

THE SCOOP!

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT WRITING--HANK LEARNED ON TV!

Here's what you need to produce a successful television story: Develop memorable characters. Build suspense. Show conflict. Tell a compelling story. Create a satisfying ending. Find justice. Change lives.

Here's what you need to become a successful television journalist: Never miss your deadlines. Be fair. Get people to tell you things they won't tell anyone else. Understand how the world works. Work with an editor. Keep on a budget. Create a brilliant and flawless product every time. Be completely devoted to your job.

Here's the scoop. What you need to write a successful novel are exactly the same things.

COMMITMENT

*****Journalists show up ready to work.**

IN TV: You arrive for your shift. You get a paycheck at the end of the week. You may have a contract, but if you break it, you're fired.

In your novel:

*****A general assignment reporter does a story every day. An investigative reporter may do a story every week or every month.**

IN TV: Reporters scramble to get the best assignments. There are ten people waiting to take your place. Ten people who think they can do a better job than you can.

In your novel:

*****There's no choice. You've agreed this is your job.**

IN TV: You're only as good and as valuable as your last story. And if someone can do better, they won't last long.

In your novel:

THE STORY MEETING

*****Without stories, there is no news.**

IN TV: The morning meeting discusses the potential stories of the day, and chooses which ones will be on the air. Some reporters are assigned to cover certain events. Enterprising reporters will offer something new. Guess who's more valued?

In your novel:

***** Each story must be compelling, new, valuable, well-crafted and watchable. Producers and editors will ask: Why do I care about this?**

IN TV: Only the best stories are selected: the ones that make people watch and listen. The ones that change lives. The ones the make people laugh or cry or get angry.

In your novel:

REPORTING THE STORY

*****Establishing the goal**

IN TV: Reporters ask the first and most basic question, and need to answer it in one thesis sentence. What is my story about?

In your novel:

*****Exploring the world**

IN TV: Reporters know the research phase will make or break your story. They step into the world they're about to explore through interviews, internet, phone calls and personal visits.

In your novel:

*****Choosing your characters**

IN TV: They're called stakeholders. They're the people who matter to the story. The good guys, the bad guys, the victims and the heroes. Of all the people who are available, you must choose the ones who will be the best for your story.

In your novel:

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*****Sound bites**

IN TV: Reporters shoot twenty times more video than they ever use. An interview could be half an hour—but only ten seconds of it used in the actual story. Reporters must select only the best, most interesting, most relevant sound bites. They learn interview techniques designed to elicit what’s new, compelling and revealing.

In your novel:

WRITING THE STORY

*****The plot**

IN TV: There’s a reason they’re called news “stories.” Reporters lay out the beginning, the middle and the end. You might call it an outline.

In your novel:

***** The panic**

IN TV: There’s always a hole in the story. Something you forgot to ask. Some picture you forgot to shoot. If it’s not on video, it doesn’t exist. A TV mantra: “go with what you’ve got.”

In your novel:

*****The editor**

IN TV: An editor has got to read your script. An editor has got to look at your story. If you make a mistake, you could be sued. If you’re unclear or uninteresting, people will turn the channel. A TV mantra: Anyone who can change your story, will. A reality: They might have a terrific idea.

In your novel:

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***The slot

IN TV: A newscast is a finite period of time. You're assigned a certain length—maybe two minutes. If you go long, even five seconds, you'll be cut off. Reporters use a stopwatch, a timer, the clock. If you don't make your story the correct length, someone else will cut it. And they won't care what you think.

In your novel:

***The deadline

IN TV: The news is on at 6 o'clock. If your story isn't ready, you're fired. There is no writers block. You write.

In your novel:

THE RATINGS

***The promotion department

IN TV: Some promotions producer will arrive at your office and say: I need to create a fifteen second ad. What's your story about? If you can't tell them, or you're too busy, the promo will be wrong or misleading, and no one will watch your story.

In your novel:

***The headline writer

IN TV: Some headline writer will arrive at your desk and say: I need a five second headline. What's the most compelling part of your story? If you can't tell them, the headline will be boring and viewers will change the channel.

In your novel:

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The Top Ten Questions:

Why do I care?

Am I in the right place?

Whose story is this?

What's the problem?

What do I leave out?

How do you know that?

Who said that?

What's the goal?

What's my deadline?

Whose idea was this, anyway?

What, me worry?

Award-winning investigative reporter Hank Phillippi Ryan is on the air at Boston's NBC affiliate. Her thirty years in television have resulted in new laws, people sent to prison, homes removed from foreclosure, and millions of dollars in restitution. Along with her 26 EMMYs, Hank's won dozens of other honors for her groundbreaking journalism. She's been a radio reporter, a legislative aide in the United States Senate and an editorial assistant at Rolling Stone Magazine.

Her debut novels PRIME TIME (Agatha Winner, double RITA nominee and DAPHNE nominee) and FACE TIME (BookSense Notable Book), were best-sellers. Both are being re-issued in July and August 2009 as MIRA Books. Her newest books are AIR TIME (MIRA/September 2009) and DRIVE TIME (MIRA/February 2010. Contact Hank at <http://www.HankPhillippiRyan.com>