



**November 2011**

## **Establishing yourself as an expert**

Authors are a shy bunch. When they release a new book, they'll usually put together a package with a review copy of their book and a press release announcing the book's arrival. They then send it out to media...and wait for the phone to ring. But the phone isn't ringing. Why? Because the publication of a book generally isn't very interesting.

Establishing yourself as a media expert is a great way to catch the attention of journalists. What are some topical issues relating to your subject area? Are you a parenting expert? Angle your pitch addressing a recent study about working moms. Is your book about recovery from drug addiction? Consider offering to comment on funding for treatment centres. There's no clear cut answer to what will be deemed newsworthy, but helping the media by outlining how you can assist them in enriching a story is a good place to start.

## **Writing historical fiction**

*This is a part of a series on writing genre fiction. [Click here](#) to read about writing mysteries.*

From Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* to the novels of Philippa Gregory (*The Other Boleyn Girl*, *The Red Queen*) historical fiction is an incredibly popular genre. Readers who wouldn't dream of being seen with a modern romance novel will happily devour stories with the same kinds of plots, just as long as the heroine is sporting a corset.

These books are fun to write as well as to read, particularly for authors who enjoy researching other lives before they put fingers to the keyboard. But it is the research that can trip up an inexperienced author: it is tempting to tell your readers *everything* you've learned, rather than allowing the knowledge you've gained simply to inform the whole book. Unwitting anachronisms in an historical novel are irritating to the reader, but even more annoying is an essay on a given era when expectations are for a good story that happens to be set in the past.

Because you are writing fiction, first of all decide on the story you want to tell. Is it an imagined episode from the life of a real person? Is it the story of an historical event told through the eyes and experiences of fictional characters? Is it a family saga, spanning a number of years or generations?

Once you know when and where your story will be set, it's time to learn all you can about that environment. What did people wear, eat, read? What were their buildings like? How did they travel from place to place? What were their religious beliefs? What kinds of conflicts could they expect in their lives? Remember that life would not be the same for every person: class, gender, age, and other factors influence our experiences and expectations.

Another place where an inexperienced author of historical fiction will run into trouble is dialogue: unless you are very skilled, it's probably best to avoid having people converse entirely in dialect. Instead, convey your characters' accents and vocabulary through individual words. And, as with any other fiction, the most important thing to remember is to give each character his or her own voice. A queen will not express herself in the same way as one of her maids, and nor will she speak to her maids in the same way that she speaks to her children or her friends. Be careful to avoid modern expressions and slang, but do feel free to throw in slang from the period if you know some...

The history of humanity is simply a collection of the stories of individual lives, so historical fiction can be a satisfying way for you to share the stories *you* want to tell.

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