

Handout

“15 Tips to Write Like the Pros”

Brian A. Klems

Author, **OH BOY, YOU'RE HAVING A GIRL:**

A DAD'S SURVIVAL GUIDE TO RAISING DAUGHTERS (Adams Media)

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Why Should You Want to Write Like a Pro?

Aside from the overall goal of landing an agent and a book deal (or creating a book worth self-publishing), you need to create an experience for readers that not only entertains them but also aligns with what readers expect from good books. Without it, people won't read your work.

Who Needs These Tips?

Everyone. Nearly every writer makes missteps in first drafts (and often second and third). Learning these will not only help you write better books but help you save time (writing better first drafts means fewer revisions on second and third drafts).

15 Tips on How to Write Like the Pros

1. **Avoid prologues unless necessary:** Only use a prologue if your opening is out of time sequence or reveals something essential to the main plot.
2. Open with action? No—**open with conflict.**
3. **You must have an Inciting Incident:** This is the catalyst that starts your character's journey and changes life-as-usual. (*Katniss takes sister's place at reaping.*)
4. **Show, don't tell:** *Mark is a plumber. He is also kind.* vs. *After repairing the pipe, Mark unclogged the drain. He always offered me a generous family discount for his plumbing services even though we shared no DNA.*
5. **Tighten your sentences** and only use necessary words.
6. **Use action verbs** (*run, jump, unclogged*) not passive verbs (*was, were, has been*)
7. **Keep dialogue shorter** rather than longer
8. **Avoid information dumps:** Weave information into your story, don't share it all at once.
9. **Include hooks:** Every chapter ending should leave a question in the readers' minds that needs to be answered (forcing them to read on for the answer).
10. **Create flawed characters:** What makes your character unique/memorable?
11. **Keep your verb tense consistent.**
12. **Pick up the pace of your novel:** Throw your characters roadblocks and challenges.
13. **Edit ruthlessly:** This is what people mean when they say “Kill your darlings”.
14. **Develop your voice.** Only *you* can write in *your* voice. (Star-Spangled Banner example)
15. **Stay consistent** throughout your manuscript. (*OK vs. Okay, character names, etc.*)

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“How to Write a Nonfiction Book Proposal”

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What is a Nonfiction Book Proposal?

A nonfiction book proposal is a document that focuses on key elements that help show prospective agents and publishers the idea, why there’s a market for it and why you are the right person to write it.

The Three Essentials of Every Nonfiction Book Proposal

1. Strong idea – something of interest to specific people
2. Platform – How you reach those specific people
3. More Platform – Yes, this is that important)

What’s are the Biggest Differences Between Selling Nonfiction and Fiction?

When you are trying to sell fiction or memoir, you need to have a completed manuscript. You don’t need that with nonfiction—you just need a great idea and a few sample chapters. Also, when selling fiction, having a platform is nice, but not necessary. In nonfiction, it’s mandatory.

The 9 Key Elements of a Nonfiction Book Proposal

1. Title Page
2. The Hook Page (Overview)
3. Target Audience
4. Competitive Titles
5. Marketing Plan
6. Author Bio
7. Chapter outline/Table of Contents
8. Chapter by Chapter Summary
9. Sample Chapters

HANDOUT

“18 Frequently Asked Questions About Publishing All Writers Should Know ”

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1. **Do I need an agent?** *No—but 95% of the time it’s in your best interest.*
2. **What do agents do?** *Everything they can to sell your book (and more).*
3. **How do you avoid immediate agent rejection?** *Follow submission guidelines. Can be found in Guide to Literary Agents and agent websites.*
4. **What is a query?** *4-to-5-paragraph email that introduces your book to an agent.*
5. **What should my query letter look like?** *Intro/Book Jacket Copy/Qualifications/Why You Picked That Agent*
6. **What is a synopsis?** *A summary of your book. It should be no more than two pages, double-spaced, reveal all major plot points.*
7. **Can I query multiple agents at the same time?** *Yes.*
8. **How many query letters should I send out?** *No more than about 5 at a time.*
9. **How many agents should I query before giving up?** *20 more than whatever your gut says.*
10. **Do I need to copyright my book before sending it out to agents?** *No. It’s copyrighted the moment you type it. (Email it to yourself to timestamp.)*
11. **What is platform?** *Platform is your VISIBILITY to potential readers.*
12. **How do I know my manuscript is ready to pitch to agents or self-publish?** *When it has strong characters, good plot points, is clear of typos and written well.*
13. **Where can I find beta readers?** *Local writing groups and writing conferences.*
14. **What’s an “advance against royalties”?** *Advance is what a publisher pays upfront; royalties are what a publisher pays after earning back advance.*
15. **How often do I get paid?** *Advance is 2-to-4 payments; Then every 6 months.*
16. **How do I get book blurbs?** *Some agents and publishers help, but for the most part, you’re on your own. Reach out to anyone. You never know.*
17. **When should I start writing my next book?** *Immediately after finishing your current book. Also, have multiple book ideas at all times.*
18. **How do I determine if my book has been successful?** *By publishing standards: Out-earns advance. By personal standards: Meets your goals.*
19. **BONUS: What can I do to have a long, successful writing career?** *Continue to write, read and build your platform.*