

265 Troubleshooting Strategies for  
WRITING NONFICTION  
Fine Clouse, Barbara  
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There may be more than or fewer than 265 Troubleshooting Strategies for Writing Nonfiction, but the book, with this same title, certainly has 265 good ones. The price, \$19.95, is a bonus.

One of the best features is the simple design. The book is divided into four parts, taking you through the four stages of writing: prewriting, drafting, revising and editing. Each of those sections is then divided into chapters, with the strategies numbered from 1, Freewrite, to 265, Use a Computer to Help You With Your Spelling. So, there is no order other than numerical. Fine Clouse is not trying to say there is one strategy more important than another.

Each of the strategies is backed up by good information, and examples are clearly written and explained. Fine Clouse isn't really telling you how to do your writing, but rather to "try this". In her Introduction, Myths About Writing: Don't Believe Everything You Hear, she separates the facts from the myths about writing, the first of which is "Writers are born, not made." Of course, we all know this is a myth. Don't we? Fine Clouse makes her point, or actually 10 of them, by outlining Habits of Highly Successful Writers. You've likely heard or read most of them already, so I won't list them. For many of us this may seem like preaching to the converted and we might think that, if we've been writing for a while, we do not need this advice or this book.

I urge you to at least give this book a good look. Just before a recent workshop, I had an editor tell me that while my story was well written, it wasn't what he'd said he wanted. I took heart after reading Strategy 104: Do Not Despair If You Must Start Over. "Often we must discover what we do *not* want before we discover what we *do* want to do; sometimes we must learn what we *cannot do* before we are clear about we *can do*. If you must begin again, do not be discouraged. Your first draft was not a waste of your time--it was groundwork that paved the way for the most recent effort."

Although this might seem like a simple platitude, I found it reassuring. I passed on this advice in the workshop. My not-yet-published writers seemed to take comfort that first drafts are not a waste of time.

While each section of the book has its merits Part 3, on Revising, is perhaps the most helpful to all writers, whether writing non-fiction or fiction.

There are countless how-to books on the writing craft. I've learned from many of them. Sadly though, many of them just sit on my bookshelf, only referenced occasionally. Even though I just started using this book, it seems destined to be one that will become dog-eared from continuous use. That is a sign of a well-loved book, which this is bound to become for me and for my workshop participants.

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**That organization is now known as the Professional Writers Association of Canada, and the newsletter, *PWAC Contact* is sent electronically.**