



THE REAL+GOOD WRITER'S
Genre Guide

THE WORKBOOK

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Introduction

A Real+Good Story should have the following things:

- + Plot
- + Character
- + Entertainment
- + Big Themes
- + Escapism

It should strive to convey big emotional truths about the world. The reader should be entertained and thoroughly enjoy reading it. And if it doesn't have a plot or a character, it's literally not a story. You can't have a story without someone doing something (aka, a character going about a plot).

The stories that stick with us for a long period of time have all of these traits. All of them. That's what makes them good. But, in fact, every story EVER has these traits. I promise.

There's this big war between literary fiction and genre fiction, and it's a whole chunk of annoyingness. Whether the story in question is literary fiction or genre, these 5 elements exist. The difference comes into play when you look at where the writer has chosen to place the weight, the emphasis of the story.

Genre pays more attention to **entertainment, escapism, and plot**.

Literary Fiction pays more attention to **theme and character**.

THAT'S IT.

When you write your story, you're going to have to choose where to place your emphasis. But all of these things should be present in your story to write something real, good, and true.

So, let's break down these traits and see how they function inside a text. Then, we'll analyze your own story so you can make conscious decisions about how to tell the story you want to tell.

ARE YOU READY? LET'S DIVE IN!

Defining *Literary Fiction*

DEFINING LITERARY FICTION

Defining literary fiction is a topic that has plagued writers for-freaking-ever. Technically, a lot of diverse books spanning many topics and many approaches can fit into this category. It's kind of a "catch-all" for books that are deemed to be of merit and don't fit neatly into any other category alone. You can fit a wide variety of things under this massive umbrella.

Wikipedia says, "Literary fiction, also known as serious fiction, is a term principally used for fictional works that hold literary merit, that is to say, they are works that offer deliberate social commentary or political criticism, or focus on the individual to explore some part of the human condition."

TRAITS OF A LITFIC NOVEL

The things they have in common are they often (but not always) have:

- + Complex symbols
- + BIG and ominous themes
- + Artistic
- + More character-devoted rather than plot-intensive
- + Focus on emotions rather than action
- + Strive to reach a higher meaning, a bigger and more abstract truth about the world we live in
- + Strive to be complex, emotionally resonant, and timeless

WHERE YOU'LL FIND LITFIC

This is what is taught in academia. These are the novels that are up for the Pushcart and the Nobel Literature and the Genius Grant and the O'Henry and the Best American.

CRITICISM

They're also accused of being too artsy and boring. Sometimes they move too slow. Sometimes they're too dense, too "smart," and are difficult to read.

EXAMPLES

- + *The Great Gatsby*
- + *Huckleberry Finn*
- + *Jane Eyre*
- + *Brave New World*
- + *Dracula*

Defining Genre Fiction

DEFINING GENRE

Defining genre is somewhat more straightforward. You can tell if a novel is a romance or a mystery based on what happens in the story and how the story is told.

Wikipedia says, "Genre fiction, also known as popular fiction, is plot-driven fictional works written with the intent of fitting into a specific literary genre, in order to appeal to readers and fans already familiar with that genre. Genre fiction is often controversially dismissed by literary critics as being pure escapism, clichéd, and of poor quality prose."

TRAITS OF A GENRE NOVEL

Genre, stereotypically (and key word being: stereotypically) has:

- + Intentions to entertain the reader
- + Lots of plot events happen that move the story forward and they're at the forefront of the story
- + Not as much about the "who" of the story, but the "what" of the story
- + Might have predictable plots (romance: boy meets girl, longs for girl, finally gets to be with girl; or, mystery: a murder happens, they look for who-did-it, then they find who-did-it)
- + Must be engaging through interesting characters, or worlds, or voices for a reader to continue reading because the reader likely already knows what's going to happen in the end, roughly

WHERE YOU'LL FIND GENRE

These novels are often turned into movies. They often sell better and the writers make a lot more money. They are the "popular" books.

CRITICISM

They're accused of being too predictable, clichéd and not worthy of merit. They are accused of being entertainment-exclusive, a means to escape reality. They are accused of being basic, face-value.

EXAMPLES

- + Romance
- + Horror
- + Sci-Fi
- + Fantasy
- + Chick Lit
- + Mystery
- + Young Adult
- + Dystopian

Newsflash:

Not all literary fiction is great. Not all genre is great. Some literary fiction novels make a lot of money. Some genre fiction novels don't make any. Some literary fiction is extremely plot-heavy. Some genre fiction is extremely character-centric.

They are unfairly stereotyped. And there is SO MUCH GRAY AREA. Most novels have a bit of literary fiction and a bit of genre.

And yet there's this war between the two placing LitFic and Genre against each other. Academia only teaches "literary" things and the word "genre" now has a negative connotation. Genre thinks LitFic people are snobbish. People have literally yelled at each other because of the things other people have said about the classification of their work. It's a war. And it's stupid. And neither side is right.

Genre categorizations are highly subjective, and focused (nearly) exclusively on marketing rather than an end-all-be-all to what the work actually is. Just because something is labeled "romance," doesn't mean that it's not also "literary fiction" or "speculative" or "dystopian" or whatever other compelling aspects it has. The label is chosen based on whatever particular editor viewed as the most prominent story element, as well as what category they can place it in to generate the most sales. These genre placements can help find readers (which is a good thing), but it can also alienate readers (obviously, a bad thing).

And the biggest downside is the worst of all: that some readers may NEVER read a book that they might love just because it has been labeled with an arbitrary category that they don't think they like. Could you imagine never reading Harry Potter just because you didn't read "young adult"?

This shouldn't be a war of "us" versus "them" or black and white or any other contrived binary. The world is full of gray areas. Fiction can be simultaneously a mystery and a romance and scifi. Fiction can be whatever the hell it wants to be. All that it's required to be is a good story.

SO, LET'S SET THE INTENTIONS OF YOUR REAL
+GOOD STORY.

What Will Your Story Emphasize?

Every story has the following five elements: plot, character, entertainment, escapism, and big themes. The difference between literary fiction and genre fiction is where you choose to place the emphasis.

STORY = PLOT + CHARACTER + ENTERTAINMENT +
ESCAPISM + BIG THEMES

In the bubbles below, fill in how much emphasis you want your novel to have for each of the five elements. Consider your intentions of what you want this story to achieve. Consider no bubbles filled in as very little emphasis, and all 5 bubbles filled in as extreme emphasis.

Plot

Character

Entertainment

Escapism

Big Themes

How Do You Define a Real+Good Story?

What makes an amazing story is completely subjective. This is where you define what a Real +Good Story means to you. Does a Real+Good Story have romance? Supernatural elements? Death? Heartbreak? Character growth? Spiritual journeys? Realistic worlds? Fantastical elements? Funny dialogue?

On the left-hand side, list all the elements you can think of that define what a Real+Good Story means to you. On the right-hand side, list all the elements you can think of that DON'T qualify as a Real+Good Story in your mind. Completing this exercise is all about determining which genre conventions you should subscribe to and which you should abandon so you can write the story you want to write.

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Genre Conventions

Using your list of what a Real+Good Story *should* have, consider the genres that utilize that element (i.e. if you think stories should have romance, you'd consider the romance genre. If you think stories should have self-identity and growth, you might want to consider bildungsroman). Use this page to research the conventions of that genre and what make it work. Print out as many copies of this page as you need to research your various genres.

GENRE BEING RESEARCHED: _____

CONVENTIONS + COMMONALITIES OF THIS GENRE:

Genre Conventions

Using your list of what a Real+Good Story *should* have, consider the genres that utilize that element (i.e. if you think stories should have romance, you'd consider the romance genre. If you think stories should have self-identity and growth, you might want to consider bildungsroman). Use this page to research the conventions of that genre and what make it work. Print out as many copies of this page as you need to research your various genres.

GENRE BEING RESEARCHED: _____

CONVENTIONS + COMMONALITIES OF THIS GENRE:

Your Current WIP Novel

INTENTION + ATTENTION IN YOUR NOVEL

Consider the novel you're currently working on and answer the following questions. This will help guide your intentions for it, which will help illuminate where to focus your attention in your revision process.

What are your intentions of writing this story? What do you hope this story accomplishes or achieves?

What does your reader come to this story for? What does your reader expect in this story? What does your reader want to see happen in this story? What emotions do you hope to evoke?

What genres do you think your novel might fit in? Why do you think it would fit in those genres? Are those the genres in which you hope to market your book? How can you get closer or further away from that?

Your Current WIP Novel

COMPARING YOUR WORK TO SIMILAR WORKS

When your novel is finished and you're ready to sell it, what 5 books would you consider to be similar to it? Which books are your influences and competitors? Why?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

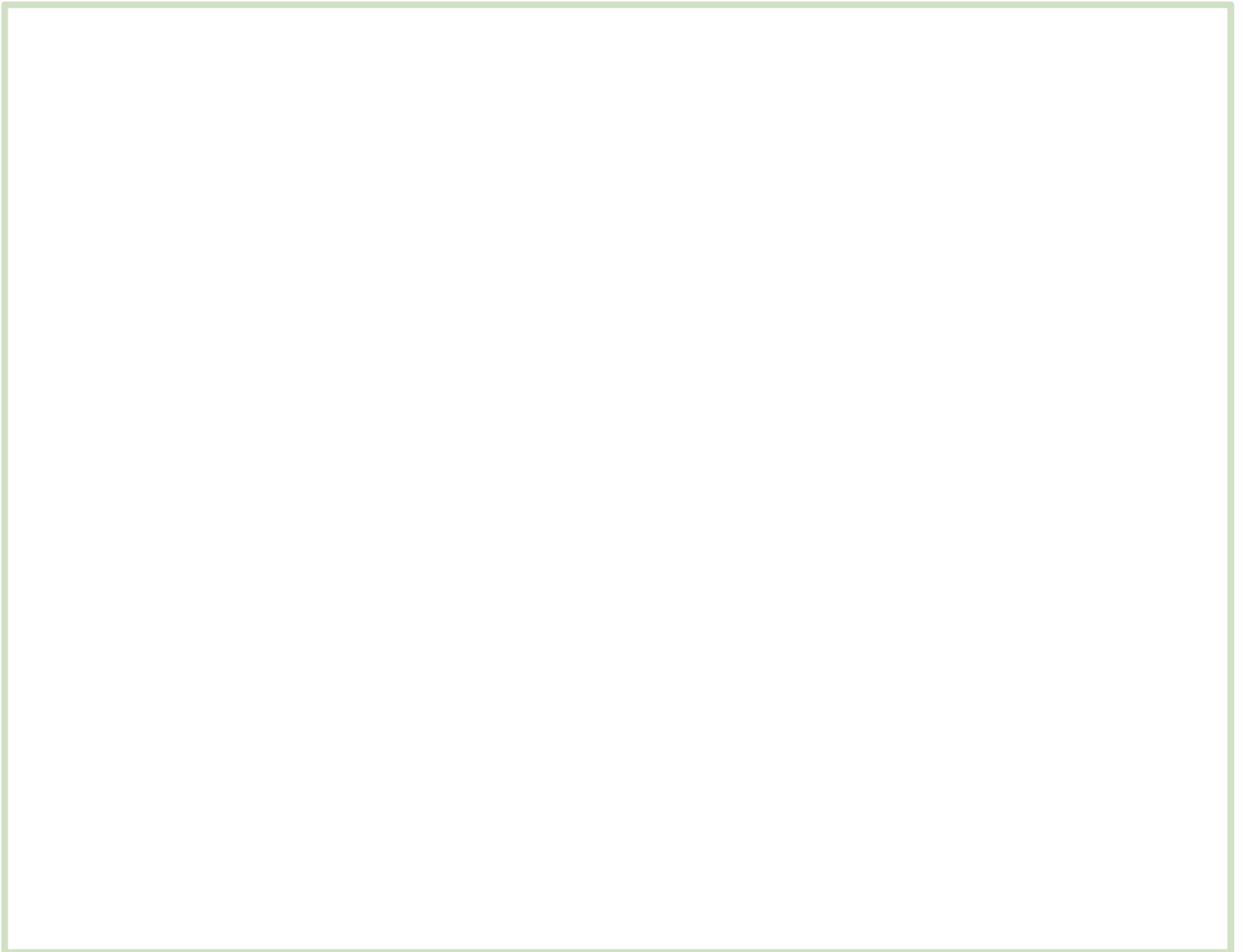
How are these books marketed? What genres and categories are they placed in? (Go to Amazon, search them, and explore the categories at the bottom of the sales pages).

Your Current WIP Novel

COMPARING YOUR WORK TO SIMILAR WORKS

What do these 5 stories have in common? Think in terms of plot, character, escapism, entertainment, and theme. Think in terms of the way their marketed. Think in terms of the way the story is told (i.e. pacing, language, character development).


Use this as your guide of how to strengthen and what to revise in your own novel.



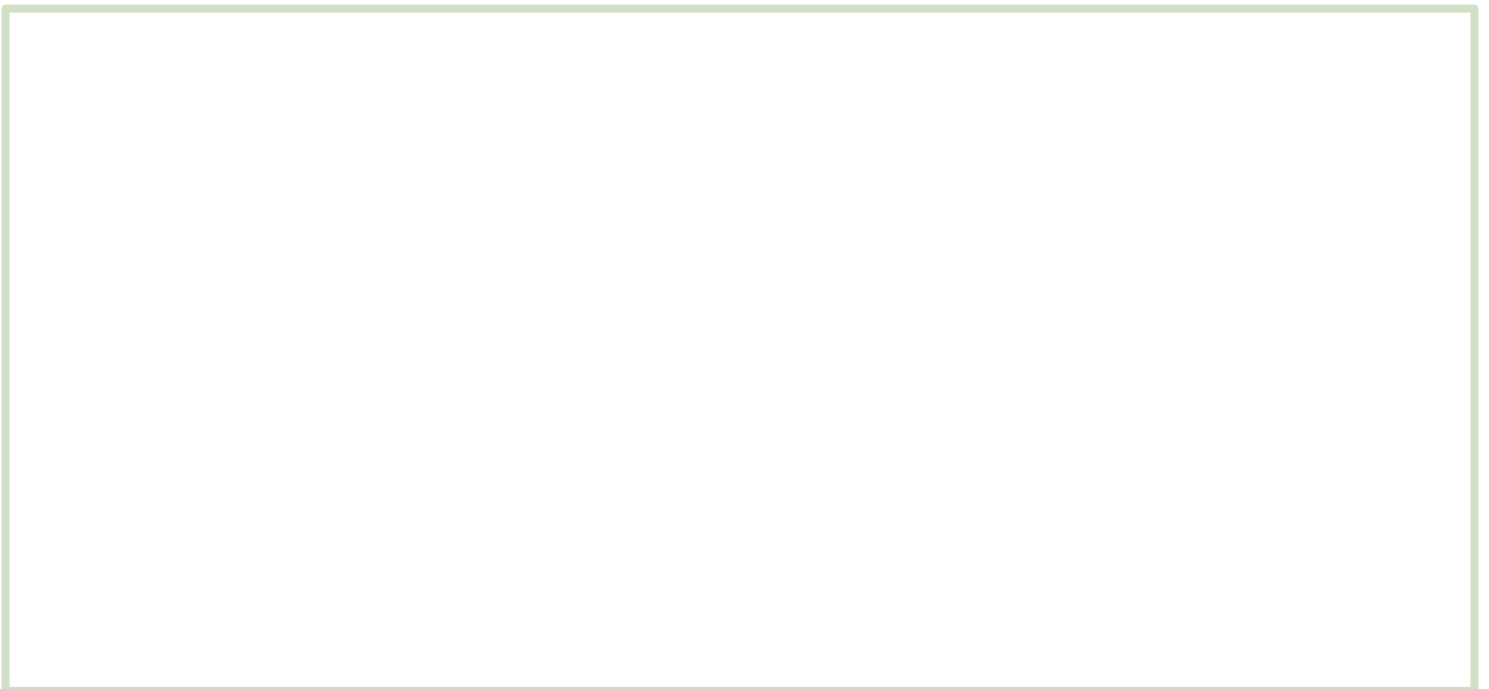
Your Current WIP Novel

DIVING DEEPER

What other genres haven't you considered that could give your novel an edge? Think wide and deep here. Branch out of your comfort zone and brainstorm.



What is your weakest link of emphasis out of the five components that make a story? What can you do to increase the emphasis? Use this as the forefront of your revisions.



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