

LET'S WRITE A NOVEL: THE MONTY PYTHON CODE

BY WILFRIED F. VOSS

**AUTHOR OF "THE BLEEDING HILLS" AND "AMERICAN MALE PROSTITUTE – HOW I
(ALMOST) GOT A BOOK DEAL THROUGH SEX, LIES, AND DECEIT"**

**A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO WRITING YOUR OWN NOVEL
TIPS & ADVICE FROM THE REAL WRITING WORLD**

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CHECK OUT THESE WEBSITES:

[HTTP://WWW.WILFRIEDVOSS.COM](http://www.wilfriedvoss.com)

[HTTP://WWW.THEMONTYPYTHONCODE.COM](http://www.themontypythoncode.com)

TABLE OF CONTENT

FOREWORD	3
INTRODUCTION	4
ARE YOU PREPARED?.....	5
FINDING THE TOPIC	7
FINDING AND RESEARCHING THE TITLE.....	10
THE TOP 10 UNWRITTEN BOOKS GUARANTEED TO SELL	12
RESEARCHING THE TOPIC.....	15
OUTLINING THE STORY LINE	16
CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT	19
THE ART OF DIALOG WRITING.....	21
WRITING YOUR NOVEL.....	23
EDITING YOUR NOVEL	24
WRITING TOOLS	28
EDITING TOOLS.....	29
IMPROVING YOUR WRITING SKILLS.....	30
BUILDING YOUR PLATFORM	31
SELF-PUBLISHING YOUR NOVEL	32
CONCLUSION	33

FOREWORD

I consider myself a different sort of author. Besides of being a writer, I am also the president and owner of a small publishing business, Copperhill Media. Copperhill Media was initially established to publish technical literature. After several years in business (Copperhill was established in 1993) I wrote my first novel *The Bleeding Hills* with the mere intention of getting a look & feel of publishing fiction literature. Within two years after publishing *The Bleeding Hills*, I have now published several fiction titles by authors from all over the world including the United States, the United Kingdom, and India. Ironically, my second novel *American Male Prostitute – How I (Almost) Got A Book Deal Through Sex, Lies, And Deceit* reflects the experience gained during the promotion of my first novel.

Both works sell decently well, but they are by far not mega-sellers. So why should you listen to me and not one of the most successful authors like Dan Brown, Stephen King, Stephenie Meyer, and others?

The answer is easy: You wouldn't ask the CEO of General Electrics for advice on how to start your home business. He would tell you to invest an initial \$500,000 into the business and to make sure you have your retirement fund secured. The problem is, you can only start small using small steps.

I started small and I am still in the process of making those small steps, and that is where you are, because you downloaded this document. Add to this my sober, no-nonsense attitude when it comes to explaining the process of writing a novel. I will not waste your time with motivational slogans like too many other lecturers; I rather share my hands-on experience with you.

Been there. Done that. Still love it!

INTRODUCTION

Maybe it's just me, but lately I noticed the vast number of books on writing novels, may it be *How to Write a Novel in 30 Days*, *The Perfect Recipe to Writing a Novel*, *Immediate Fiction*, or more titles filled with the same kind of utter nonsense. Don't get me wrong, all these books provide some information on the novel writing process, but there are some major problems.

First of all, there is a myriad of similar books available, and about 99% of them are filled with inspirational blubbering. Their strongest feature is a strong, but misleading title like, for instance, *Writing Like Hemingway*. This particular book – it really exists – is more of a Hemingway biography rather than about his writing style.

My point is, most of these authors write about writing without ever actually having written a novel, not mentioning the experiences that come with writing a novel, and not mentioning the daunting task of getting published.

The simple truth is that not a single one of these books will reveal anything revolutionary. Add to this that every writer has individual methods of writing, and you, the aspiring writer, need to find out what works best for you. Rather than going through the investment and buying a shelf full of books, use the Internet. Google extensively, and you will find tons of valuable information without spending a dime.

I could go on over many pages and describe the situation in detail, but enough now. In the following I will describe the process that works for me, and you will be able to decide what works for you and what not.

First, let me introduce the result of this writing project:

The Monty Python Code

A Novel by Wilfried F. Voss

Wilfried F. Voss' newest work delivers an all-embracing appeal to the public readership. It reflects the brilliant enthusiasm of conflict in the political arena of religious movements combined with a true-to-life anguish. Definitely a must-read. - Tully Bascombe

Note: The above review is, of course a fake. Tully Bascombe is the main character in Leonard Wibberly's *The Mouse That Roared*.

About the Book

Professor Hubert Ringtone, America's top specialist on religious sects, becomes an unwilling conspirator in a plot to reveal the deepest secrets of the Thetan Society, the fastest growing religious movement in the history of the world. Four of his students have been tortured and murdered after discovering the health records of the Thetan Society's founder, Ron Bruiser. These records could prove devastating for the movement's message of abstinence, or might even destroy its very foundation. Ringtone, with the help of another student, Margaret Hatcher, engages in a roller-coaster quest to find the location of the secret documents, followed closely by his nemesis, Don 'Potatoe' Quayle, the grandmaster of the Knights of the Thetan Society, the movement's military side-arm.

ARE YOU PREPARED?

So, you had an idea. You want to write a novel. The story line is already in your head, and you are itching to get your hands on that keyboard. In your mind, you have already sold thousands of copies, and you are thinking about who will play the lead role in the movie version. Been there, done that, and still like it...

The harsh reality is that most aspiring authors never finish the first draft of their novel, and some start a second before the first one is not even close to completion. I personally managed to finish my first novel and publish it, but I also started writing my third novel after the second was only half finished. The major problem is that we all have too many good ideas, and it is hard to focus on one story, especially when writing it turns out to take more time than we estimated. I once calculated that, due to abundance of ideas, I could (theoretically) write four novels per year... if only I could write eight hours per day. In reality, I do have a daytime job and a family. The thought of quitting my job and leaving my wife and son didn't appeal.

Before I explain a solution to the problem, let me add more obstacles to this Mission Impossible:

First, a good novel should have at least 60,000 words, and that will take time. When your work is finished, you need to hire an editing service to review and improve your work. Otherwise you won't have the hint of a chance of being accepted by agents or publishers. Editing will cost you \$800+.

I have written numerous posts about the daunting task of finding an agent or publisher, or, in case you self-publish, market and sell your first novel.

Promoting and selling your first novel is the most difficult task in the business world. Even traditional publishers won't help you there, unless you have a definite Dan-Brown-Potential. So, writing should not be your only talent.

The solution to the problem is first of all perseverance, focus, and a major investment of time. And don't ignore the much-needed blood, sweat, and tears. You may notice that I did not add talent to the formula. Talent does definitely help, but all aspiring writers believe they have it, and I won't judge who has and who does not.

From my personal experience I can say that writing my first novel was nothing short of exciting. It was a trip into a different dimension, a different life and time. I had a good outline of my story, but it also took some surprising turns that I did not expect. A story develops while you write it, and that simple fact is absolutely fascinating. For that experience alone it was worth writing it.

So, here, based on my personal experience, are some tips:

- Don't expect your first novel to be a bestseller. I always say that the best marketing tool for your first novel is the release of the second.
- Write for yourself, not for commercial success. Have fun!
- Write plenty! The more you write the better your style will be in the end. You don't necessarily need to write on your novel all the time. Watch people or events and write a story about it. Post it on your blog.
- That being said, run a blog!

- Read plenty! Read online versions of the New York Times, Washington Post, etc. Read from Hemingway to Sarah Palin (Yikes!). Reading will help improving your style.
- Pace yourself to 3,000 to 5,000 words a week (some do better, some do worse).
- Don't edit your own writing over and over. You're losing too much time. Keep the editing for the time after your first draft is done.
- Find a place and time to do your writing on a regular basis.

FINDING THE TOPIC

So, you have set your mind on writing a novel, and maybe you already have a specific topic in mind – most aspiring authors do. As a matter of fact, when it comes to writing a first novel, the process of determining a suitable topic is utterly unnecessary.

In this case the process is reversed: The idea of a captivating topic spawns the idea of writing a novel. Yet there are authors who are in need of a good idea.

I, personally, wrote my first novel, *The Bleeding Hills*, with a lot of passion but had enormous trouble starting a second. I do have enough ideas in my mind that would account for another four or five novels, but none of them had the potential to light another fire in me. It took me almost a year, and an unfinished attempt for a second novel, before the passion returned in form of *The Eleventh Incarnation*, a work still in progress. Yet, the re-kindled fire drove me to finish my original second novel. You'll get it: It's a roller-coaster ride.

There are two basic methods of finding a topic, and they depend fundamentally on the motivation behind writing a novel. Most authors write about topics they feel passionate about – I am one of them. However, passion alone is no guarantee for success.

The second, somewhat safer method is to go with the current mainstream taste, which could be seen as writing as a business, not a passion. After all, everybody would like to make some money writing at home.

The perfect scenario, though, is when you can combine the two methods, meaning your passion is compatible with the current mainstream taste.

The “Passion” Method

The saying is that you're good when you do things you love, things you are passionate about. I myself am a history buff, but I still don't know nearly enough about historical events as much as I would like to.

Benjamin Disraeli once said, “The best way to become acquainted with a subject is to write a book about it.” And that's exactly what I did by writing *The Bleeding Hills*. It personally bothered me that I never looked into the background of the Irish Troubles, specifically the gruesome events of Bloody Sunday. Everybody knows *Sunday, Bloody Sunday* by U2, but hardly anybody I know is familiar with the background. I wouldn't call myself the ultimate expert on Irish history, but after writing my first novel I feel very comfortable discussing the current political situation in Northern Ireland and its historical background.

The downside is that the topic of the Irish Troubles is not mainstream taste at all these days. My novel still sells in small numbers, more through Amazon's Kindle Store rather than the paperback version. On the other hand, I stated from the beginning that I wrote *The Bleeding Hills* to get a feel and look of the publishing industry, i.e. without the commercial aspect.

And yet again, my second novel, *American Male Prostitute – How I (Almost) Got A Book Deal Through Sex, Lies, And Deceit*, is about another topic I feel very passionate about: Writing.

Of course, I have had dreams of selling millions of copies, which would have been the cream on the cake. Well, it didn't happen. The passion remains, though.

Other ideas I had was writing about immigration to the United States in the 1930's, Robert F. Kennedy's last train ride from Los Angeles to Boston, but, just by chance, I got stuck on a different topic. This is another case of curiosity.

What would happen if the Dalai Lama died? Who would be his successor? I know, any expert on Tibet and his complex religious system will cringe. Now I know better. The Dalai Lama doesn't die! The Dalai Lama will shed the garment of his human body and enter upon a passage into another life. And there will be a search for his reincarnation. As part of my research, I slipped into the topic of *The Panchen Lama Controversy*, which provides enough material for several novels. As a result I am researching and writing *The Eleventh Incarnation*, which, at some time, will be my third novel.

I understand, not everybody is into history, but if you follow your passion you will find a good topic eventually. Do what I did. Keep digging. This world is full of stories to be told. You just need to turn the stone to find what's beneath it.

The "digging process" could be, for instance, accomplished through reading newspapers, may they be local or national, printed or online. Every aspiring author should be reading frequently, anyway.

For instance, the New York Times reported on April 29, 2009, "Hans Holzer, Ghost Hunter, Dies at 89." Hans Holzer was an Austrian-born, American pioneering paranormal researcher and author. He wrote well over 100 books on supernatural and occult subjects. What caught my attention was his conclusion that "the other side" is very much like this side, only with more red tape. The dead who wish to return to earth have to get permission from "spirit guides", then wait in a queue and register with a clerk.

This spawned yet another idea for a novel I will probably never write. The title would be "Have You Filed Reincarnation Form RI-98726?" and it would describe the death of a person, his way through the other side's bureaucracy, and, finally, his new birth. (See also chapter "THE TOP 10 UNWRITTEN BOOKS GUARANTEED TO SELL")

One advice, though, before you start writing: Check out existing works on the topic you chose. There might be a slight chance that your topic was already picked up by somebody else. If you find that your idea is already covered by other authors, you might consider backing out.

On the other hand, don't let existing works discourage you. In my specific case (i.e. *The Eleventh Incarnation*) I found that somebody had already used "my idea" to write a novel, but under totally different aspects. I know, my novel will be different from existing works.

Nevertheless, it is advisable to check existing works, and specifically what their content is. The best way to do that is to search your topic on Amazon.com. Amazon.com provides vast information on each book like publication year, number of pages, content, sales rank, and more. Use this information carefully before you make a decision.

As I wrote before, the perfect scenario is when your passion and current mainstream taste are very similar. A great number of aspiring writers are into vampires and werewolves these days, definitely inspired by Stephenie Meyer's novels. I admit, my current writing project, *The*

Eleventh Incarnation, is somewhat of a Dan Brown material, even though I am trying not to assimilate him or his writing style. As I said, I am a history buff, and I love reading his history-based novels.

The “Mainstream” Method

I still remember the vast success of *The Hunt For Red October* by Tom Clancy in the 1980's, and especially all the follow-ups by a myriad of lesser-known writers. Spy novels were the big seller then. The same situation is true for the vast success of the *Twilight* and *Harry Potter* series. There are authors, either trying to land a first success the easier way, or simply focusing on the commercial aspect, i.e. making money. They look at what's selling these days. They copy and slightly modify book titles and concepts. Pablo Picasso once said, “A good artist copies; an extraordinary artist steals.”

Judging from my tone, you may recognize that I don't necessarily approve of the mainstream method. I personally prefer to be the master of my own ideas, even if it implies continuing my life as a starving writer (Not really. I do have a daytime job.). Nevertheless, mainstream followers exist, and writing is just another job for them.

The question is, how do you determine mainstream taste? The easiest way to determine the current bestsellers is by going to the Amazon website.

Go to Amazon.com, search for books, but don't enter any title information. The *Sort By* drop-down box is set to *Bestselling* per default.

Amazon.com will also provide information, beside the sales rank, that is important for your writing project, such as number of pages. The number of pages and the book price will give you a good indication what you need to accomplish to break into the market.

FINDING AND RESEARCHING THE TITLE

Don't underestimate the importance of your novel's title. Designing the title is the first step toward effective marketing, and I am sure that some publishing companies employ people in their marketing department to analyze the strength of each title they publish – yet another reason why traditional publishers work so slowly.

A title like “The Mouse” may be interesting, because short, but doesn't have a lot of value to it. If you make it “The Mouse That Roared,” you might attract more attention (Note: That particular title is already published; it's an absolutely lovely novel by Leonard Wibberly and was made into a movie starring Peter Sellers).

On a side note: Book titles cannot be copyrighted! You can write a novel and call it “Gone With The Wind,” not a smart marketing move, nevertheless absolutely within the law. The easiest way to verify that your title is unique, go to Amazon.com and search for it.

Naturally, there are several ways of designing the title. Let me refer to my first novel *The Bleeding Hills*. Of course, this may not be the strongest title ever, and in some readers' eyes it may even be misleading. No, it is not a Stephen-King-style horror novel, if that is what you were thinking. I did add a sub-title, though, to point a bit more into the right direction, which, in turn, indicates the importance of a sub-title.

In this particular case, namely my first novel, the inspiration to write came from an Irish song, *The Boys of Barr Na Sraide*, which is based on a poem by Sigerson Clifford. One of the verses starts “And when the hills were bleeding and rifles were aflame...” You get the picture...

With my second novel, I tried to be a bit more provocative. I titled it *American Male Prostitute*, sub-titled *How I (Almost) Got A Book Deal Through Sex, Lies, And Deceit*. Don't get excited; the content is a product of my vivid imagination.

As I mentioned before, promoting your first novel is the most difficult marketing task you can imagine, and I was wondering what it would take to attract the ultimate attention. Yet, I didn't follow the marketing activities as explained in the novel. First, I don't have the necessary, luscious looks, and, secondly, my wife would kill me for sure.

There is nothing wrong about being provocative. I call it “aggressive marketing.” Think of “Sh*t My Dad Says” by Justin Halpern, which was a huge success.

One of the guest writers on my blog FrogenYozurt.Com is in the process of writing a novel based on her experience with OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder). The working title is *A Life Lived Ridiculously*. It's a strong title, but if you want to be provocative, another version could be, for instance, *Diary Of An Obsessive Compulsive Bitch* (I haven't researched whether or not the title is already taken). For the record, that's not how I think of her, but the title would definitely get some attention.

Okay, in case provocation is not your cup of tea, there are other ways of finding the right title for your work. Pablo Picasso once said, “A good artist copies; an extraordinary artist steals,” meaning we're now coming to the copy & steal section...

Honestly, I found some very good titles in the bible. Think *Power And The Glory* by Graham Greene, a line take from the Lord's Prayer – ...for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory...

If you are in the business of writing a lawyer's novel, how about "Those Who Trespass Against Us" ? Sorry, that title has already been used several times...

Another good example comes from Psalm 30:5 – *For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for a lifetime; Weeping may endure for the night, But a shout of joy comes in the morning.* If you look at Amazon.com you will find, yet again, several titles using *Weeping May Endure For The Night.*

In the same sense I am reminded of the German writer Johannes Mario Simmel, who wrote works like *Nobody Is An Island* (Niemand Ist Eine Insel), a line borrowed from Shakespeare – if I'm not mistaken. Other works' titles are *The Answer Is Blowin' In The Wind* (Bob Dylan), *And Jimmy Went To The Rainbow's Foot* (Rudyard Kipling), and more.

In the same sense, another way to look for titles is reading CD labels, i.e. song titles. My personal favorite is Tom Waits, who wrote titles like *The Piano Been Drinking – Not Me, Pasties And A G-String (At The Two O'Clock Club), Warm Beer And Cold Women,* and my personal favorite *Bad Liver And A Broken Heart.*

As a matter of fact, I am also preparing a short story collection based on his song titles, and the title of the book will be *Cemetery Polka.*

Even if copying and stealing is not your choice, you may have learned that the title of your novel needs to attract attention. Another important feature is, of course, the book cover, but the importance of covers will diminish with the increased use of electronic reading devices such as the Kindle.

THE TOP 10 UNWRITTEN BOOKS GUARANTEED TO SELL

Well, nobody can say that I don't have enough ideas for new novels. The problem being that I don't have the time. As we all know the day has only 24 hours. Add a night of 12 hours plus we skip the lunch hour, and we have 37 hours. Still not enough time... The result is disappointing. I'll have to give away the idea. Anyways...

There is much to say about the strength of a book title. Really. Some works just sell by the title. Think about *Go the F**k to Sleep*, which made it to the Amazon.Com top ranks many months before it was even officially published. I am not saying the book is not good, but you get the picture.

Being a publisher and writer and having way too many ideas, but hardly the time to write all books that come to mind, I have developed a list of my favorite, yet unpublished titles. Please feel free to use them. I even gave you some idea what the content could be.

My Love Affair With Osama Bin Laden

What? You think the man is not attractive? Read this book, and you will find a few secrets that even the CIA would like to learn.

Diary of an Obsessive Compulsive Bitch

Does bad sex justify murder? Doesn't it drive you crazy when the service at Starbucks denies you your decaf soymilk latte? How do you get even with a roommate that puts glass chips into your toothpaste? This book addresses social issues not yet recognized by today's society.

The Poop About Pregnancy

Before you read "What To Expect When You're Expecting," and especially before you give birth you should read this book. There are many aspects about pregnancy that your doctor doesn't want to tell you.

Victoria Beckham's Interviews With Famous Authors

Yes, Victoria has never read a book in her life, but that doesn't mean she can't maintain a conversation (or publish her memoirs). If you are curious about how she weasels herself out of a precarious situation, you must read this book.

All US Interstates Lead To Exit

A US travel guide to almost every town in America.

Maintain Your Erection

Now that you have erected the swing for your three-year-old... What? You think the title is misleading? But it sells. Right?

A Caveman's Guide To Celebrity Dating

Think of all the gorgeous female celebrities in the entertainment business that fall only for the "bad" guys. Don't you want to be one of them? This guide explains all aspects of bodybuilding, tattooing, and BRS (Brain Reduction Surgery).

Have You Filed Reincarnation Form RI-98726?

This is the true story of spirit T5648R, its quest for reincarnation, and the struggle with the “Other Side’s” bureaucracy. T5648R wants to be reborn as a human male anywhere outside of Greenfield, Massachusetts, a wish requiring proper filings of the proper papers.

The idea spawned after reading the New York Times on April 29, 2009, “Hans Holzer, Ghost Hunter, Dies at 89.” Hans Holzer was an Austrian-born, American pioneering paranormal researcher and author. He wrote well over 100 books on supernatural and occult subjects. What caught my attention was his conclusion that "the other side" is very much like this side, only with more red tape. The dead who wish to return to earth have to get permission from "spirit guides", then wait in a queue and register with a clerk.

The Dead Candidate

One morning I read an intriguing article in the New York Times. Let me state upfront that it is not my intention to show any disrespect to the victims of the Jan. 8, 2011 shooting in Tucson, Arizona that left 6 people dead and 13 injured. I feel, nevertheless, disturbed by the before-mentioned article:

An Arizona Senate Race Waits to See if Giffords Emerges to Run

The New York Times, March 30, 2011 (Excerpt)

TUCSON — Representative Gabrielle Giffords is still in the hospital, but some of her most ardent backers are so enamored of the idea of her running for the Senate that they describe the inevitable campaign commercials: the deep-voiced narrator recounting what happened to her, the images of her wounded, then recovering and speaking into the camera alongside her astronaut husband to call on Arizonans to unite.

:

...several of Ms. Giffords’s longtime aides are whispering behind the scenes that she just might recover in time to run for the seat that Senator Jon Kyl, a Republican, is vacating next year.

While it might be wishful thinking, Ms. Giffords’s noncampaign is already having a major effect on Arizona politics; other prospective Democratic candidates say they feel compelled not to jump in unless she bows out, allowing Republicans to get a head start organizing their campaigns.

:

With a question mark beside her name in the Senate race, other Democratic hopefuls are working behind the scenes as carefully as they can, lining up support in case Ms. Giffords decides to stay out while taking care not to appear disrespectful to the candidate that the Democratic establishment here believes would have the best chance of winning.

Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/31/us/politics/31giffords.html>

I, personally, find all these rumored behind-the-curtain activities despicable, to put it diplomatically. But it also shows the ruthlessness of the political system in these United States. I mean, how far will these politicians go to assure victory? And just for the record, I call myself a moderate liberal, and my wife is a registered Republican, meaning, no, I am not out to point at a specific party.

Nevertheless, here is enough material for a new novel to write for someone with knowledge of the political scenery. Being the cynic that I occasionally am, I have come up with the perfect title:

The Dead Candidate, in the nature of *Dead Man Walking*. I believe, it would be pure fun to write about the background activities of the MYMN (Maybe Yes, Maybe No) party waiting for their candidate, who lies in a coma, to either die or run for election, while the KEA (Kill 'em All) party is having a ball raising funds for their candidate.

In the meantime I wish Ms. Gifford and the other victims a quick recovery, physically and mentally. My thoughts are also with the people who were killed and their families.

The Monty Python Code

Professor Hubert Ringtone, America's top specialist on religious sects, becomes an unwilling conspirator in a plot to reveal the deepest secrets of the Thetan Society, the fastest growing religious movement in the history of the world.

No! Wait! That title is already in progress...

RESEARCHING THE TOPIC

Mark Twain once said, get your facts first, and then you can distort them as much as you please, and this is all what writing a novel is about. As a novelist you have the liberty of distorting facts to fit them into your story line. At the same time, though, you'd like your novel to be believable. You don't want to lose credit by taking too much liberty.

Tom Clancy once wrote about a nuclear explosion that destroyed Denver, Colorado, and that is absolutely acceptable. After all, it's called fiction writing. His story would be unbelievable if he had described Denver's harbor located at the Gulf of Mexico. That would be part of insufficient research.

The best online source for researching background information on almost any kind of topic is Wikipedia.com. Little details like the location of the MI5 headquarters in London, the types of Chinese military uniforms, the history of the Hopi tribe, the behavioral patterns of wolves, etc. can be easily researched through the vast Internet resources, namely search engines. Reading books on the topic helps, of course, too. Traveling to the location of your novel would help to get a better look & feel of the life and culture there, but let's face it, unless you have the travel budget of a Dan Brown you won't make it to Jerusalem or to Lhasa in Tibet. So, in a nutshell, good research should be an important part of writing your novel. The foundation, still, is your story line.

The "problem" I found with extensive research, though, is the cataloging of references. You may have located some interesting information, but it applies to a chapter that you haven't written yet, and it may take weeks before you get there. As a result, all of my research literature is filled with little paper bookmarks with notes written on them. Sometimes I write down notes on my computer and save the file as "research.doc". All in all, I use many .doc files in a folder, dedicated to the current novel, on my computer. They all contain information contributing to the story line.

The best tool to keep track of Internet references (i.e. websites) is Microsoft's Excel (or the Mac or OpenOffice equivalent). I will not go into further detail about search engines such as Google, Bing, Yahoo, etc. I'm assuming you are familiar with search engines.

Again, my favorite tool to catalog references is Excel. I use the tabs on the bottom to describe the topic, for instance, Bloody Sunday, Irish History, Town of Derry, etc. The first column in a sheet contains a short description of the resource (i.e. hyperlink), and the next includes the actual hyperlink. Maintaining an Excel file proved to be an invaluable tool for my research.

As I mentioned in a previous chapter, *Are You Prepared?*, I deem it absolutely necessary that each author, published or not, maintains a blog. Not only will it provide a startup boost in terms of people getting to know you, but it is also a perfect tool to store and publish your research.

OUTLINING THE STORY LINE

The simple reason that many aspiring authors never make it beyond the first few chapters lies usually in a lack of organization. Let's face it, writing a 60,000+ words work is a major project, and it should be handled as such. A rough outlining of the story does not only help to keep you organized; it also gives you an overview of the work ahead of you. For instance, writing the outlining might tell you that the structure of your novel calls for 20 chapters. In this case you know that you need an average of 3,000 words per chapter.

Note: There is a multitude of programs available in the marketplace helping you to organize your writing. I tried a few of them, and they are indeed very helpful. Nevertheless, while they do help with organizing your writing project, most of them provide less-than-standard word processing capabilities. I personally prefer working with Microsoft Word, especially due to the automatic spell and style checker. In addition, I use Microsoft Excel to keep track of my research references.

Step #1 – The Synopsis

Try to summarize your novel in less than 200 words. Of course, 200 words are not enough to describe the story line, but think of it as a movie ad on TV. You don't need to reveal the details of your novel; that is not the purpose of a synopsis. If you want to attract the attention of an agent or publisher, you need to act like a sales person.

In the case of our writing project *The Monty Python Code* I have come up with the following 118 words:

Professor Hubert Ringtone, America's top specialist on religious sects, becomes an unwilling conspirator in a plot to reveal the deepest secrets of the Thetan Society, the fastest growing religious movement in the history of the world. Four of his students have been tortured and murdered after discovering the health records of the Thetan Society's founder, Ron Bruiser. These records could prove devastating for the movement's message of abstinence, or might even destroy its very foundation. Ringtone, with the help of another student, Margaret Hatcher, engages in a roller-coaster quest to find the location of the secret documents, followed closely by his nemesis, Don 'Potatoe' Quayle, the grandmaster of the Knights of the Thetan Society, the movement's military side-arm.

I am sure there is still some room for improvement for this particular synopsis, but for now we'll leave it as is – you get the idea.

The above synopsis already includes another step in our writing project, the character development. The synopsis includes four people, Professor Ringtone (apparently the main character), Ron Bruiser, Margaret Hatcher, and the bad guy, Don 'Potatoe' Quayle.

We will come to the character development in a different chapter of the project, but let me make an important point: There is no forced chronological order in which you need to accomplish the steps of the writing project. You can start with writing the story, and while you write you encounter new characters, or you realize you need to add, remove, or move chapters. And even while you write the outlining you might discover characters you haven't thought about before.

Outlining is a dynamic process. It helps you to keep a focus on the story line, but it will most definitely change while you write.

Step #2 – The Outlining

As I wrote before, an outlining goes hand-in-hand with the character development. So, while you write the outlining, keep records of the characters you create and try to describe them. The first draft of the outlining will most probably result in only a few chapters, but over time you will add more, and you will rearrange them. As a result, do not number your chapters, but give them a brief description.

Okay... We now approach my second-most favorite work – writing the outlining. The most favorite work is the actual writing. The outline, though, is the first step into an adventure. Honestly, in the case of The Monty Python Code I don't have a glimmer of a story line, but that only adds to the excitement. I will write it while I go with this post.

The Monty Python Code

Chapter – Igor Feldman kills student Hillary Pinton

Scene in a basement. Hillary is tied to a chair, blind-folded. Igor uses 20-inch knife to pierce her heart.

Chapter – Professor Ringtone arrested for murder

Ringtone, in front of his students, explains the history of the Thetan Society. Police shows up and arrests him.

Chapter – Ron Bruiser having sex in hotel room

Flashback – two years earlier.

Scene: A hotel room in Monte Carlo with view to the Mediterranean Sea. Ron Bruiser, very drunk, has sex with supermodel Holly Darton, also very drunk. Hidden cameras film the scene.

Chapter – Interrogation

Professor Ringtone interrogated by FBI Special Agent Jethro Tibbs. Turns out, Hillary Pinton's murder took place in Ringtone's basement. Ringtone can prove he was at the university at the time of the murder, but Tibbs suspects Ringtone hired somebody to do the kill. Ringtone is released due to lack of evidence.

Chapter – Quayle's Outrage

Scene: A meeting room at the Thetan Society's headquarter in Salem, Massachusetts. Don Quayle is outraged. Ron Bruiser just told him he is being blackmailed. Bruiser orders Quayle to find and kill the blackmailer. Everything points to Professor Ringtone.

Chapter – Meeting at Ringtone's house

Scene: Ringtone's house around midnight. Margaret Hatcher, one of Ringtone's students, is at the door and demands to talk to Ringtone. Confesses that she and four other students – who are now all dead – tried to blackmail Ron Bruiser.

Chapter – Igor at the house

Igor Feldmann watches Ringtone and Hatcher through a window. Good opportunity to write about his childhood – of course, he was abused – and his fantasies. Also mention “the master” who promised Igor the fulfillment of all his fantasies.

Chapter – Ron Bruiser orders another killing

Another flashback – one year earlier. Bruiser is on the phone in his office, ordering the killing of supermodel Holly Darton. She attempted to blackmail him, asking for \$894,000 as a fund to further her acting career. Refer to the electronic bugs in his phone, and the person, two blocks away, overhearing the conversation.

Chapter – Ringtone meets Quayle

Late afternoon at the university. Ringtone wants to enter his car, but two dangerous looking guys with walk-in-closet-size chests push him into a large pink limousine. Inside he meets Don Quayle. Ringtone convinces Quayle he is not responsible for the blackmailing, but admits he has some vital information. Makes a deal to spare Margaret Hatcher's life in exchange of the documents implicating Ron Bruiser. Quayle gives him 9½ weeks to produce the evidence.

Chapter – Quayle background

Scene: Quayle inside the limousine on the way back to headquarters. Good opportunity to explain Quayle's background and the military side arm of the Thetan Society.

Skipping a few chapters – may add more later...

Final Chapter – The End

Ringtone and his new-found love, Hannah von Tana, a German exchange student, stand next to Margaret Hatcher's dead body, kissing passionately.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Many aspiring authors shy away from character development, but it is a simple fact that every good story hinges on characters. Maybe you have a good feel for the personalities in your novel, and it is absolutely acceptable to develop them while you write.

However, you want your story to be consistent. Just think of the myriad of movie blunders where, for instance, the ten-year-old version of the main character is left-handed, while as an adult he is right-handed (that happened in *Braveheart*).

On the other hand, Igor is allowed have a back hump that moves from right to left, if it fits the story line (See *Young Frankenstein*).

Character development does not necessarily mean a fully detailed psychological profile, and you don't need to reveal all the details in your novel and possibly take a hit at readability. In other words, don't bore the reader with too many details, but maintain consistency, and, after all, keep a list of all participants. It doesn't make sense to scan through your writing to verify the correct spelling of a person, or if he/she had dark or light hair, etc. Character development can be as simple as keeping a database.

Note: There are programs available in which you fill certain characteristics such as gender, age, etc., and the program will even provide you information how the individual would respond to certain scenarios. I personally prefer to apply common sense, and if I feel unsure about a character I engage into further research, yet again emphasizing the importance of thorough research.

Developing a character, just like the story line, is a very creative process, and you will be surprised by the features they gain, while you define them. Again, you don't need to apply too many details, but make sure your main character is attractive to the intended readership by adding certain features.

In the following I am posting a few characters from *The Monty Python Code*:

Characters

Professor Hubert Ringtone

Main character. America's top specialist on religious sects. Age: In the thirties. Tall, slender, but not athletic. Introvert. Tends to mumble when in female company. Hates the New York Yankees. Red Sox fan. Prefers green jackets. Always wears a mickey mouse tie.

Margaret Hatcher

One of Ringtone's students. Brunette. Blue eyes. Wears glasses. Slightly aggressive attitude. Parents died when she was six. Grew up with grandmother. Only survivor of five students who blackmailed the leader of the Thetan Society.

Igor Feldman

The creepy character. Ugly, short creature with huge nose and hump on his back. Prefers dark clothing. Acts only at night. Was abused as a child. Enjoys killing. Serves the "master," whose identity is unknown.

Holly Darton Supermodel.

Huge “assets.” Blonde.

Don ‘Potatoe’ Quayle

Leader of the Knights of the Thetan Society. Age: Around 50. Wears eye-patch. Loves white, furry cats. Desires to be president of Thetan Society. His sentences are limited to five words. Unhappy character. Never married, and never had sexual relationships. New York Yankees fan.

THE ART OF DIALOG WRITING

There is much to be said about dialogs in a novel, and in the following, I would like to point to the most common problem in novel writing, the “he said – she said” issue. There is nothing wrong with the frequent use of “said,” but an abundance of “said” can hurt the readability. Readers may get easily bored, which, in turn, kills any potential to be accepted by agents and publishers.

Well, I’m a hands-on guy, so let’s create a chapter of *The Monty Python Code* on-the-fly:

“You are way out of your league, Ringtone,” Quayle said.
“I don’t know what you are talking about,” Ringtone said.
“We can crush you in a second, unless, of course, you cooperate,” said Quayle.
“What do you want me to do?” asked Ringtone.
“Well, if you can provide the documents, I might be able to convince our leader to keep you alive,” said Quayle.
“Honestly, I don’t know where the documents are stored,” Ringtone said.
“Ringtone, be honest with me. You are the only person who can locate these documents,” Quayle said.
“Okay. If it will save my life, I will do my best,” said Ringtone.

You get the picture. Almost each dialog sentence contains a “said,” and by reading the paragraph you get the feeling that something is missing.

There are several ways of tackling the “he said – she said” issue:

- Look for alternatives; use your thesaurus.
- Kill the “said” portion in the dialog line. Sometimes it’s just not necessary.
- Add some action instead of “said.” (Her eyes were filled with tears. “But I love you!”)

Okay, here is the modified version, yet again on-the-fly (unedited):

“You are way out of your league,” Quayle growled.
Ringtone looked confused. “I don’t know what you are talking about.”
Quayle looked straight into his face. “We can crush you in a second,” he hissed, “unless, of course, you cooperate.”
“What do you want me to do?” Ringtone was curious.
“Well, if you can provide the documents, I might be able to convince our leader to keep you alive.”
“Honestly, I don’t know where the documents are stored,” Ringtone protested.
The old man’s impatience with his young opponent erupted again. “Ringtone, be honest with me. You are the only person who can locate these documents.”
The professor slumped in his seat and sighed. “Okay. If it will save my life, I will do my best.”

Let me, yet again, emphasize the importance of “fleshing out” a novel. While the second draft of the dialog seems to have improved over the first draft, it is still a draft.

And yet, there is still a problem with this last version: In the character development section, I chose that the Quayle persona speaks only in maximum five-word sentences.

So, let's try this again:

“You’re out of your league,” Quayle growled. “Way out.”

Ringtone looked confused. “I don’t know what you are talking about.”

Quayle looked straight into his face. “We can crush you. In a second,” he hissed. “Unless, of course, you cooperate.”

“What do you want me to do?” Ringtone was curious.

“Well, you provide the documents. I will convince our leader. He might keep you alive.”

“Honestly, I don’t know where the documents are stored,” Ringtone protested.

The old man’s impatience with his young opponent erupted again. “Ringtone, be honest with me. You are the only person. Only you can do it. Just locate these documents.”

The professor slumped in his seat and sighed. “Okay. If it will save my life, I will do my best.”

WRITING YOUR NOVEL

I wrote it before, and I do it again: Every writer has his/her own method of writing. Some are good in the morning, some are night owls, and others don't care. I personally write with music all the time. The best place for me is somewhere outside of my house, maybe at a café with wireless connection (for the Internet research).

There are two key words when it comes to writing and actually finishing your novel:

1. Perseverance
2. Start small, grow later

Perseverance

First of all, try to write on a daily basis. Reserve a certain time, maybe an hour, maybe even more. The key to finishing a novel is keeping connected to it and adding to it regularly. Reserve that certain time and that certain place.

Start small, grow later

With developing your outlining and your characters, you have already accomplished a first step to writing your novel. In the next chapter "Editing Your Novel: I will explain the step from outlining to the first draft and beyond.

As I mentioned earlier, the majority of aspiring authors do not finish their novel, or starts the second before the first one is finished.

Let me re-iterate: The most important step to getting your novel is finishing it! It may sound obvious, but the harsh truth is that writing a novel requires discipline.

So, take your outlining and add to it. There is no need to be perfect the first time, and the next chapter will explain how it works.

EDITING YOUR NOVEL

There are numerous methods of writing a novel and even a greater number of books describing the process. However, what it comes down to is that authors need to find their own method that works best for them.

The most economic way to write a novel is just to start writing without looking back, without editing. Editing takes a lot of time, and it does make sense to limit it during the first draft. I, personally, try to be best as I can with the first draft, and I edit continuously, but if editing takes too much time, I leave it for later.

During our little writing project, I had described the importance of outlining your story. In fact, the outlining is the first step toward writing your novel. In the very first draft you start small, in the second and following drafts you add more details. As I mentioned before, you need about 60,000 words for a decently sized book and that can be hard to accomplish.

Side note: I personally consider author David Baldacci the ultimate authority when it comes to “fleshing out” a novel. Dan Brown is good at it, too. At times, you can easily skip multiple pages without missing the general story line.

Let me demonstrate the process of “fleshing out” your work through my favorite example, a novel-to-be titled *The Duel*.

First, we start with the **German version**, short, precise and to the point:

He saw him. He shot him. He left.

Not very satisfying, is it? It is very apparent that the story line needs more substance.

In the following, we take the same story line and flesh it out in form of **English journalism**:

It has been stipulated, the person, we will refer to as “A”, besides his detestable reflection, had demonstrated some abominable behavioral patterns prior to the confrontation with the subject we will refer to as “B”. One is reminded of the MKRF report – the findings of that report have also been adopted by the RTAK, an organization whose services have on occasion exploited by the British Defense Ministry, in 1999 – recognising spectacular similarities to the event in question. While bloodshed was not a preferred choice of reconciliation, it was nevertheless the most effective – as was substantiated by research activities at the UKIMA, the United Kingdom Institute for Military Absurdity in 2002. The elimination of “B” is widely considered a logical consequence of the conflict and it was accomplished in full accordance to the 1875 Treaty of Thurtherthon, Wales, which specifically outlaws coercive exercises during teatime.

Well, since we are trying to write a novel, let’s take the same example (the German version) and convert it into **American “Crime Noir”**:

Giordano Mozzarella took shelter from the falling rain at the corner of 5th and 6th Street. Once protected, he watched the New York rush hour traffic crawling by, waiting for his

target to arrive. Mozzarella was not a handsome man. In fact, he had a face that only a mother could love. Unfortunate for Mozzarella, his mother didn't love him. In an erratic decision earlier in her life, she had refused to have more children who might turn out like him. He had tried hard to please her, but she still couldn't find it in her heart to love him, and he wondered why.

Suddenly he recognized the man in a long trench coat walking toward his position next to "Yakov's Butchery." Mozzarella quickly took care of his running nose by pressing a finger on his left nostril, and forcefully pushing the gunk through the other into the falling rain.

He checked his wristwatch, assuring it was past teatime. The Brits would have no reason to complain about his timing.

Mozzarella was not a man of many words, maybe because he was mute, and when the man in the trench coat walked by him, he simply raised the 90 mm Glock and pulled the trigger. "Gotcha," he thought. For several minutes he just stood there, watching the man die as a number of pedestrians, unimpressed by the blood stream, walked by.

Mozzarella checked his watch again and decided it was time to go home. Maybe this time his mother would be proud of him, now that he had killed the man from the Internal Revenue Service.

Last, but not least, let's have another look at the outlining of *The Monty Python Code's* first chapter:

Igor Feldman kills student Hillary Pinton

Scene in a basement. Hillary is tied to a chair, blind-folded. Igor uses 20-inch knife to pierce her heart.

Let's go ahead with the first draft:

The full moon of a bitterly cold January night shed its eerie light on the chair in the smelly basement of Hubert Ringtone's villa. Hillary Pinton, the blindfolded girl tied to the chair, started crying. If they, whoever they were, wouldn't release her within the next two hours, she would miss the party at Margaret Hatcher's house, and that was just not fair.

She felt the presence of another person in the room.

"Hello?" she called out. "Can I like go home, please?"

The short, ugly creature, dressed in a filthy black robe, shrugged but did not respond. Igor Feldman was not in the mood for a conversation.

The master will be happy, he thought. I will do what he asked me for, and he will grant me my wish.

The sweat running from his back had caused his hump to slide, and he started adjusting it.

"I really need to go home, like soon," he heard Hillary again. "It's like late, you know."

“In time,” he calmed her with his raspy voice. “In time, my dear.”

He weighed the twenty-inch blade, a common kitchen knife he had stolen from Ringtone’s house, in his hands, and then he limped toward the chair.

Pretty she is, he thought as he curiously watched her for a few seconds. His right hand went under her sweater, and he started counting the ribs until he found the perfect spot.

“What are you doing?” Hillary giggled. Feldman’s pulse accelerated in anticipation as he positioned the tip of the knife on her chest.

“Ooh,” she swooned. “You pervert! I guess, we have like time for a…”

Using swift and powerful force Feldman thrust the cold steel into her heart. Hillary’s body surged for a fleeting moment before it slumped back into the chair. Feldman felt her blood streaming down his wrist, red and tasty. He pulled the knife as swift as he had during the kill.

Maybe I could, he thought, but then he mastered the growing desire, suspiciously scanning the surroundings. *The master’s eyes are everywhere. He knows everything.*

Igor had accomplished the mission, and he was certain the master would reward him.

Be aware, this is only a first draft. Your novel will undergo numerous modifications, first by yourself, and later by the editing service. Yes, even after numerous correction and optimization processes, you will need to submit your novel to an editing service. You, the author, and even a great number of friends, will miss something, and it takes a professional to make it perfect. And even if a publisher accepts your novel, it will still undergo a further editing process. Publishers don’t take chances, and neither should you.

Proofreading

Just a short remark addressing another aspect of editing: proofreading. Like the majority of aspiring authors, you will most likely read and re-read your written work over and over again. As I mentioned before, this process, including the numerous little corrections that come with it, can be extremely time-consuming.

My advice is to wait a few days – or even longer – before you re-read your writing, just for the sake of developing some distance from your work. It clears the mind and helps you to detect misspellings, improper use of words, etc.

Another important tip: Whenever you “stumble” at one of your writings (like “What was that? What am I trying to say?”), don’t be satisfied with an explanation why you wrote it that way. If you stumble over your text, it is most likely that other potential readers will do, too. So, whenever you stumble, seriously consider re-writing the sentence.

Most Common Spell Errors and Style Mistakes

In my business I have to read a great number of novels of various genres, and, after a while, you get a feeling for the most common mistakes. Here are the most common mistakes:

- It may sound obvious, but many writers should familiarize themselves with the difference between *their*, *they're*, and *there*. The pronunciation is the same; the meanings are entirely different.
- The same is true for *your* and *you're*.
- Try to prevent “passive” sentences. Let me give you an example: Instead of “The book was written by me.” choose “I wrote the book.” It improves the readability immensely.
- Try to avoid too many uses of “very.” Try to substitute “very” by “immensely, incredibly, extraordinarily”, etc. Again, use a thesaurus.
- Many aspiring authors write like they think and talk, and, initially, that is a great advantage in terms of readability. Try to keep your style casual, but don't overdo it. For instance, it is acceptable to use “don't and I'm” instead of “do not, and I am” but I would try to stay away from “they're,” etc. In terms of dialog, almost everything is allowed, even spelling errors, when it helps to emphasize certain idiosyncrasies. The descriptonal part of you novel, however, should be slightly more formal. There are always exceptions, of course (Think *Forrest Gump*, a novel full of intentional writing errors).

For more tips on improving your style, please see DailyWritingTips.Com. There are entire books dedicated to this topic, and I will not repeat everything here.

WRITING TOOLS

There are a myriad of programs available – mostly for PCs – to support the novel writing process. I will not go into details and list all of them here, but my experience is that most of these writing tools have their specific insufficiencies, predominantly represented by lack of word processing power.

A standard word processor will be sufficient for most authors. In addition to putting your thoughts on screen and paper it provides vital functions such as spelling and grammar check. My personal preference is Microsoft Office (Word and Excel), but OpenOffice as well as Apple's iWork are just as good. If you follow the rules of our little writing project you don't need a special program.

Note: Don't be fooled! A writing tool is not a guarantee for error-free writing or good style. The spell-checker cannot help you when you have trouble distinguishing between *there*, *they're*, and *their*. In the same sense, the grammar checker is only a supporting tool, a first initial step toward correct and good writing. In the end, it takes a human being to create the final result.

Thesaurus – Every good word processor comes with a Thesaurus, but my absolute favorite is Thesaurus.com because it presents more choices, not only in terms of quantity, but also in quality. Use the thesaurus frequently! If you are in doubt, the thesaurus will help to find a better choice or even get your thoughts in a different, but better direction.

Dictionary – Same scenario: Every good word processor includes some spell checking power. Dictionary.com, however, presents more, and in some cases, better results.

Daily Writing Tips – Whether you are an author, attorney, manager or student, writing skills are essential to your success. The rise of the information age – with the proliferation of e-mails, blogs and social networks – makes the ability to write clear, correct English more important than ever. DailyWritingTips.Com is about that.

EDITING TOOLS

In addition to the regular writing tools, there are a few websites and programs available to support editing your work. As I wrote before, an author should not engage into extensive editing until the work is finished. Frequent editing will slow down the writing process. Nevertheless, brief relapses are allowed.

Polish My Writing – PolishMyWriting.Com is a free Internet service for spelling error, grammar suggestion, or style suggestion. It is a nice tool, but the results are very close to those of a standard word processor. It is worth, however, to use it in addition to your word processor. Two opinions are better than just one.

AuroCrit – AutoCrit.Com provides some free reports to check for overused words, repeated phrases, and sentence length variations. These reports are limited to 5 per user per day, unless you sign up for their service. Higher-priced service levels check for redundancy, readability, etc. If you are serious about the editing process, I recommend the Platinum level (\$77 per year), or the Professional level (\$117 per year). I personally liked the “overused words” report, a feature I haven’t seen in any other program, even though sometimes the program complains about only 2 occurrences of the same word in one paragraph, which I found a little too picky.

White Smoke – I personally don’t care for this product and the business practices attached to it. When you google for writing tools you will end up finding White Smoke one way or the other; they’re everywhere. I admit, it has been a while since I used their software, but it was a huge pain to install, and the results were acceptable, but not great.

And the winner is...

Grammarly.com – Formerly known as EssayRater.Com, Grammarly.com was initially focused on essays, but now it provides options for writing style. I found it to be a huge help when it comes to writing a novel.

Their website states “Grammarly is an automated proofreader and your personal grammar coach. Check your writing for grammar, punctuation, style and instantly enhance your texts.” Grammarly.com is by far my favorite editing tool! Grammarly.com checks for proper punctuation, wordiness, spelling, writing style, vocabulary use, and synonyms. Synonyms is my favorite tool, because their recommendations are fabulous! The downside is the price tag, and they don’t reveal the pricing until you signed for a free trail. If I remember correctly, I paid \$77 for the annual subscription. It is, nevertheless, only a small investment, because it does, in fact, improve not only your script, but, over time, your writing skills.

Note: Any editing tool will help to improve your text. Nevertheless, if you plan to approach an agent or publisher, it is mandatory to hire a professional editing service, otherwise your chances to be accepted are extremely slim. The price for a 60,000 word work should be in the neighborhood of \$800.

Note: Prices, as mentioned above, may have changed since the writing of this document.

IMPROVING YOUR WRITING SKILLS

Well, just in case you feel a bit uncertain about your writing skills. As I mentioned before, we all have wonderful ideas, but you might hit a roadblock when it comes to writing them down. First of all, go ahead without reservations. If you have developed your outlining, or even only a few chapters, you should be writing. The more you write the better.

A good exercise is writing short stories of about 2,000 to 3,000 words in length. This can be easily done within shortest time. My method is to challenge myself by defining the title first and then develop the content.

For instance, I wrote a short story titled after Tom Wait's song "Bad Liver And A Broken Heart." I developed two characters, a man and a woman, who met by chance at Hampton Beach in New Hampshire. The woman is on the brink of becoming an alcoholic due to a bad marriage, and she represents the "bad liver." The man had just divorced his wife and left his job, both of which were the cause of a heart attack. Consequently, he is the "broken heart."

In another instance I wrote a series of short stories about my life in New England based on local events as they were reported by the local newspaper. The challenge was to change names, locations, and events, but to keep the core of the story.

My point is that frequent writing will improve your writing skills. The same is true for frequent reading.

Also, as I had mentioned previously, the frequent use of writing and editing tools (online or on your PC) will eventually improve your writing.

And yet again, here comes my advice again: Put everything you write, short or long, good or bad, on your website.

BUILDING YOUR PLATFORM

I won't go into the last detail of marketing yourself and your work; that would require another book. There are a myriad of ideas for promotion, and there is no guarantee that any of them will work, but damned if you do, damned if you don't. I will mention only a few, mandatory items, because they should go hand in hand with your writing. All these items have something to do with "building your platform," and you should work on that as soon as possible, if you ever want to sell your work.

To be honest, I hate the term "platform building," because there is a lot of nonsense - in form of misleading articles and books - attached to the idea. The basic equation is: If nobody knows you, nobody will buy your book. Ergo, you need a "platform" telling people who you are and what you have to offer.

The nonsense starts with the number of activities that some experts in the industry suggest. The most popular choice these days is "social networking," represented by Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, technorati, and many more. Add to this numerous writer forums, where you are expected to post daily. On top of all that, you will need a top-notch website, and, of course, you need to update it on a daily basis as well.

The question is, how much time will you have left for writing your novel? Yes, "building your platform" is mandatory, and it should start pretty much at the same time as you start writing your book. It is also true that promoting your novel will require more efforts than actually writing it. However, you can do only so much.

Here are some suggestions in a nutshell:

- As I mentioned before, a website (or better: a blog) is mandatory. If you want one without charges, I recommend WordPress.com. Also, have a look at my book "A No-Nonsense Guide to a Professional Blog." You can download it for free at www.myprofessionalblog.com. - no forms to fill out and you don't need to submit your email-address.
- You may already have a Facebook account, and, if not, get one. Create and maintain your own, personal community. Post at least once a week, if not more. Don't waste your time with other social networks; it takes too much time away from your writing.
- Stay away from writers' forums! It's a waste of valuable writing time. The idea of getting expert advice or communicating with other authors may sound intriguing, but, in reality, it doesn't work that way. Most forums are crowded with people who will "jump on you" with comments like "Welcome, and, by the way, this is my website, and please buy my book." Think about it, these forums are visited by other writers, not potential readers of your book.

SELF-PUBLISHING YOUR NOVEL

This chapter is, actually, out of the scope of this document, and it is merely for those who prefer to see quick results. I know out of experience that most authors prefer instant gratification, and I would like to share some valuable information.

Much has been written about finding a traditional publisher or literary agent. In a nutshell, this is a process that can take years. I have read about cases where an author worked about eighteen years to be published.

Nevertheless, be aware that promoting your novel is as important as writing it. When you self-publish you are basically on your own. Traditional publishers have great marketing power, and they have their distribution channels that you can't use.

The quickest way to publication is e-publishing. It is practically free and can be accomplished within shortest time.

The two resources you should use are the Amazon Kindle Store and Smashwords.com.

In both cases, you must have your book in form of a Microsoft Word file. Smashwords.com provides an extensive manual on formatting your Word file to make it suitable for conversions into electronic formats.

The key to best performance is to keep it simple. Do not use any fancy fonts or formatting features, not even page numbers; just keep it simple.

In both cases, Kindle and Smashword, you do not need an ISBN, but having one will open more sales channels on Smashwords.

An ISBN will cost you about \$25 from Bowker.com.

Also, you will need a cover image. You can use either Photoshop yourself or maybe you know an artist who can help you. You can also use the freeware program Gimp (See Gimp.Org).

For images with free copyright I recommend Bigstockphoto.com. Images are as low as US\$2.95.

Now just go to Amazon's Kindle Direct Publishing (<https://kdp.amazon.com/self-publishing/signin>), register and follow the recommended steps, and publish your book at no charge. You can choose a price between \$2.99 and \$10 for your book, and you get 70 percent of each and every sale via a monthly check from Amazon.

Of course, not everyone has Kindle or Kindle app for iPad. So you also need to go to Smashword.Com, which is also free. You can upload the same file, and it converts your e-book to a form that can be downloaded by any electronic reader, including iPad, Sony Reader, Nook, etc.

CONCLUSION

I have tried to provide as much information as possible into this short document. Please feel free to check out further details on TheMontyPythonCode.Com, where I will post more insights as they become available.

And last, but not least, here is the final, edited version of the first chapter of *The Monty Python Code*:

The Monty Python Code – Chapter One

The full moon of a bitterly cold January night shed its eerie glow on the scenery in the smelly basement of the 19th century villa on Elm Street in Grand Fenwick's most noble neighborhood. A blindfolded girl, still dressed in her cheerleader uniform, the pom-poms lying next to her on the dirty floor, was tied to an old, wooden chair, and she started crying. If they, whoever they were, would not release her like within the next two hours, she would like miss the party at Margaret Hatcher's house, and that was just not fair. She could lose her status as the coolest girl in college. After all, she was Hillary Pinton, daughter of Horatio Pinton, owner and editor of the Grand Fenwick Observer.

She listened to the noise around her, the groaning of the old house, the howling wind from outside, the barely noticeable tapping feet of rats looking for food, but there was nothing that would reveal a clue of what was going to happen. Then, suddenly, she felt the presence of another person in the room.

"Hello?" she called out. "Can I like go home, please? I don't wanna play anymore."

The short, ugly creature, dressed in a filthy black robe with a large hood hiding his blemished face, shrugged his shoulders and skillfully wiped his runny nose with his long tongue, but he did not respond to his victim's plead. Igor Feldman was not in the mood for a conversation.

The master will be pleased, he thought. I will do what he asked me for, and he will grant me my wish.

The sweat running from his back had caused his hump to slide, and, angry about the inconvenience, he groaned and started adjusting it.

"I really need to go home, like soon," he heard Hillary again. "It's like late, you know."

"In time," he calmed her with his raspy voice. "In time, my dear."

He weighed the twenty-inch blade, an ordinary kitchen knife he had stolen from the house, in his hands, and, dragging the black shoes over the worn basement floor, he limped toward the chair.

Pretty she is, he thought as he cocked his head and curiously watched the young woman for a few seconds. He took a deep breath as his right hand went under Hillary's sweater, and he started counting the ribs until he found the perfect spot.

"What are you doing?" Hillary giggled.

Feldman's pulse accelerated in anticipation as he positioned the head of the knife, maintaining an accurate ninety-degree angle to her chest.

"Ooh," she swooned. "You pervert! I guess, we have like time for a quick..."

Using swift and powerful force Feldman thrust the cold steel into her heart. Hillary's body surged for a fleeting moment within the restraints of the tight ropes, and then it slumped back into the chair. The killing had been fast and effective, and, besides the hissing of air leaving her body, not a single sound had left her mouth. The eyes under the blindfold were open wide, filled with terror as if she were still alive.

Feldman felt her blood streaming down his wrist, warm, red, rich, and tasty. He pulled the knife as swift as he had during the killing, and he held it close in front of his face. His long tongue caressed the cold steel, and he moaned with pleasure. Then he looked at the dead body.

Maybe I could, he thought, but he mastered the growing desire, suspiciously scanning the surroundings. *The master's eyes are everywhere. He knows everything.*

Igor had accomplished the task as he was asked, and he was confident the master would reward him generously.

###