



The Beacon

Your guiding light for writing and publishing

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Book Launches: Are they worth it?

I have launched five of my 14 books and have come to doubt the value of this practice (readings too). Let me explain my skepticism.

Certainly the first launch boosts the author's ego. Writing colleagues, friends, and family dutifully show up to hear you read a few pages, enjoy the nibbles and wine you pay for, and buy a copy of your book. If you're lucky enough to sell 50, it's considered a rip-snorting good launch. Usually you sell fewer and lose money. If you're a well-known author and have sent out releases, the media just might report the event in the book section of the local paper. They are unlikely to attend. If you are unknown, they will ignore you.

As I don't write bestsellers—my books are for small, specialized markets—my name means little in the publishing world, nor do I attract the media. This reality made me discuss my dilemma with my publisher's promotion department last September.

They confirmed that launches do not help sales and had a few suggestions for me. They urged me to focus on launching my book electronically using FB and Twitter, as well as my blog; to create a new blog just for my new book, and meet my readers where they congregate; to offer myself as a guest blogger, especially to blogs that cover the subject and genre of my book; to let them (the publisher) get the books out to reviewers before I send more media releases offering to do print, radio, or TV interviews; lastly, to target my buyers and write articles for them online and in print.

My publisher's bottom line: authors don't have to do live launches and readings. If you must, they said, share them. It reduces your expenses (sometimes to zero) and ensures bigger attendance and better sales, all of which preserve your ego.



From the editor's desk

One of the best Christmas presents I ever received as a writer was the registration fee for a conference. That was years ago and I am still benefitting from it. Not so much in terms of the knowledge I gained (the world of writing and publishing has moved on), but the connections I made there remain a key part of my writing life today.

In southern BC, we have many conferences, courses, workshops, and writers' groups that provide invaluable guidance for emerging and experienced writers. They cover the craft of writing, as well as the business of getting published. Fees vary, but most are reasonable. While not exhaustive, the list below will provide ideas for your professional development in the New Year, gifted to you or not.

If you live in another part of the world—seek out your local offerings. You'll be glad you did. Nothing helps your writing more than rubbing shoulders with those more experienced than you.

Julie H. Ferguson



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At CWILL's Fall Book Harvest where I launched my [YA biography](#) at no cost with 25 others. The bonus was pitching the book to teens and school librarians who attended. October 2009

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Book Launches: Are they worth it?	1
From the editor's desk	1
Defying the rules	2
Links for Learning	2
Events for Writers	2

Defying the Rules

by Joyce Gram, writer and editor

If you read a lot, as I do, you will come across books that seem to break the rules, books in which the authors defy the conventions of style and structure, even of punctuation and grammar. You may wonder how some writers get away so successfully with violating the accepted hallmarks of good writing. The novel *Austerlitz* by W. G. Sebald is written in almost a single breath: there are no chapter breaks, only a couple of section breaks, and sentences that go on and on, one for eight pages. Though perhaps not a story for everyone, it is magnificently crafted: a close look at any one of those sentences reveals that all are flawless—every one of them *works*.

And that is the key. The best writers—the ones whose names and books endure—can get away with just about anything, because in the end, under the finest scrutiny, what they have done *works*—and they have made absolutely sure of it. Like Francine Prose, author of *Reading Like a Writer*, they have “discovered that writing, like reading, [is] done one word at a time, one punctuation mark at a time. It [requires] ... putting every word on trial for its life.”

There are, of course, successful authors who flout the rules badly and get away with it spectacularly. *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown has been variously described by reviewers as a “considerable achievement” and “a novel so bad that it gives bad novels a bad name.” It is worth examining for what it does well and for what renders it, in the words of another reviewer, “unmitigated junk.”

The lesson here is that to defy the rules successfully, you must first understand them; and to understand them, you must practise them. As Prose says, “We learn to write by practice, hard work, by repeated trial and error, success and failure, and from the books we admire.”

Francine Prose, *Reading Like a Writer: A Guide for People Who Love Books and for Those Who Want to Write Them*. New York: HarperCollins, 2006.

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Winter Events for Writers

(for additions, visit www.beaconlit.com/schedule2010.htm regularly)

Jan 23: *Pitching Your Articles to Magazines* for those who want to sell material to print and online markets, Port Moody Public Library, 9:30am to 12:30pm. Free, but space is limited. You must register at 604-469-4577 to reserve your seat.

Feb 6: *Pitching in a Cold Climate* for the Surrey Writers' School, 10:15am to 1:15pm. Freelancers today must offer magazines more than just an article.... Location/fee: TBA. Details of session: www.beaconlit.com/PitchingCold.htm. Register at: www.surreywritersschool.com/

Mar 20: *Book Magic: Turning Writers into Published Authors* (9am-noon) and ***Crafting Irresistible Query Letters*** (1-4pm) for all fiction and non-fiction writers who want to learn more about getting their books published (unsuitable for poets and screenwriters). Vancouver Community College (downtown). Register after New Year [here](#).

Links for Learning

Powell River Writers' Conference, Apr 30-May 1, 2010: www.prwriters.org/
Shuswap Lake International Writers' Festival, May 28-30, 2010:

www.saow.ca

Surrey International Writers' Conference, Oct 22-24, 2010: www.siwca.ca

Simon Fraser University's Publishing Program, summers: www.sfu.ca/pubworks.

Surrey Writers' School:

www.surreywritersschool.com

Vancouver Community College's Creative Writing program: www.vcc.ca/programs-courses/.

Burnaby Writers' Society, workshops and groups: www.bws.bc.ca/.

Federation of BC Writers:

www.bcwriters.com. Look under links for groups in BC ... under programs for workshops in the province.

Canadian Authors' Assn:

www.canauthors.org/branches.html.

Workshops and courses.

Please visit the Beacon blog at:
www.beaconlit.blogspot.com



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