



The Beacon

Your guiding light for writing and publishing

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Branding for Writers

Branding is all about gaining name recognition and a solid market position that highlights you and your product.

And, branding applies to writers every bit as much as to a box of detergent, and in today's competitive market, more than ever. It is an essential component in developing your publishing platform and for increasing sales of your work before and after publication, in book form or in magazines.

But, most importantly, branding means getting known as an author or freelancer worth reading.

The branding process for writers includes:

- **identifying** your brand or brands (see below)
- **differentiating** your brand of books/articles from others in the same fiction genre or nonfiction subject (see spring issue)
- **positioning** yourself and your work (summer, if enough interest)

IDENTIFYING YOUR BRAND: Figure out the overarching theme of your books and articles, and the expertise and value you bring to them. This effort will eventually reveal your **brand** as you develop as a writer, and it is much more than your books' category and sub-category, or your freelance topic. It is not sufficient to say "I write mysteries" or "I'm a travel writer." They are not specific enough. Mystery brands are often the sleuth themselves - think of DI Lynley in Elizabeth George's novels; in the travel world, your brand may be a region or a mode of travel, for example.

I found asking those who knew my books and articles provided the best insight into my commercially published work. Two comments got me drilling down further: "You are fascinated by what motivates leaders" and "You write history as if it's personal."

If you write in more than one genre or subject, go through the process for each one. I ended up with these drafts for my two distinct brands:

1. *I write Canadian history for adults and teens that tends to focus on the motivation of extraordinary leaders.*
2. *I am a guiding light for Canadian writers seeking publication.*

The latter, incidentally, drives this newsletter, my blog and website, and provided my company name and logo.

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From the
editor's desk

When does **critique become criticism**? This is the razor edge we straddle in writers' groups.

If you critique, either live or virtually, first jot down something positive about the piece you're reading. The trick for the negatives is this: identify the deficiency in the piece that's been read but don't name it. Figure out what's caused it. Then, speak and/or write down your suggestions for rectifying the deficiency. For example: Rather than write *Lacks tension* or *Boring*, write *Increase the tension in paras 2-3 by using shorter sentences and more active verbs*.

I have been using **Skype** for several years to FREE video-call my far-flung family and friends. But for some reason, I hadn't used it for my coaching practice. Perhaps because, until recently, people had not caught on to Skype. That's all changed since most monitors now have webcams and mics built in.

Today I use Skype with clients near and far—last week I spoke face to face with clients in Florida and Australia, and prevented a return drive from Port Moody to Abbotsford. Quite a saving! Since I deep-sixed my land line, I also use Skype for most long-distance calls and to reduce those interminable minutes on hold to utility companies, which suck time from my phone plan.

Download Skype at www.skype.com and visit me with your questions. My Skype name is **Julieh5**.

Julie H. Ferguson

Syntax Defined—and Understood

By Joyce Gram, Writer and Editor

Syntax, simply put, is word order in a sentence. When we write, we convey meaning by the connection and relation of our words. If we ordered those same words differently, we would change the meaning, sometimes dramatically. When we order those words with skill—skill that comes from command of the language and deep understanding of its complexities—we “create prose that thrills.”

Turning syntax “from a minefield into a stamping ground” is what *Sin and Syntax: How to Create Wickedly Effective Prose* by Constance Hale is all about. Hale defines syntax as “that collection of prissy grammar rules dictating how to put words together.” But not for a moment does she suggest that any writer can get away with not knowing those rules, which she also calls “the sensible system.” Learn the sensible system, she says, if only to know how to escape it in flights of creative fancy.

The table of contents of *Sin and Syntax* reads like the most ordinary of grammar texts: nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives; the subject, the predicate; simple sentences. Don’t be fooled. Every chapter is a fresh—and funny—take on old stuff, beginning with *Bones*, the grammar sermonette; followed by *Flesh*, the lesson on writing; and *Cardinal Sins*, the catalogue of true transgressions, of errors made in ignorance; and concluding with *Carnal Pleasures*, where Hale shows “how breaking the rules can lead to breakthrough prose.”

For decades, or longer, style and writing guides have exhorted us to *use the active voice* and *omit needless words* (Strunk and White), or adhere to the “four articles of faith”: clarity, simplicity, brevity and humanity (Zinsser). Hale accepts all that but goes further and deeper. She says: relish every word; be simple, but go deep; take risks; seek beauty; find the right pitch.

Constance Hale, *Sin and Syntax: How to Craft Wickedly Effective Prose*. New York: Broadway Books, 2001.

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Take a look at these articles by Frances Peck, writer, editor and teacher:

[The Secrets of Syntax \(Part I\)](#) and [The Secrets of Syntax \(Part II\)](#)

“In the beginning was the word. But by the time the second word was added to it, there was trouble. For with it came syntax . . .”

—John Simon, *Paradigms Lost*

Events/courses for Writers

Dec 11: A.m: *Alien Tracks to Magician Spells: Learn How to Write and Successfully Publish SF and Fantasy* – Nina Munteanu

And, p.m: *Building Characters Who Tell Their Own Stories* – Lois Peterson

Both at Semiahmoo Library, 1815 - 152nd Street, Surrey. Register at the Surrey Writers’ School, www.surreywritersschool.com/coursesandregistration.aspx.

Jan 10-Mar 14: The winter session of **Port Moody’s Monday evening writers’ group** is now open for registration—call 604.469.4561. Runs Monday evenings from 7-9:30pm at Kyle Centre. We are an enthusiastic, eclectic bunch of experienced and emerging writers of fiction and nonfiction. Due to extended vacations in the sun (!), there are a couple of spots open for the Winter term—Jan 10 to Mar 14.

Feb 12: E-books, E-readers, and E-publishing: Are You Ready? demystifies the exciting world of electronic publishing for writers and readers. Port Moody Public Library, 1:30-4:30 pm. FREE! But you must register at 604.469.4577 after New Year (only 30 seats). Leaders: Nonfiction author, [Julie H. Ferguson](#), and mystery author, [Debra Purdy Kong](#); plus a librarian to show us how to borrow e-books.

Losing interest in your WIP

I go through a phase I heartily detest when I’m writing a book. After I’ve finished the first draft, I start losing interest about one third into the revision process. My self-talk gets negative, “This book is boring. My writing is awful. Why should I bother any more?” It happens with every book I write.

Now, I recognize this phase for what it is, but it thoroughly scares writers the first time it occurs. I assure you—it’s common and normal. It too will pass!

I’ve learned to view this mental slump as a signal of exhaustion with the book. My answer is to take a complete break from the manuscript, indeed from all writing if I can. I have to stop not only tinkering with my ms, but also thinking about it. It takes me a good two weeks to achieve this.

I try to plan a vacation for the time I expect my motivation to plummet and I leave my lap-top behind. If I can’t go away, I fill my time at home—decorate a room or play a lot of golf. This solution works for me every time and I return to the book full of ideas and energy. Try it!

Please visit *The Beacon* blog at:
www.beaconlit.blogspot.com



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