



Title: **The Writer's Toolbox**
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"Very concise. Exactly what I came for." – Thonie Hevron

Abstract:

To write stories that grab readers – whether fiction or memoir – you have to understand your tools: point of view and characterization, dialog and description, showing and telling, metaphor and simile, pacing and voice, backstory and flashback, repetition and opposition. We examine every tool and see where, why and how they can be put to work constructing great stories. Bring your story idea or manuscript and let's get to work!

"...shockingly stupendous." - Peter Dudley

The Writer's Toolbox is a collection of modules:

1. Clarity is key

In the most fundamental sense, writing is communication and communication requires clarity. Clarity is Key is an introduction to the Toolbox. After a discussion of the concept of literary layers Ransom provides a swift and complete overview of description, point of view, backstory and flashback, dialog, showing and telling, narrative trust, and tension and suspense.

"Crystal clear, beautifully organized, perfect examples ... inventive, challenging, inspiring. I have a novel waiting for completion and it just got a good kick in the a---!" -Gaie Larrick

2. Putting description, metaphor and simile to work for you

Without description, your readers can't see, hear, smell, taste or feel the world you create. How much description is right for your work? Too much slows things down, too little and your readers are blind. And how should you describe things? Adverbs and adjectives are boring so use nouns, but which metaphor or simile is right for the job? Part 2 of The Writer's Toolbox features rich examples that show you how to use description to enrich your characters, plot, theme and voice. The important thing is to know your options so that you can make the right choice.

"I love the samples from various books, your speaking skills, and a chance to hear your first novel." –Linda Beltz

3. How to make point of view work for you

The way you use point of view determines the level of intimacy between your readers and your characters. Perhaps the most important and often mistaken case is memoir. By carefully employing narrative distance, both the first and third person can be used to give your readers provide the most effective perspective on your story. In Part 3 of The Writer's Toolbox, Ransom teaches how to switch points of view without jarring your readers, how to manipulate narrative distance to emphasize characters' feelings or the action of the plot and provides guidance for how to choose the points of view for your work.



“Informative, thorough, humorous.” – Stefanie Freele, editor, *Los Angeles Review*

4. How to use backstory and flashback to build tension

Backstory is the biggest pitfall that faces writers. All writers. The first sign of amateur writing is inappropriate introduction of backstory – if you’re writing is going backwards, it can’t go forward. The question isn’t just about tuning the amount of character and plot backstory that the reader needs to understand what’s going on and why, it’s about how to use backstory to increase tension. In Part 4 of *The Writer’s Toolbox*, Ransom uses extensive examples to teach you how to go into and come out of flashbacks – whether the flash lasts one paragraph or a hundred pages – how much backstory to include in the first few chapters, and how to withhold backstory in a way that ramps up suspense and tension without sacrificing narrative trust or character motivation. The result is taught, professional storytelling.

“Ransom has a breezy speaking style that helps audience members feel engaged without feeling lectured.” – Linda McCabe

5. The irony of effective dialog

Dialog brings characters to life, but it’s tricky. If we write the way people talk, the dialog feels flat and ironically artificial. Dialog can be used to convey character and motivate plot but must be done carefully. The solution is simple: when two people talk, they aren’t both having exactly the same conversation. With plenty of fun examples, in Part 5 of *The Writer’s Toolbox*, Ransom teaches you how to write fresh, crisp dialog that resonates character and keeps stories moving.

“Enthusiastic, organized. You care that I get it.” – Linda Loveland Reid

6. How and when to show or tell, or show and tell

You’ve heard it in every writing workshop and seminar: show, don’t tell. But you know in your heart it’s not always true. The most common way that stories get bogged down is by showing things that are better off told or, worse still, doing both. The art of choosing whether to show or tell distinguishes smooth, tension building manuscripts from jerky, coarse trains of paragraphs. In Part 6 of *The Writer’s Toolbox*, Ransom teaches easy to implement guidelines for whether an element of plot and/or character should be shown or told.

“Thought-provoking, stimulated inspirational ideas on my writing. Excellent examples of each point. Upbeat and funny and serious presenting – kept on track and didn’t bore me.” – Nancy Long

7. How to build tension and suspense

Tension is why we read and suspense keeps us reading. In Part 7 of *The Writer’s Toolbox*, Ransom shows how some of the bestselling books in history were crafted to build momentum by interweaving subplots and layering character anxiety in a way that drives the story, inexorably increasing tension, unto the climax. The tools include withholding information, surprise and mystery, injustice and desperation, romance and horror. By bringing these elements together you

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form an arc that bridges sentences to paragraphs to chapters and finally the whole manuscript. You can control how fast your reader turns your pages

“Interesting and helpful, easy going but very informative. It was like listening to a really well informed friend.” – Mark Piper

8. How to recognize manuscript quagmires and bring it all together in the final edit
We make mistakes – too much backstory, insidious repetition, one dimensional characters – we lose narrative trust, our voice gets confused with our characters’ voices... in the early drafts. In Part 8, the conclusion to *The Writer’s Toolbox*, Ransom helps you find the problems and fix them. The big problems, the novel’s muddy middle, the memoir’s ironic distance, are easy to find and hard to fix, but Ransom’s guidelines will help. Other problems, the ones that emerge in writing workshops can be hard to find but are usually much easier to fix than you might think.

“Great! A lot of useful info – really! Good humor, pacing, flow and logic. Everything was of a piece... humorous and human. He has been there and it shows.” – Mark Parlichek

Details:

Modules can be combined and presented as individual seminars – 50 minutes without exercises, two hours with exercises. The best format is a full day intensive workshop or set of four two hour seminars, but the highpoints can be covered in a single 90 minute lecture.

“An earth shattering dive into fiction’s many vagaries.” – Andy Gloege

About the instructor:

Ransom Stephens, Ph.D., has been a writer and public speaker for 20 years. He has 1000s of hours classroom experience as a university professor, is the author of what the SF Chronicle called “an ambitious first novel that sings of the heart and the scientific method as two parts of the same song,” *The God Patent* (Numina Press, www.TheGodPatent.com). He has also written over 200 articles, essays and anthology contributions on impossible subjects like quantum physics, the future of publishing, and parenting teenagers, is a Litquake producer and co-produces two literary reading series.

“Excellent. Your talking is like your writing – clear, organized, accessible and humorous...easy, confident delivery.” – Ana Manwaring

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