

## YOU CANNOT WRITE SUCCESSFULLY IN A VACUUM

The caricature of an author *is a person sitting alone, bent over his desk*, but I believe that you cannot write well if you cut yourself off from the world. If you do that, you don't know what others want to read or hear, you might not know how to weave current or past cultural issues, sports, music, etc., etc. into your work. You may not have heard the latest slang, or know how best to put words together to tell a story so others will understand and enjoy reading. Not everyone is interested in only what is in your head. Readers want to be able to imagine themselves in the work; they want to be able to relate.

If you look up “genre” there are many definitions. One site says there are 4 categories: poetry, drama, fiction, and nonfiction,

Another site listed them in the chronological order that man developed genres: epics, tragedy, comedy, and creative non-fiction.

Still others categorize genres by their written construction, from the constrained syllables of haiku, to the controlled rhymes of a limerick, to the looseness of stream of consciousness.

Even if a topic doesn't seem to apply to a writer's genre, writers can learn valuable information from a wide variety of topics because **it's all about writing**.

All genres have many of the same requirements as any writing. Some are:

**Story/plot** – what happens and why

**Scene/setting** – time and place of action

**Characters** - protagonist, antagonist, major and minor characters

**Tension/conflict/emotion** – the feeling that keeps the reader turning pages

**Point of view** – omniscient, first, third

**Theme** - central message or insight into life

Even nonfiction needs many of the same elements to be relatable. No one wants to read a list of facts. Story makes facts relatable.

As a branch, Mt. Diablo worries about having poetry as a speaker topic. Not everyone writes poetry so we worry that those meetings won't draw many attendees. It shouldn't be an issue. As a writer, you should be willing to go anywhere and hear any topic in order to learn. You never know when you'll see or hear something that helps your writing. Maybe your character has a habit of thinking poetically; maybe they mutter poetry when stressed. Maybe their heart sings poetry when happy. Maybe if you listen to a talk on poetry or hear some read at a branch meeting, something will click with you that you can add to your work in progress—or to one that's hiding in a dusty drawer, or an aged computer file yearning to be resurrected!

Chatting with your neighbors at the table before the meeting begins, you might hear a story you'd like to write or a scene that would work in your book, or maybe someone mentions something that clicks and helps you solve a writing problem. Maybe the speaker will say something that rings a bell with you.

Maybe a characteristic of one of your characters is that he fancies himself a wild west cowboy type, maybe a female character devours science fiction books, maybe two characters meet and bond over Hitchcock thrillers. If there's a teenager in the story, how will that person speak? Are you up with the latest lingo? If there's a child involved, what's age appropriate? And on and on!

## GENRES AND WHAT YOU MIGHT LEARN FROM A GENRE NOT YOUR OWN

Some genres are as follow with their partial definitions and WCYL or What Can You Learn:

- **Fantasy:** speculative fiction in a fictional universe inspired by myth and folklore  
WCYL: how to weave myth/folklore into a story/article that isn't fantasy
- **Science fiction:** speculative fiction dealing with imaginative and futuristic concepts, science, technology, space exploration, time travel, parallel universes, and extraterrestrial life  
WCYL: science, technology futuristic concepts, scientists' speculation about life on other planets
- **Poetry:** sets scene in the American frontier typically from the late 18th to the late 19th century.  
WCYL: details of American history, what the plains looked like before intensive farming and roads
- **Western:** set in the American frontier typically from the late 18th to the late 19th century.  
WCYL: details of American history, what the plains looked like before intensive farming and roads
- **Romance** involves love and/or lust  
WCYL: a few pointers?!
- **Thriller** fiction, having numerous, often overlapping stories characterized by the moods they elicit, giving readers heightened feelings of suspense, excitement, surprise, anticipation and anxiety.  
WCYL: how to develop tension in your work, moods, emotions, surprise
- **Mystery** usually involves a mysterious death or a crime to be solved  
WCYL: how to solve problems, how to imagine possibilities
- **Detective** an investigator, usually part of a law enforcement agency, collecting physical evidence at a scene, or information by talking to witnesses and informants, or searching records  
WCYL: how to impart detail, places to find information,
- **Dystopian** explores social and political structures in a dark, nightmare world, in a society characterized by poverty, squalor, or oppression. Mostly used in science fiction and speculative fiction.  
WCYL: what life can be like if you don't have the luxury of taking time to write!
- **Young Adult** written for readers aged 12 - 18. (Approximately half of YA readers are adults!) YA subject matter correlates with the age and experience of the protagonist.  
WCYL: slang, teens' views of the world including politics, food, school, adults, what they see and fear
- **Non-Fiction** can be history, biography, instructional, commentary, humor, and can ponder philosophical questions.  
WCYL: facts, how to make them interesting, how not to make them boring, scene,
- **Newspapers/magazines** current/historical events, travel, food, local and foreign news, etc.  
WCYL: details of the current world and culture, history.