* it. So yeah, I don’t know what I am most days as a writer. I guess I’m a Guppy in a pond, and when I feel lost or lonely, I take heart in that I have other Guppies swimming right next to me.

Jodi Rath is working on a cozy mystery, *Strange Blue,* as well as a children’s book, *The Puppy-Toed Kitty, and* a YA book, *The Cultural Mishaps of Savan- nah Lighthead.* She has a B.A. in Eng- lish Literature and an M.A. in Teacher Education. She taught English to high school students for 17 years, but is now working in higher education at Ashland University. She writes educa- tional articles for affiliations such as ASCD and NCTE. Follow her at [Face-](https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100010339986027) [book](https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100010339986027) and on Twitter at @jodirath.