
Which places in your life have had the biggest impact on you? Why do these places have significance for you? What emotions do they evoke?

“The places with the most impact were my hometown where I grew up, and the UK, where I met my wife. I think early impressions in life are more lasting. There is a stark contrast in what is today versus the way it was, and we often forget those values. I like to write about the way it was, a simple lifestyle and old-fashioned American values.”

“About England and Scotland, many fond memories will be with me forever. My wife was Scottish, and the Scots know how to socialize and be merry. There wasn’t a mean bone in my wife. She had the most magnetic personality I’ve known, and could talk to anyone. She made you feel good, just to be with her. She knew exactly what to say to lift you up, and she could make you laugh. She could’ve been a stand-up comedian.”

When is it better to use exposition to tell readers facts, than show them within the course of the scene?

“I think the best time to use exposition is to fill-in important details that dialogue or action alone does not cover. But if you have the space, it’s much better to intermingle exposition with action and dialogue in balance. Background information has to be exposed somehow, and perhaps the best way is to simply narrate the facts. But keep it short, and link this with a string of dialogue.”

What kind of vivid external markers best explain a character’s personality?

“I think external markers of any kind give reader’s insight into personality. Biting nails, not looking one in the eye, standing too close or too far away from someone, use of cliché’s, chronic eye twitching, fiddling with clothing, endless jabbering, being too quiet, never smiling, etc. How readers will interpret these clues depends largely upon circumstances of each scene.”

What are the most important qualities to convey if a character is going to be sympathetic to the reader?

“This is a tough one. It depends on a lot of factors. If a writer is talented enough to shape the reader’s POV, then plug-in qualities that appeal to that POV. You normally do this through the protagonist, but you could also use the antagonist. Everyone does not necessarily admire protagonists. Use whatever is mission-critical to your plot.”

If your main character is not meant to be sympathetic, what makes the reader want to keep reading about that character?

“My short answer is whatever turns them on! You have to ask the question, what is the target market—your intended audience? Based on that, you should write what appeals to them. It could be their lust for vengeance, justice, clinical philanthropy, or simply to satisfy curiosity—no matter how you portray a character. I think a writer should decide what hot buttons to push, and then let storytelling and prose take care of the rest.”
