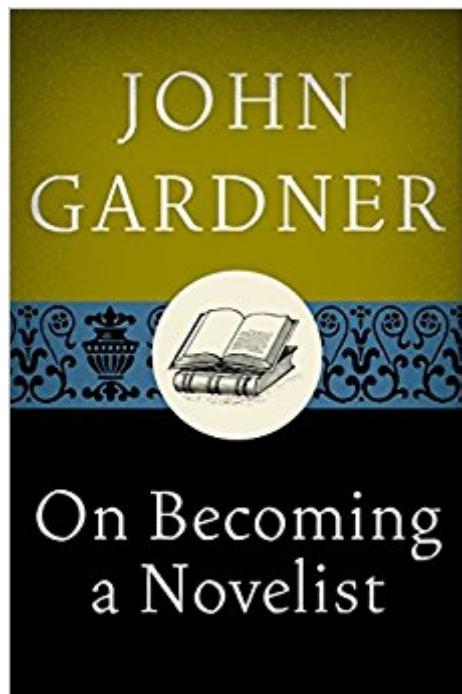


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# On Becoming A Novelist



## Synopsis

John Gardner's classic exploration of the creative processes and career paths of modern fiction writers. In this essential guide, John Gardner advises the aspiring fiction author on such topics as the value of creative writing workshops, the developmental stages of literary growth, and the inevitable experience of writer's block. Drawn from his two decades of experience in creative writing, Gardner balances his compassion for his students with his knowledge of the publishing industry, and truthfully relates his experiences of the hardships that lie ahead for aspiring authors. *On Becoming a Novelist* is a must-read for those dedicated to the craft and profession of fiction writing. This ebook features a new illustrated biography of John Gardner, including original letters, rare photos, and never-before-seen documents from the Gardner family and the University of Rochester Archives.

## Book Information

File Size: 2411 KB

Print Length: 172 pages

Publisher: Open Road Media (September 21, 2010)

Publication Date: September 21, 2010

Language: English

ASIN: B00AB7NYZU

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Not Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #295,588 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #217 in Books > Reference > Almanacs & Yearbooks #281 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Reference > Writing, Research & Publishing Guides > Publishing & Books > Authorship #660 in Books > Reference > Writing, Research & Publishing Guides > Publishing & Books > Authorship

## Customer Reviews

I found this book beyond my expectations, showing the pitfalls I had experienced directly, and echoing what I warned my colleagues and students. It is in fact not just a guide for a "young" novice

trying to be a novelist but a critical advice for even the professional or the elitist who may easily forget about the magic of writing, or as Gardner puts it, neglect the magical job of creating an incessant vivid "dream" in the minds of the readers, not interrupted by anything. In this regard, the book is really exceptional in its genre. It warns the writer not to forget about the entertaining/charming core of story-writing, or not to be mesmerized by the elitist or critics' approach. Even though language is very important it should not be overdone unless you want your story or characters being devoured by the dragon of a bombastic language; and even though technique is a significant part of any story-writing it should not be so heavy to crash the story by overloaded trite tropes or superficial symbolism ... The book is not a writing-made-easy, but rather about the hard work of acute observation, years of hard-work, revising and constant editing until it turns into a satisfactory work of art. It is, however, a WORK not just piece of art! I read the book with an aesthetic joy ... And I think any writer would find the book quite useful and enjoyable even if it just crystalizes what you have directly experienced or learned as a professional writer! P.S. Perhaps the only drawback I found in the book is in the middle when the author, explaining the mystery of "epiphany" resorts to an example from his own novel and goes with a long descriptive interpretation of the denouement. But this few pages seem rather like a digression and it is not so negative to make me demote the book by giving it four star!

My favorite quote: "A good book is like a good wine, a common set of standards for good fiction is the creation of a vivid and continuous dream, authorial generosity, intellectual and emotional significance, elegance and efficiency, and strangeness." Especially good chapter on The Writer's Training and Education which holds up good models of a creative writing workshop, which should help the student "find his own way." (83) Pages. 138-145 have a clear exposition on how a new novelist can learn craft using small increments to build a short story. "Writing a novel is like running grain through a hammer mill: one has to get the central action rolling, and then feed in the background, or sprinkle in the larger implications, whenever and wherever one can do it without losing a finger."

With an forward by Raymond Carver and a concrete study of writing's symphony of syntax, this book hits hard and keeps hitting- Elimination of useless words and gimmicks, truthfulness in the telling, economy of language and endless revision just some of the topics, all relevant for today's realist fiction writer. Look at this from his preface: "Fine workmanship - Art that avoids cheap and

easy effects, takes no short cuts, struggles never to lie even about the most trifling matters (such as which object, precisely, a man might pick up to throw at his kitchen wall, or whether a character would in fact say "you aren't" or the faintly more assertive "you're not") - workmanship, in short, that impresses us partially by its painstaking care, gives pleasure and a sense of life's worth and dignity not only to the reader, but to the writer as well.....If you're considering this book and would like to write in the spirit of writers like these, don't go home without it. This book, Stephen King's "On Writing" and Steve Kowitt's "In the Palm of Your Hand" a great book on poetry writing, compromise my only books on the craft, carefully picked out and lovingly cherished after trying to read writing books by hack after hack.

John Gardner's book *On Becoming a Novelist* is all about you as a human. Where other books of the sort focus on literary theory, storytelling, and plot structure, Gardner instead centers on what it means to be a writer. He describes the ideal novelist in humanistic terms and outlines various qualities and characteristics a true novelist should have. In my opinion, following writing guides can only take you so far. Ultimately, who you are is more important than how you write. That is the thrust of Gardner's book, and everyone considering writing should take a good hard look in Gardner's mirror to see if they are truly up to snuff.

John Gardner has a keen awareness of what makes a great novelist and how to parse the great from the merely mediocre. As Stephen King does, Gardner cautions against liberal use of adverbs. Unlike King, unlike any novelist, Gardner says adverbs can be either your best friend or your worst nightmare. Compared to King, Gardner penetrates to a granularity King seems not to know exists. Although King is no amateur, Gardner is an artist. Gardner is an artist's artist. Although much of what Gardner says about the novelist could also be applied to painters and musicians, as Gardner himself applies it frequently to poets and writers of short stories, his advice to the would-be novelist is searing, honest, and accurate. He has no qualms about telling lackluster writers to find a trade elsewhere.

The characters were interesting. The horse analogies didn't interest me, but they were used in such a way that I could still enjoy the book. Overall I enjoyed reading the book, stayed up late to finish it. Don't be foolish to believe that the title is literally speaking of borrowed horses, it's deeper than that.

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