

## Why Reinvent the Wheel?

by Linda Rohrbough

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In the world of writing, one of the debates is about use, or should I say overuse, of the “tools” or formulas for developing fiction. A number of writers, like Eric Adams scriptwriter of the new movie “My Suicide,” praise workshops like Robert McGee’s *Story* saying they were helped to sell because they learned what it takes to create compelling work. However, there are others, such as Tom Sawyer, former head scriptwriter for the hit TV series “Murder She Wrote,” who told me this approach produces stale, drab work that disappoints the public and makes everything the same. *New York Times* best-selling author Jodi Thomas, a native Texan, told me she has the same concern.

In fact, the prejudice against the fiction formulas is so deep in the literary community that in my whopping 40 hours of college undergraduate and graduate level creative writing courses, (at a 4.0 GPA, I might add) I never saw a single formula or tool. My college professors told me they would not even consider showing students any of the fiction writing tools. They didn’t want to “corrupt” us.

However, I recently ran across information that got me thinking. In the world of music, for centuries there was no standardized definition for music. But once the music scale was defined, including the tonal distance between notes, timing, and the rest of the things we’re all so familiar with, the music world took off. Composers such as Bach and Beethoven emerged. Further, everything we experience in music now, from Rap to Classical, is based on what was then argued as a rigidly defined set of parameters. The take away here is the definition, development of notation, and wide distribution of written music (thanks to the advent of the

printing press) allowed for a proliferation, a renaissance you might say, that we’re still enjoying today. To put it succinctly, a musician no longer has to reinvent the wheel to compose music.

So why are we, as fiction writers, reinventing the wheel?

Why indeed.

Even the writers who disdain some of the most popular tools for fiction writing, have their own novel plotting grids and character development tools. And they know what the formulas are, even if they choose not to use them.

And for me, that’s the point. You can always choose not to use the tools or formulas. But as a fiction writer, you ought to at least know what they are. Once I found those tools existed, I jumped in with both feet. I got myself to every writing conference I could find, bought books on developing fiction (I have more than 200 now), and got to know a number of authors who excel in the world of story-telling.

And that’s the beauty of conferences and why I spend the time, effort, and money to go. Fiction writing is **hard** and competitive. We need every tool, every resource we can get to give us whatever boost might be available to get the job done. Listening to successful authors talk about their work and hearing agents and editors talk about what they’re looking for and how the business is developing is one of the major benefits of attending.

Which brings me to a blatant pitch for my workshop, “The Writer’s Toolbox.” In developing this workshop, I’ve worked to put together an overview of the most representative samples of the tools for fiction development I’ve come across, where these tools are available, and how they’re used. Further, to show how the tools are used, I briefly explain basic premises of fiction development -- the formulas -- which can be especially useful to those new to fiction writing.

The search for tools to make us better fiction writers is never-ending. Jodi Thomas, who I mentioned earlier, told me just a couple of hours after she was inducted into the Romance Writers Hall of Fame, after winning her third national award for historical fiction from RWA, she was in the conference bookstore purchasing more how-to books on fiction writing. So even experienced writers are looking for new ways to solve problems.

It is very much a trial and error process to find tools that work for you in addition to efficient and effective ways to use them. But I'd encourage you to expend the effort. After all, why reinvent the wheel?

***Biography:***

*Linda Rohrbough has been writing professionally since 1989, and has more than 5,000 articles, seven books and numerous awards for her fiction and non-fiction. Linda's latest book is Weight Loss Surgery with the Adjustable Gastric Band (Da Capo Lifelong Books, March 2008). Visit her website: [www.LindaRohrbough.com](http://www.LindaRohrbough.com).*