



DAILY SHOUTS

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EIGHT RULES FOR WRITING FICTION

BY TEDDY WAYNE

Writing fiction is not as hard as it seems, as long as you follow these eight simple rules:

Show, don't tell. Remember show-and-tell in elementary school, when you'd bring in an object from home and talk about it? I want you to remember that experience and the lessons about storytelling it imparted. Then invent a time machine, and travel back to elementary school, and get a job as a second-grade teacher, and make sure you get yourself as a student in your class, and in the time machine bring along an iPhone, and give it to your second-grade self. All the kids will be blown away, even though it won't get phone reception because cell-phone towers haven't been built yet. The younger you will develop greater self-esteem from your newfound popularity, and go on to lead a richer adult life, and have more material to write about.



Create three-dimensional characters. Say you're writing about a hard-charging banker who's having an extramarital affair. This is a good start, but to avoid turning him into a cliché, you need to fill him out in three dimensions. In every paragraph, tell the reader exactly how high, wide, and long he is. For instance: "Benjamin

Waller, a hard-charging banker who stood six feet one, with a size-thirty-two waist and a chest girth of forty inches, was having an extramarital affair.” Also mention that he drives a flashy sports car.

Choose a point of view. Decide which point of view makes most sense for your story: first person; second person; third person, either limited or the omniscient, godlike perspective; the less omniscient but still potent perspective of Freyr, the Norse god of weather and fertility; “Larry,” the crossing guard from your elementary school who always made the same joke about your getting a failing grade at crossing the street, except for that one time he saw an anachronistic iPhone and became confused; the camera I’ve covertly installed in your bedroom. The best one is Larry, followed by Freyr.

Give your characters motivations. If you’re having trouble fleshing out your characters, continually ask yourself in each scene, “What does this character want?” Say this out loud enough, and soon someone nearby will ask why you keep repeating that. Do not reply, but simply keep questioning aloud, “What does this character want?” Eventually you’ll be committed to an asylum. Asylums are great places to think without the distractions of the modern world. I’m sure you’ll figure out that pesky protagonist in no time.

Write what you know. Are you an expert in the Norse weather-and-fertility gods? Or in elementary-school crossing guards? I am, and I hope you’ll consider for representation “Larry and Freyr: A Novel in Letters.” In it, Larry Patowski, a genial crossing guard at John F. Kennedy Elementary who’s known for his quick, albeit repetitive, wit, commences an epistolary friendship with the Norse god Freyr. In the course of their letters, e-mails, text messages, and Gchats, we learn more about this seemingly mismatched duo—one a fifty-six-year-old bratwurst-loving mortal from a Chicago suburb, the other a supernatural deity out of Scandinavian paganism—who are more

alike than they think. By the novel's powerful conclusion, when Freyr has become a beer-guzzling Cubs fan and Larry, with the help of a stolen iPhone, intervenes in mythological history to destroy the frost giant Surtr during the great battle of Ragnarökkr, these two unforgettable characters will have carved a place into your heart as surely as Freyr rides the boar Gullinbursti to Baldr's funeral!

No tears for the writer, no tears for the reader. If you're not moved by your story, don't expect your reader to be. Therefore, sob uncontrollably as you compose. Slice onions to abet the process. Film yourself weeping. Submit the video to an A-list director, who will be so impressed by your ability to emote that he will cast you in his next marquee film, a two-hundred-million-dollar 3-D adaptation of "Larry and Freyr." Supply a stirring performance that has all of Tinseltown buzzing "Oscar." Encourage the producers to take out an ad in *Variety* touting your career-defining portrayal of Freyr. Win the Academy Award, grow drunk on your own power, and make a series of commercial missteps resulting in your excommunication from the film industry. Return to writing fiction, having now lived through highs and lows few of us have experienced. Slice onions and repeat (with "Larry and Freyr 2: Spring Break in Finland").

Revize, revize, revize. This goes without saying.

Trust yourself. Ultimately, you should value your own judgment over that of others. Except for this list of writing rules. It is completely accurate.

Illustration by David Goldin.
