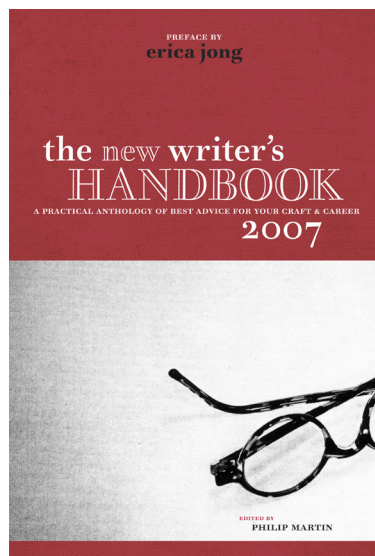


Review of *The New Writer's Handbook* edited by Philip Martin



The New Writer's Handbook is not the kind of book I usually review—it is meant for writers in general, not just for children's book writers. But there is much useful help and inspiration in it, for children's book writers as well as others.

Contents of The New Writer's Handbook: The subtitle sums it up well: "A Practical Anthology of Best Advice for your Craft & Career." Here you will find collected 63 essays, checklists, polemics, and how-to pieces, previously published in print and online, in a well-produced paperback of about 270 pages. You can see the balance between writing and business matters in the names of the 6 sections into which the book is divided:

- * Creativity, Motivation & Discipline
- * The Craft of Writing
- * Pitching & Proposals
- * Marketing Your Work
- * Internet Skills
- * Literary Insights & Last Words

Since there are such a large number of essays on varied subjects, it's difficult to give an accurate sense of the entire range of the book, but here are a few examples of articles that caught my attention (other readers would likely have

other choices): "The Benefits of Messiness," which makes the argument that some messiness is a good thing; "The Invisible Writer," which argues for the virtue of being invisible as a writer, of striving to write in a style that does not call attention to oneself; and "The Potential of Tips Booklets," a way to market a book and earn some money while doing so, of particular value to nonfiction writers. I particularly enjoyed "What Dr. Seuss Can Teach Us," which makes some interesting points about Dr. Seuss's approach to writing for children, not including his use of verse. Most of the selections, though, are not aimed at writers working in a particular market; those that are may also be useful for writers in other areas.

What else can you find? Here's a **partial** list of subjects: ideas, cultivating creativity, beginnings, revision, nonfiction scenes, getting interviews, critique groups, pitches (4 in all), query letters, proposals, bookstore events, press kits, websites, blogs, the publishing of literary fiction, traveling in time through words, music, and art. There's a lot to browse through, and the quality is consistently good.

Comments: In some ways, *The New Writer's Handbook* is a grab bag. I found a mix of the satisfying and the surprising. I wasn't surprised that I enjoyed reading about Jane Yolen's "Writing Rhythms." I was surprised by an intriguing, in-depth piece called "Haiku Techniques." I found good general advice, solutions to specific problems, and both inspiration and tools for writers in difficulty. But it's more than a grab bag, since a grab bag is a mixed-up collection of stuff, and what I like about this collection is that it has been compiled and arranged thoughtfully. It has breadth and depth, so that I expect I'll be coming back to it over the coming months and years.

Who Needs *The New Writer's Handbook*: This is primarily for **writers**, but if you are just getting started, and don't have a basic writing guide, don't get this book. You should get yourself a how-to with which you feel comfortable. So see my list of Writing How-To's. If you have been writing for a while, and want to build up the selection of tools in your writer's toolkit, this is a good alternative to another writing guide--the variety means you can find something relevant to a wide variety of situations, and browsing in it may give you ideas.

For similar reasons, **editors** and **writing teachers** may find *The New Writer's Handbook* useful, as a source of inspiration or assistance for someone with whom you are working.