

Summer/Fall 2011

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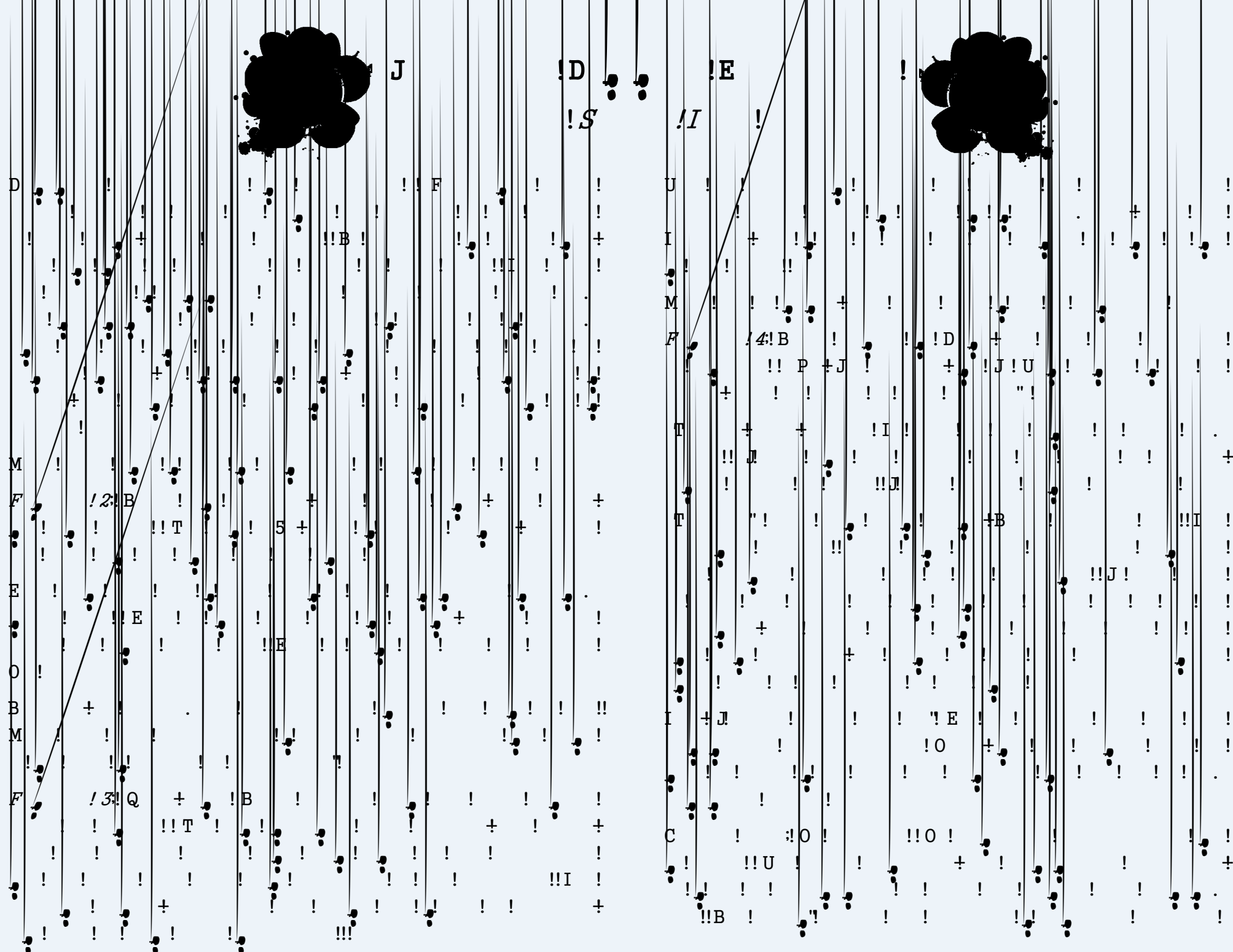
Fantasy 101 Magic 1: Limits

Rosey Unicorn

better



deux ex machina



Writing a novel is hard. Writing a *good* novel is even harder. While no one can tell you exactly how to formulate the perfect plot arch and execute it flawlessly throughout the course of a novel, the building blocks of most good novels are the same. And the most important building block, the cornerstone to your novel, is the first chapter. And in this article, we'll take a look at five ways to build a fantastic, effective first chapter.

First Chapter First

This may seem self-explanatory, but a lot of writers fall under the delusion that a prologue is an integral part of a novel. Prologues serve to enhance a novel, however the story should be able to stand without it (to an extent).

There are two types of prologues that writers fall to that any story would be better off without. One is the false hook; where the prologue is amped with excitement in order to lure the reader in, but the first chapter is significantly less exciting (think Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight*). The second type is the first chapter in disguise; where the events of the prologue flow directly into the events of the first chapter. A prologue is not a part of the story as a whole, but something used to enhance or clarify the story as a whole.

What prologues are good for is providing needed backstory/

Welcome to Novel-Land

Being able to connect a reader to the world of your story as early as possible will only benefit you in the long run, so don't hesitate to flaunt your setting in the first chapter. Of course, do so sparingly. An endless info-dump about sweeping mountains or cityscapes isn't going to draw most readers in.

Instead, use setting description along with the action and interactions of the first chapter. Weave the story around the world and the characters. The point is to begin to familiarize the reader with the sort of world your characters live in (in both a physical sense and in a sense of how the characters fit into the setting), especially if it's a non-earth-based story. If it's a setting familiar to the average reader (a city, a forest, the ocean) then less specific detail is needed. Try instead to focus on details that pertain to how the main character views/interacts with the setting.

Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* shows off its semi-otherworldly setting (a post-apocalyptic North America) by seamlessly weaving it into the action of the first chapter. Most of the setting is familiar to the reader (forest, small poor town) but the larger setting, Panem, is unfamiliar territory. Throughout the first chapter, the reader learns the basic information they need to understand this world for the rest of the story and without sitting through a sweeping info-dump.

Plot-Ho!

A story should start as close to the beginning of the plot as possible. That means ditch the long, winding introductions and jump right into the action (however action-y that action

is depends on the story). Work the introductions in as the story progresses - introduce amidst action.

Of course, that doesn't mean to start it all in the middle of a nuclear meltdown (unless, of course, that's the plot). It just means to skip the weeks of Sally and John living normal lives before the zombie apocalypse if the story is about Sally and John kicking zombie butt and saving the world.

The Hunger Games is a great example of this as well. The first chapter is host to the event that sets the plot in motion: the reaping of contestants for the annual Hunger Games. There's no beating around the bush for weeks and weeks; there's only a morning of events leading up to this plot-starting scene.

Hook, Line, and Sinker

Now, what most novel writers know is a huge factor in a first chapter: the hook. Whether it comes in the first line, the last line cliffhanger, or somewhere in the middle, there needs to be something to hook the reader and make them want to read more.

The best advice to give here is to put your words together really well (easier said than done) and raise more questions than you give answers to without being obnoxiously subtle. Give the reader something to work with.

If a first chapter does a good job of executing each of these factors, then it's well on its way to investing a reader in the story and building a truly fantastic novel.



Writing in English as a Foreign Language

by *Lava*

Everybody wants to be able to express themselves in English these days. Not surprising, since English has somewhat become the lingua franca of the world. When English is learned as a second or foreign language, however, it can get challenging.

Writing in English is a personal choice. You may be aiming for a larger audience, or maybe it's just the language you're comfortable with. But either way, there are times when you find that things don't sound as awesome as it did in your language. The only way around it is to work on English skills to make it sound better.

Understand your language and English.

By 'understanding' I don't just mean learning the grammar rules, but actually understanding the structure and formation of a sentence. The first thing to do is to look at the SVO (Subject, Verb, Object) organization. Most European languages follow pretty much the same SVO as English, but many Asian languages follow the opposite.

So, when translating a sentence from your language into English, it has to obey the rules of English.

The importance of grammar.

All through school (and in college) I was taught grammar. I was taught the parts of speech, the grammatical syntaxes, the third person verb dilemma, modals, auxiliary verbs, tenses, etc.

My schools gave a huge importance to grammar, but forgot to teach us its application in English. As a result, I was never able to form a coherent paragraph.

There are various grammar activities and tutorials online. Those should provide the easiest help.

While grammar and learning its nuances are very important, don't forget to understand the need to form a meaningful flow in your writing.

Reading.

The best way to get over English's challenges is to read. Reading an excellent way to understand how sentences are used and are connected in a paragraph. Besides being a source of new words, it's also fun! If you don't know the meaning of a word, instead of rushing to the dictionary, try to work out the meaning based in the context. Then check with a dictionary.

The Internet.

The internet is a wonderful tool that'll help you learn. Since most of the content is in English, just reading a favourite website or blog will help you understand English.

And of course on writing sites like YWS, you can get your writings reviewed. Sometimes the critiques may seem harsh, but you have to take it in your stride.

Watching T.V.

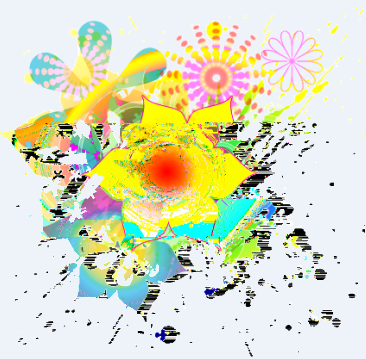
As strange as this might sound, I learnt a lot from watching TV. English shows are a great source of dialogue. Besides pronunciation, there's also the slang, the tone of speaking, the phrases often used, etc.

You can identify which type of sentence is used in which situation. It will also help you write natural or believable dialogue.

It helps if the shows have subtitles as well.

So, grab the remote and start watching Supernatural (or anything in English, really)!

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Taria says:

"But if it's a language you already know somewhat, then I would recommend reading.

When I went as an exchange student I knew English and except for slang, my vocabulary didn't change much, the way I talked changed and I started dreaming and thinking in English after about a month."

Shrubbery says:

"I got some hurtful reviews like I had a horrendous grammar, which did hurt at first, but then I took in good sense and started working on it. And now it has benefited no one but me. So I think sometimes the hardest things in your life make you a better person."

Solvalery says:

" About false cognates, those can change the meaning of a sentence without you noticing. I suggest to listen to the radio, TV, or even a song, focusing on trying to *understand*, that'll develop that ability, it sure help a lot."

Word Games.

Since most of us speak our native languages at home and maybe at school, vocabulary needs to be strengthened. There are a number of activities instead of reading a dictionary.

There's Boggle, word building, Taboo, spin-a-yarn/story building, crossword and a vast array of activities on the internet.

Writing to a native English audience.

Suppose a story is based near where you live. Such a setting would be new to native English speakers. You need to make sure the inherent cultural aspect of your writing isn't lost to the audience. An extra effort is needed to avoid info dumps while explaining to your readers.

Consider the opposite; a typical setting for such an audi-

ence. Don't make your British characters go to work riding a polar bear. It may sound silly, but those kinds of mistakes are easy to make, just because we're so used to them in our own culture.

carbonCore says:

"Sociali ing with others is always a plus. Whether in real life or over chat, anything that gets you to use the language is good."

Make sure you are aware of internet safety, as well.

Demeter says:

"If I were to give advice for ESL/EFL writers, I would recommend not to use the translation strategy. Translations from one's native language to a foreign language are bound to sound forced and awkward, and I'm the living proof. Write in English from the very beginning.

Try to avoid 'translating' idioms in your native language to English, because even though many idioms and sayings are similar around the world, there's a good number of those that aren't. For example, who would understand me if I said 'not my stack of hay' instead of 'not my cup of tea'? And while in English we 'pull a leg', in Finnish we 'pull a nose'."

As a side note to Demeter's, we all have a 'mind-language' which may not be English. Remember to take pains to translate your 'mind-voice' correctly and pretty soon you might find yourself thinking in English when writing. That's what has happened to me and it has a very positive influence on my writing.

Most of all, every ESL/EFL writer should know that you're extremely brave and cool for being able to *write* in a language other than your own.



Storybook Profiles: A How To Guide

by *Kitty15*



Most of you will be aware of the storybooks section, but for those who are new or who haven't come across our little corner of the site, allow me to explain. But wait. Don't go anywhere my old timers, there are tips and tricks for you as well!

What are storybooks then? Well, my ducklings, they are stories, but not like any you have seen before. When you pick up a book, that book's end is pre-destined. You may not know where it will go but it's creators and the readers before you have already discovered all its secrets and details. Storybooks are by far more alive. It is up to the participants what happens in them; every step of the journey is filled with unexpected twists and turns.

And where there are storybooks, there are storybook profiles. There's a lot to consider when creating a character, will they be gallant or sneaky, will they be knight or mage. You might even on occasion need to ask yourself, will they be dead or alive? This guide is not the definitive answer on character creation but rather is meant to serve as inspiration and to open your eyes to the many possibilities. It is too easy to play the same brand of character over and over again because they are familiar and already mapped out, but perhaps after reading this you will be ready to step outside your comfort zone.



How Much Detail Should I include?

This can vary a lot depending on what type of storybook you're joining. You'll always want to give the basic details like your character's name and age, a rough idea of their appearance and personality, but sometimes you'll want to be more thorough than others. If the storybook is a fantasy there might be extra categories that look a little confusing at first!

You'll want to fill out all the categories as best as you can, but don't feel as though you're forced to reveal every secret, in fact you'll want to keep a few of those back. The best of the storybooks are as full of surprises as they are well planned. And these surprises shouldn't come just from the creator, but also from the other participants.

The Basics

Name: For historical storybooks, you'll need to look up names that are appropriate for the era and if it's fantasy, you might want to use something a little more unusual but try to avoid those really silly names like Atha'lulu'tuon because they just take too long to type out and your character will be henceforth known as Lulu.

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Age: If you've joined several storybooks then try out different ages, sometimes it's fun to be the crotchety old grandfather who's always telling everyone what to do! Also, you need to match your character's personality and level of abilities to their age. Don't let me see any 200 year old vampires acting like sulky teenage boys! The advantage of playing the older characters is that you get the best pick of skills and experience. If it comes to blows between a fourteen year old boy with his father's sword and a forty year old knight who has led men into the heart of battles. I'm sorry but, your character or not, the boy is in for a spanking.

Appearance: Does your character have any defining features – scars, freckles, tattoos? Are they currently injured? What do they normally wear?

Personality: Make sure you mention both virtues and flaws; there is no such thing as a perfect character!

History: Where is your character originally from and what have they been through to become the person they are today?

Strengths and Weaknesses: What is your character good at and what are they not so good at? Also, try to mention how this has affected who they are. Maybe being good at sport has made your character fearless or being poor at maths has given your character a lack of self confidence.

Likes and Dislikes: What does your character like to do in their spare time? Remember to make sure it fits in with the storybook, for example, a character from the Victori-

an era can not spend their free time playing video games.

Extra Categories

Race: This one affects a lot about your character so choose carefully and remember to apply any obvious traits. For example, if you have an elf, they have a much weaker constitution than a troll! But on the plus side would be quicker than the troll.

Weapons: Does your character carry weapons? Be realistic, some weapons are heavy and your character only has so many places to put them.

Sexual Preference: Perhaps your character likes the same gender or both?

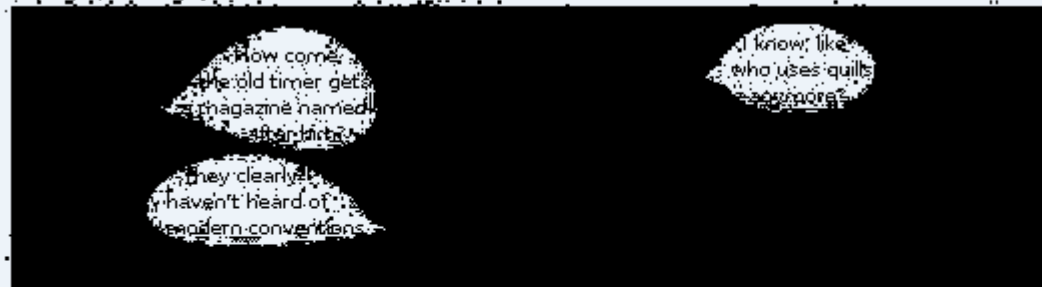
Allegiance: In some storybooks you'll find that there are warring factions and you must choose a side. If you've played a hero before, maybe try a villain this time!

Are there Different Formats I can use?

Yes there are! Most people fall into the groove of using third person for their profiles, but there are other options too! You could write in second person, describing your character as another might find them: 'You see before you a gaunt man whose face has been marked by the wasting disease.' Or if you really want to shake things up, why not try an interview format? Change the category titles to questions and have your character answer in their own voice! For example: 'What sort of person do you consider yourself to be?' "Oh a nice one, I'm a dandy fellow me. Very ed-oo-cated like and intellectual, yes sir. A right dandy, you'll not find a better man than me."

Over at The Doll's House...

Issue#1 Squills



S d pœ eg

How to Keep Your Poem Awesome

by *lilymoore*

There are hundreds of factors that can make a poem great, or not so great. These can range from a bad rhyme scheme to a poor theme. Even something like overly-extravagant language can interfere with how awesome your poem could one day be.

These three tips will, hopefully, help you make the best out of your poem.

Keep It Simple

Face it, the more extravagantly worded a poem is, the harder the poem is to read and understand. But as poets, we sometimes attempt to be too poetic and overdo ourselves. For example, would you rather read:

“the aubade-castigated barren-land”
or
“the sun-beaten desert?”



Unless you plan on reading this poem with a dictionary in one hand and a thesaurus in the other, then I recommend the second option. Not only is it simple, sweet, and to the point but it does the job without making you, the poet, seem like a show-off.

Keep It Together

Poetic consistency isn't as difficult as it might first seem. No, not every poem you ever write should appear the same as those that came before it but each individual poem should be consistent with itself. If you start the poem off with a rhyme scheme, then keep rhyming. If you have a specific syllable

pattern then keep that pattern rolling. If you're writing a poem that fits into the guidelines of an exact type of poem. A reader won't be too happy when he starts out expecting a haiku but instead is greeted with a petrarchan.

Inconsistency, however, can be used to show a sudden change in the poem or to mark the climax of the action or idea. Sometimes shifting the style of your poem, doing something that could be considered “inconsistent” is a great way to show these changes, but only if done correctly.

Keep It Specific

Unless you plan on writing one herculean narrative poem detailing the life and times of your hero or heroine, then you're probably better off keeping your poem keyed in on your subject. If you're describing an eighty-seven-year-old man's last living moments, don't worry about the nurse who brought him pudding earlier that day or the snoring chap sleeping in the bed next to him. Focus on the old man. If you're writing a poem focusing on a specific idea or theme, don't worry about other thoughts that might wander into your poem. When writing specifically about love, don't let your mind drift off suddenly to first days of school or bread pudding (no matter how delicious bread pudding is).

Keep it Awesome

Keeping these tips in mind can help make your poem as awesome as you hope it will be. Sure, there are a billion other things that make a great poem, but when it comes to making a keep-worthy poem, these three tips are definite essentials.

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A Few Words of Thanks

First off, I just wanted to throw this extra page in to say thank you too everyone who had any part in putting Squills together, especially the writers, (Ranger Hawk, Lauren2010, Kitty15, sarahwar, Rosey Unicorn, and Lava). I also want to say thank you to Persy for letting me interview her way báck when she was still Persephoneia oh so long ago (because one thing is for sure, it took me what feels like a lifetime to finish up Squills). I also have to give a huge amount of thanks to Meshugenah and Firestarter who handed out an immense amount of advice to me. And the biggest of all thanks has to go out to Lauren2010 who handed over her services as an editor without even batting an eyelash.

Also, thank you Nate – not only for making Young Writer’s Society the place that it is but also for allowing me the opportunity to dive blindly head first into this project.

Seriously, though, everyone who had a hand in Squills in any way – you are amazing and I love and appreciate you all so much. And if I forgot anyone, I don’t mean it. I’m just forgetful. <3

~lilymoore

