

about 1500 words

WRITER'S CRAMPS

By Lloyd Hudson Frye

Months of looking for work was getting on his nerves. Everyone he knew was getting back to work after the lay off. John S. Temple was 55 but looked much older. A life of stress had aged him cruelly.

All this time he had nothing to do but send the resume yet again. He started writing a story, then another, and another. Soon he was showing his family his stories, then people he knew at school, finally he sent in emails to people he used to work with. The responses were best from the family. They said his stories were good, but needed some work. He resented the "some work" part.

He began to send files of his epic story to hundreds of literary agents and publishers he found on the net. He answered submission requests he found online and soon was getting "not our type of subject matter" emails back. Still he wasn't discouraged, he'd heard it's hard to get published, but he believed in his epic story and was convinced it would make a great movie and series of books with sales in the millions.

Finally, after months of emailing his story, an ezine answered and an editor said it was a great story. The editor was encouraging and suggested he add dialogue to an otherwise straight narrative story. John was excited at the prospect of getting published on the site. The editor suggested he look into a writer's workshop to hone his skills. Great a chance for someone to see what a great story he had come up with.

He reworked some of his earlier stories and entered them for others to read and critique. The reviews were devastating to John. He knew the Nobel Prize for literature wasn't a likely shot this early, but the flaws in his work were many. The words of encouragement seemed swamped by the points he needed to improve on. He was sure he had deluded himself into thinking he could write. Two days went by and he became determined to quit the site. He said goodbye to several of his reviewers and tried to make an apologetic retreat while he had any sense of pride left. But then he got emails that said do it for the joy of writing, not for fame and money.

Starting all over he began to try to put more detail into his stories. He worked and worked at giving every detail he could think of to describe the scene and the

character's appearance and their feelings. But he got reviews that said, "Show me, don't tell me."

This frustrated John to no end as he tried to give pictorial views of the story.

Instead of writing what he saw in his mind, he tried to type pictures of the people and the scenes that would show exactly what he couldn't seem to say in words. His stories became extremely hard to write as he endeavored to depict the settings using the keyboard.

FIG. 1

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Scenery wasn't so bad, but the faces would take him hours as he tried every character on the keyboard to get the expressions just right.

FIG. 2

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No matter how hard he tried he just couldn't get the picture to show the emotions that were called for in the scene. He finally gave up, and went back to trying to describe what he saw in his mind.

He noticed trends in the reviews. Soon he had a conversion table for understanding the comments being made. Outside of the reviews that out and out said they didn't like any part of the story, that none of it worked for them, he was able to decipher the writer's vocabulary so he could understand what they were saying. He would refer to his conversion table when he was reading a review.

FIG. 3

What was said in the review	What they probably meant by it
----- Need to tighten it up	----- The story rambles on and on without saying much and if it does, the reader has become so distracted or bored they have quit caring altogether
Needs housekeeping	Punctuation mistakes, typos, mix of past and present tense, passive state, poor wording, incomplete sentences, dangling participles, and lousy grammar are to be found throughout your work
Show me, don't tell me	You haven't described completely the exact appearance of the mole behind the right ear, low, against the ear lobe or fully described the look on the hero's face after finding out his sweetheart has died of some terrible disease
I loved your story	They read past the first couple of lines after opening up the story, and at least read enough to review it
Needs some work	You shouldn't put it up yet, it was a waste of everybody's time to bother reading such dribble
Don't understand the ending	Your story has no point, the ending, one of convenience for shock value or worse, to confuse the reader in an attempt to seem profound
Have someone read it aloud to you	The logic and flow of your story is absurd if not down right idiotic
Hope these thoughts are helpful	You don't have the slightest idea what you're doing as a writer, come back after you've taken classes in creative writing at an accredited school
Would have liked to know more about the main character	The story was poorly developed, the people drawn so flat that they didn't seem real
Overall, very readable	In spite of the poor craftsmanship of the story, the reader was able to push through it to get credit for one of the five required reviews
This one has potential	If you rewrite the whole thing with the idea of changing almost everything you've written, it might in time be alright to read someday

Too repetitive	Used the same word either in the same sentence or in an adjoining sentence
With some deeper character development through better dialog and a more natural progression of their relationship, the story will be better	You have no idea what a well written story is supposed to be
You may think I'm flaming your story, but I'm not	You're insecure and can't handle honest, helpful suggestions
Instead of.....try this...	You're saying it all wrong, dummy
I fail to see a theme here or a story line	They hated the story and could identify with the characters or their lives
Frankly I would not read on at all after reading the first paragraph, it did not hook me, there is no style, no humor, weak characterization, cannot define any of the characters, etc, etc, etc, for what seems like several paragraphs	They hated it

The table helped a lot in deciding exactly how the stories were getting received by writers and would be writers. The classier people on the site could tell a newbie review by telltale signs that would magically appear in all the reviews John wrote. He looked at copies of reviews he'd given and noticed the following in most of them:

- Started off with how he liked the story, whether he understood it or not
- Next came some dumb anecdote in his life

- Followed by how that anecdote was related to the story
- Then he'd mention his favorite parts
- If running short, he'd say whether he found any grammar errors
- Finished with a thank you for a fun read

He wanted to say more to actually contribute to the story with a pithy comment or suggestion as to how to put a line better on paper, but the fact was he was in awe of the writer and couldn't find anything intelligent to say. Much of the time, he couldn't even figure out what the writer was saying, with all the heavy imagery, metaphors, similes, and what seemed like obscure literary references to people and places he'd never heard of.

John still puts an occasional story now and then, but his dreams of being a writer are no more. He cringes each time he sends one up, just like his reports in fifth grade, when he'd have to wait till Monday to see a C- or D+ in big red letters in the upper right hand corner of the top page, where all the surrounding kids could plainly see.

THE END