

# SETTING THE STAGE: WHEN DESTINATION MATTERS

Jill Hedgecock: Destination Writing & Research Tips

**Bill Stong: Writing & Finding Expert Help**

Mount Diablo Branch of the California Writers Club

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# THE ROAD MAP

Here's the roadmap for my presentation:

- This introduction
- The presentation
- Work for *your* writing to be done this weekend *by you*

# WHAT THOU SHALT BE DOING

- ▶ Work for *your* writing to be done this weekend

This involves asking you, at the end but before the ending, to write your personal/professional responses to five questions and/or actions.

So, make sure your writing implements and paper, or their virtual equivalents, are ready to see some action!

# WRITING & FINDING EXPERT HELP

- Finding organizations with the knowledge and resources to ensure your scene/poem/non-fiction piece has spot-on details
- Finding SMEs (Subject Matter Experts) with the right knowledge, ability, and willingness
- Having a “Council of Mentors/Advisors”



**BUT *FIRST!!***

**WHAT** do you need help with?!

- All the points in the previous slide are **WHO** ones
- It doesn't matter what genre you're writing in, you're probably going to run into some areas where seeking out help would...well, help.

# QUESTION # 1: WHAT?

*Specifically, WHAT do you need help with?*

- ❖ A scene that isn't cutting it?
- ❖ Something is missing from your narrative—a gap, perhaps, but you can't quite put your finger on it?
- ❖ Are your characters giving you difficulties?
- ❖ The story has as much tension as a brittle rubber band?
- ❖ You can't find the next block of your story arc?

# QUESTION # 1: WHAT? <CONT>

- ❖ In non-fiction, perhaps nailing down facts or the sequence in which something happened?
- ❖ Even with pure fiction, do correct, pertinent facts help?
- ❖ Poetry~~perhaps you can't put your finger on exactly the right word—in cadence, meaning, nuance, or rhyme?
- ❖ For any genre, is there some *thing* that you don't know what it really looks like?

# WHAT DON'T YOU KNOW?

**Mission Not~Impossible:** Know what you don't know.

Part of the answer can reveal itself in having others read, or at least listen to, your writing; e.g., a critique group, beta-readers.

Either way, the most valuable thing they provide is feedback on what they think of, and get out of (or not) your writing.



# WHY DON'T YOU KNOW?

When you ① listen carefully to what these people are saying and ② think about it, their feedback is invariably telling you something *you* don't know for any number of reasons:

- you don't have the technical writing skills
- it's clear to you but your writing isn't connecting with any experience of the reader for them to understand it
- the writing isn't clear or has flaws you simply don't see

## QUESTION # 2: <ANOTHER> WHAT?

*What would HELP you?*

Once you know **WHAT** you need help with:

- Imagine what might provide insight to move forward:
  - ✓ A book? An expert? A place? An activity?
- List sources that might have that relevant help

# QUESTION # 3: HOW?

Armed with your answers to the first two questions, *now* you can ask HOW to get help that deals with your problem(s):

- Think through the sources you've identified and be very detailed about how they can help you
- Keep it simple & specific

# QUESTION # 4: WHO?

Everybody's WHO is going to be different. *One example:*

- I've read lots of history books about the events during the time I'm writing about
- I thought historians would do the research, write their books, which I would read and
- Then I would add whatever fictional components I wanted.



# QUESTION # 4: WHO?

*Boy, was I naïve!*

Did you know that qualified historians can write about the *same* historical event and have *different* dates, people, and sequences for those events?

What I assumed were hard facts are sometimes vague & squishy.

# QUESTION # 4: WHO?

In those cases, I can only improve my understanding—and accuracy—by:

- finding appropriate historians
- talking with them & asking my questions
- pointing out the differences I've noticed between sources &
- listening very carefully to their answers

# QUESTION # 4: WHO?

In doing so, I may need to talk with several and then ultimately decide, myself, what might have happened.

At some point, of course, you need to move on.

During your research/confirmation time, enjoy meeting and working with all the WHO's along the way. They might be willing to write something about your book!

# WRITING & FINDING EXPERT HELP

Finding organizations with the knowledge and resources to ensure your scene/poem/non-fiction piece has spot-on details



# FINDING ORGANIZATIONS <1>

- Start with the Google search bar
- Wikipedia is generally a good place to begin
- Books & magazines on the subject that is being researched

# WHICH ORGANIZATIONS? <2>

- Organizations that are founded for or by the subject matter
  - ✓ Brick-&-Mortar as well as virtual/internet sites
- Museums/Libraries/Archives/Universities
- Historical Societies/Historical re-enactment groups
  - ✓ Festivals and special holidays
- Travel-related companies and services
- YOU-centric connections
- Social media sources

# MY ORGANIZATIONAL EXAMPLES

- Museums useful to scenes in my book include:
  - ✓ The Tower of London, England
  - ✓ Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City
  - ✓ Shiga Kenritsu Azuchijokoko Museum, Azuchi; Edo-Tokyo Museum, Tokyo; Miyagi Sant Juan Bautista Museum, Ishinomaki
- Historical re-enactment sites or groups/Open air museums
  - ✓ Kanazawa Historical battle re-enactment
  - ✓ New Year's horseback archery at Yasukuni Shrine, Tokyo

# MY ORGANIZATIONAL EXAMPLES

- Alumni Association of The University of Michigan
  - ✓ Center for Japanese Studies
- Internet/Social Media
  - ✓ <https://www.japan.travel/en/>
  - ✓ <https://www.japan-guide.com/>
  - ✓ <http://samurai-archives.com/>
  - ✓ <https://www.tripadvisor.com/>



# MY ORGANIZATIONAL EXAMPLES



# MY ORGANIZATIONAL EXAMPLES





# TIME

Who writes in a genre that has absolutely no connection to time?

*<Please let me know if so...>*

The internet has tons of TIME-related sites.



# MATCHING TIME NEEDS & SITES

- Any need to convert Japanese Imperial reign years?
- Maybe other regnal calendars~~the English, Chinese?
- Any need to know when & where the West changed from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar? Leap Years?
- How about what **DAY** any specific date was or will be?  
<http://www.dayoftheweek.org>
- Ever need to know **Dawn/Dusk** at any place on Earth?  
<https://www.timeanddate.com/>



# WRITING & FINDING EXPERT HELP

Finding SMEs (Subject Matter Experts) with the right knowledge, ability, and willingness

# FINDING SME'S <1>

**An SME is anyone who has specialized knowledge of or skills in a particular topic.**

- ✓ SME's are generally recognized, but given the variety of opinions that surround most human endeavors, there might be some disagreement about WHO exactly is one
- ✓ The validity of an SME is driven by your genre & need

# FINDING SME'S <2>

Sources for SME's come from:

- Internet searches
- Source materials
- Recommendations from people you meet in the organizations you have approached
- Personal introductions (either directly or, as in my case, through a friend or colleague)

# FINDING SME'S <3>

Finding the absolutely perfect SME from a knowledge, skill, qualification basis is only half the job—and, unfortunately, by far the easier half.

The world-recognized authority on the topic you are researching might not have the time, ability, or inclination, to help you.



# FINDING SME'S <4>

If one side of the SME coin is expertise, the other side is  
**ability and willingness to help you**

You may find that the SME

- couldn't teach someone with cholera to poop
- makes willingness conditional—in terms of time, content, remuneration, and/or personality

# FINDING SME'S <5>

In every instance, make your best case @ first contact:

- ~ What you are seeking help on
- ~ Why you have chosen that person
- ~ Would they be able to help OR recommend another person?

That's it.                      Specificity and conciseness are paramount.

# FINDING SME'S <6>

- If there is no response, that is a response.
- On the other end of the spectrum, if they're in whole-hog, that's great.
- Anything in between is up for negotiation between you
  - ✓ Only they know what they may gain from spending time with you
  - ✓ Only you know what working with that person is worth.



# MY SME EXAMPLES



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# WRITING & FINDING EXPERT HELP

## Having a “Council of Mentors”

# COUNCIL OF MENTORS <1>

As before, a definition: for me, a “Council of Mentors” is a group of people who are willing to put up with my questions within a specific, bounded topic.

These are people who have some expertise, knowledge, experience that can provide additional details, accuracy, nuance, or direction to whatever the topic area is.

# COUNCIL OF MENTORS <2>

For my historical novel, I have three “Councils of Mentors”:

- ~ For Japanese~related topics
- ~ For Spanish~related topics
- ~ For English~related topics

*( You might be seeing a trend here: Japan, Spain, England)*

# COUNCIL OF MENTORS <3>

In the beginning, ask directly whether they would be willing to help you by responding to questions, from time to time, that you may have in the topic area.

If they agree, even with conditions, you're on your way (subject to those conditions).



# TIPS FOR A COUNCIL

<4>

- ✓ The size of the Councils vary
- ✓ Be respectful of their time
- ✓ Reserve the most interesting and challenging questions for the Council
- ✓ When communicating with mentors, be concise & on point

# TIPS FOR A COUNCIL

<5>

- ✓ Do not pressure or set deadlines for your mentors
- ✓ Do not waste their time
- ✓ Always be appreciative of anything a mentor does—even if it's to say they have nothing to contribute
- ✓ If you can, compensate your Council of Mentors somehow

# TIPS FOR A COUNCIL

<6>

- ✓ Express your appreciation—outside of the confines of the Council.
- ✓ Recognize them—when you get published.



# A WORD OF CAUTION

- Recognizing your mentors might be interesting
- Most people would be pleased with recognition, say being mentioned in an *Acknowledgement* section.
- However, some might not want that. You need to figure out exactly what they prefer because the publication of your work is the final objective and it would be awful if it would mar what had been a good working relationship.

# ONE WAY TO RECOGNIZE MENTORS

- ✓ After a particularly helpful series of questions, research, and answers on a very specific Japanese language issue, I asked each mentor whether it would be all right to include their surnames in the story's text (I shared the chapter with them)
- ✓ In the scene, a Jesuit monk is trying to figure out the etymology of a certain word by asking several locals
- ✓ Every one of my mentors gave their permission!

# A WONDERFUL SIDE~BENEFIT

A really awesome result is that every one of my mentors has introduced me to new places/events and/or gone with me to check something out.

Those are times of both research *and* wonderful friendship.

# ***ACTION TIME!***

Here are action item(s) each person needs to take right now!

You're writers so I know each of you has

- ✓ paper and a writing implement
- ✓ or their electronic equivalents

Ergo, please write down your answers, right now, to each of the following questions and/or actions



# ACTION & *YOU!*

- There are five (5) questions and/or actions steps
- We have a bit more than five (5) minutes left
- Which means: *don't* overthink these
- Just spew your answers in less than 45 seconds each
- I'll be timing you – *in 15-second increments*

# ACTION! YOU! NOW!

Are there any questions?

*<Hey! You're all on mute. That's a moot question.>*

Remember what you've all heard:

**“Write now, edit later.”**

1<sup>ST</sup> :

A QUESTION

**WHAT do you need help on  
right now?**

***Go!***

2<sup>ND</sup>: ALSO A QUESTION

**WHICH organization(s)  
might be able to help you?**

*Get movin'!*



3<sup>RD</sup> : ANOTHER DAMN QUESTION

WHO <a person> might be  
able to help you?

*Shake a leg!*

## 4<sup>TH</sup> : AN ACTION

**Give a name to your  
Council of Mentors**

***Get on it!***

## 5<sup>TH</sup>: ANOTHER ACTION

**Write the subject line of  
your exploratory email to  
your Council members.**

***Do it, now!***

# **BONUS: YOUR HOMEWORK**

**When you get home,**

- **review your answers *and***
- **write that email!**



終, EL FIN, THE END

ありがとうございました ! *¡Muchas Gracias! Thank you!*

Not sure why anybody would feel the compunction, but I can be contacted at:

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