

Robert's Rules of ~~Righting~~ Writing

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If thou desirest to publish fiction, thou shalt heed the content of this sacred script. Thou shalt ignore these directives at thine own peril.

Thy manuscript shalt conform to industry formatting standards. Shouldst thou lack knowledge of said standards, thou shalt seek to erase thy ignorance with all diligence.

Thou shalt familiarize thyself with the *Chicago Manual of Style*, and thou shalt reference it when in doubt.

Thou shalt understand and implement the Three Act Structure, or some variant thereof.

Thou shalt create unique and interesting characters, ones for which thy readers shall surely care.

Thou shalt present thy character with a momentous obstacle early in thy story, an obstacle which thy reader shall desirest for thy character to overcome.

Thou shalt not misspell a word. Never. Not ever. If thou presenteth a work to anyone, and thy work should contain a spelling error in the first chapter, thy work shall be put to death.

Thy first paragraph shall introduce a character performing an action that piqueth they reader's curiosity. Wise is he who applies this rule to the first sentence of Chapter One.

Thou shalt not tell the reader what didn't happen, nor what wasn't said.

Thou shalt hunt down the adverb and kill the unclean beast. Thou shalt continue hunting until such time as strong and healthy verbs outnumber the unclean adverb ten thousand to one.

Thou shalt seek out "was" and "were" and banish such weaklings to the fire, replacing the usurpers with strong verbs worthy of thy name.

Thou shalt not use a sentence fragment without first having earned thy poetic license.

Thou shalt track down words whose tail is "-ing" and view such words with highest suspicion. Rare is the "-ing" word you may count as friend.

Thou shalt study every pronoun, seek the closest noun, and verify most certainly the two exist in harmonious union. Pronouns are a treasure, but they are the weaker word, and require a noun upon which to lean.

Thou shalt seek out and employ the strongest and most descriptive verbs, and shun the weaker ones, such as “walked” and its ilk.

Thou shalt not begin consecutive paragraphs nor sentences with identical words, and thou shalt further take care not to place any word in close proximity of its twin.

Thou shalt not violate thy character’s point of view. Thou shalt study point of view, feel its weight in thy hand, and wield it in a manner that shall make thy editor proud.

Thou shalt not give weather reports, less said report have prominent effect upon thy plot.

Thou shalt shy away from attribution, understanding when it is necessary, and when it is not.

Thou shalt balance thy narrative with dialogue, and thy dialogue shall not become a speech.

Thou shalt love the past tense verb, and lift him to prominence above all other tenses.

Thou shalt make sparse the single-sentence paragraph, and be certain its appearance imparts great power.

Thou shalt show thy characters’ feelings, attitudes, and thoughts through action and dialogue, forsaking thy urge to tell such things in mundane narrative.

Thou shalt refrain from burdening thy reader with every descriptive detail, for thy reader is smart, and he willingly fills in the minutia that thou leavest out.

Thou shalt examine every sentence in thy finished work and verify that each word and each phrase in each sentence cannot be removed without plunging thy work into eternal darkness.

Thou shalt edit thine own work to perfection, allowing no other eye to chance upon it, whether for edit or critique, before thou hast fully incubated its goodness.

Thou shalt read thy work aloud, using thine eyes and thine ears to flush the little foxes from their holes, thus eliminating mis-wordings that label thee as a suckling.

Thou shalt not present thy writing to friend or foe, agent or publisher, nor especially any editor until thou hast complied with every rule herein.

Thou shalt not argue with thy agent, thy editor, nor thy publisher, who are thy friends. On occasion, friends may discuss opposing viewpoints. Shouldst thou disagree with thy friends, thou shalt remain silent and choose thine own path, and in so doing, shall be wary of the ground upon whichst thou tread.

Thou shalt approach thy work with humility, realizing that, while thou art gifted in the craft of writing, thy gift is not perfection.