

1 · BECOMING A WRITER

Talent is a compulsion, a critical knowledge of the ideal, a permanent dissatisfaction.

Thomas Mann

This is a handbook about the craft of fiction writing for new and developing writers. It can't conjure your talent, vision and imagination, or teach you how to write, but it can encourage the awareness that may help you to be observant, develop your own voice and become a better writer.

BEFORE YOU START

A handbook on writing cannot help you unless you invest time and effort in developing your talents. For example, it's unwise to set out to be a writer of fiction without first being a *reader* of it. Yet, as writing teachers know, many beginner writers do not read much or are unfamiliar with contemporary writers and styles of fiction. Writers of fiction who are also thoughtful readers of it are better able to make informed assessments of their own work, forge their own writing styles and try a range of structural approaches.

Becoming a writer also involves patience, a readiness to rewrite, developing a resilience to rejections from publishers, and being realistic. I once spent a week writing a detailed reader's report for a man whose first novel had been rejected by a publisher. The novel had interesting characters and a moving theme, but it was too long by half, sloppily constructed and badly written. In conversation with the man I learned that the novel was the story of his life, but he had no particular perspective on his life and merely reported everything that had happened to him. The manuscript needed a major rewrite and I suggested how this might be done. I happened to mention that even if the manuscript were accepted the print run would be about 3000–5000 copies, not all would be sold, and he would earn, in a trickle of royalties, only 10 per cent of the selling price of each book sold.

He was aghast. He didn't know about the hard work, rejection slips and low income that are the lot of the professional writer but expected to make tens of thousands of dollars in hardback, paperback, film and foreign translation rights. He said, 'Forget it,' and turned to another hobby.

I believe that many new writers have false or romanticised notions about writing, the writer's life and getting published. They don't realise that writing and rewriting require thought, care, patience and long hours of solitary work; that what is easy to read has been difficult to write. As long-distance runners need training, and *ongoing* training, in order to run a marathon, writers learn to write by observing, being perceptive, reading, writing, drafting and refining, and developing good work habits.

Writers take what they do seriously. Raymond Carver, an American poet and short-story writer, once heard a fellow writer say apologetically that his latest book would have been better if he'd taken more time. Carver was appalled: '... if the writing can't be made as good as it is within us to make it, then why do it?'

If I've sounded finger-wagging in these opening remarks, I'm wagging the finger at my younger self, who was in love with the idea of being a writer but didn't write, who later dashed off stories in an afternoon and considered them finished, who wasted time on projects that tested no abilities and brought no pleasure, and who took too long to develop the habits and state of mind required to become a writer. It all seemed too hard sometimes. Now, twenty years later, writing is all I do. I think and feel like a writer, and wouldn't have it any other way. Sure, it's satisfying to make a living from something I love doing, and see my books studied, translated or optioned for films, but the main reward has been to realise that I'm getting better at what I do. I hope you find the same sense of satisfaction, and I hope this book helps.

DO YOU REALLY WANT TO WRITE?

I often hear people say, 'I don't read but I know there's a book in me', or 'I could write a book if only I had the time', or 'My life has been so interesting it would make an interesting book', or 'I don't understand all the fuss about Isabel Allende: I could write something just as good', or 'I'm going to write a psychological mystery because they're big with publishers at the moment', or 'I was always good at English at school so I know I could write a good novel one day', or 'Now that I'm retired I think I'll write a book'.

The only possible response to these statements is, 'Do it, don't tell me about it'. It's not enough to hold a vaguely formed notion of wanting to write. As Australian poet Kevin Hart has said about the desire to write poetry, something beckons from the far side of experience. Writing comes out of a deep-seated need for self-expression and to make sense of life, tell stories, entertain, and capture what we feel when we read fiction that moves and enthrals us.

A related question is, 'Are you ready to begin writing?' Rainer Maria Rilke wrote in *Letters to a Young Poet* that he was 'almost ready' to begin writing when he was thirty, and that to write something worthwhile can take a lifetime.

I'm assuming that you badly—rather than idly—want to write, and understand that being a writer entails *becoming* a writer. Even so, I know—from my own experience, and from working with beginner writers—that there may be times when you'll need to tackle the problems of under-confidence or over-confidence.

UNDER-CONFIDENCE

You have a terrible secret, apparently one not shared by real writers: writing fills you with doubts, fears, anxieties and self-consciousness. Perhaps the words won't come, or are not there, or your prose is stiff and mannerly, or you never finish any of your projects, or you'll do anything to avoid sitting at your desk, or you stopped writing after the first rejection slip or critical feedback, or you're waiting for wisdom to come, or you're fearful of being judged, or you think your work has to be perfect, or you never know where you're going when you start something and think real writers don't work like that, or you can't write anything unless a teacher has set the topic and deadline, or you can't be a real writer because real writers are mad, doomed, brilliant, sensitive souls who never spend their Saturdays at the laundromat.

These are the common fears of new writers, but rest assured that *all* writers experience some of them from time to time. Some of us gain equilibrium quickly, others may stop writing for long periods, a few stop forever. This is a book about the craft of writing, not soul maintenance, but I've been a writer and worked with new writers for a long time now, and know something about the fears and misconceptions of writers.

I think many new writers find themselves waiting for that flash of creative insight they believe lies behind the writing of fiction, or believe that the best writing grows out of powerful feelings and intense passion. In fact, as Chapter 3 shows, anything at all, even the most mundane incident, can give rise to a story or novel, and the best writing and creative insights often come from writing calmly and with detachment—which is not the same thing as indifference—day after day. Don't sit and wait. Start writing, and write regularly—for the practice, and to find what it is you want to say. Also, new writers often don't trust themselves or their words—their own experiences or ways of speaking about them—and hold mistaken notions of what a short story or novel should be. Perhaps harking back to their school years they believe that 'good' writing must be 'arty', flowery or difficult to read. Others use 'literariness' and obscurity as a form of self-protection, fearing that readers might otherwise see through them. Certainly writing craft is important, but often it's the natural rather than the forced voice that sounds fresh and original. Vision, and writing assuredly, matter more than style, and will in fact impart style. New writers can often 'free' themselves by writing about a bad childhood experience in a simple, ordinary way. This might then be central to a larger work, or the key to another story. In this way we often find the story we realise is the one we wanted to tell all along.

New writers also feel anxious about planning. When Raymond Carver learned that fellow American short-story writer Flannery O'Connor usually didn't know where she was headed when she sat down to write a short story, he was 'tremendously heartened'. He'd thought only he wrote like that, and had been uneasy about it, as though it revealed his shortcomings. Paul Theroux was surprised to learn that V. S. Naipaul found writing to be 'torture', for Naipaul's work seemed so 'humorous and full of ease, the imagery precise and vivid, the characters completely human'. He later learned that to write well 'one went slowly, often backwards, and some days nothing at all happened'.

From time to time all writers find themselves knowing what to write but do anything to avoid writing. Having an idea is not the same thing as developing it on the page. Edna O'Brien once said that the essential quality of the writing life is stasis. We dodge writing even as we seek incentives to write. We hope, mope about and make copious notes to salve our consciences. Fear is often the key to the problem: fear that we're not up to the task, fear that our writing isn't good enough, fear of making mistakes, fear of being judged. It helps to identify this fear; it also helps simply to sit down and write, for then, often, the fear will vanish and the act of writing will unlock more writing, setting further ideas free, especially if the writing is not self-conscious but a natural expression of what we feel and think.

All writers find themselves giving up from time to time. They start but never finish projects, cut from one project to another, can't relax, follow fruitless distractions. It could be that they have chosen unwieldy, difficult or boring subjects, or haven't done the necessary contemplation, planning or research, but often they are putting off the sorts of fears mentioned above.

Sometimes writers are anxious that others will see their kind of writing as narrow and limited. They write only short stories, for example, or repeat themes, settings and situations in their novels and stories. This isn't necessarily a narrowness of range. For a start, the short story should never be seen as a lesser form than the novel, and writers who know where their interests lie are luckier than writers who seek them forever or dissipate their talents trying their hand at every form or genre. Fiction writing arises from two contrary yet complementary impulses, one toward economy, efficiency and implication—the short story—and the other toward expansion and indulgence—the novel. Some writers experiment endlessly, others find style and subject early in their careers and stick to them. The fine Canadian short-story writer Alice Munro is an example of the latter. She writes only short stories, and writes mostly about small-town, small-farm life in southern Ontario.

Criticism of one's writing can be wounding, but it's important not to confuse this with a judgement of your *person*. Try to stand apart from your work and judge it calmly. Accept where you've made errors or written badly, for how else, apart from writing practice, will you learn to be a better writer? Rewriting may be difficult for new writers who are often finding their voices by writing anew each time, but it's a critical means to developing writing skills.

Try to trust your own feelings and experiences. It can be paralysing to hold the belief that you have nothing to write about because you haven't lived yet or nothing's happened in your life. As Flannery O'Connor said, 'If you've survived adolescence, you have enough to write about for the rest of your life.'

OVER-CONFIDENCE

Equally as crippling for writers is over-confidence. Overconfident writers believe that simply because they have written something it has worth, and doesn't require correction or improvement. They see writing as 'self-expression', an extension of the self, and that this makes it somehow intrinsically worthwhile. They take criticism of their writing as criticism of themselves personally. To the question, 'Can writing be taught?' they might respond, 'Can anything be learned about writing?' While anxiety may lie at the heart of over-confidence, overconfident writers also have an insufficient sense of language as something separate from themselves, an external well from which words may be selected and artfully arranged according to techniques that can be learned and developed. They regard 'rules' as authoritarian and believe that 'creativity' comes from a divine spark, unfettered by conventions, strategies or techniques. For them there is no sense of the role that *form* plays in making *content*; no sense of

language's playfulness, insinuations, shapeliness, poise, formal constraints, beauties and provocations; no sense that revision and self-editing are a natural and necessary part of the writing process.

In fact, it's through learning the 'rules'—and how to use, subvert and 'unlearn' them—that writing becomes a pleasurable, liberating act and the words effective. As the American poet Robert Frost said, when responding to someone who suggested that surely he didn't think about technical tricks as he wrote his poetry: 'Madam, I revel in 'em!' Just as writing poetry requires an understanding of factors like metre, writing fiction requires an understanding of characterisation, structure and viewpoint—even if you eventually know enough to risk dispensing with these things.

HOW THIS BOOK WORKS

The trouble with a book like this is that it has to separate out discrete elements of fiction writing, such as plot, character and setting, in order to identify them, when in fact they work interdependently during the actual writing of a short story or novel. Nevertheless, there are times, especially when we're 'blocked', rewriting or tackling a matter of technique, that we stop to ask ourselves questions like: 'Is this story heading in an unlikely direction?' or 'Is this character necessary?' or 'Have I made the house spooky enough?'

So I have taken a conventional approach to fiction writing—after all, James Joyce could only write a novel as original as *Ulysses* because he had already written the more conventional *Dubliners*. It's only through learning the basics that writers recognise how the boundaries might be extended. Nevertheless, where appropriate I do discuss some of the techniques of experimental fiction.

The advice in this book may be applied to all types of fiction writing. It challenges the notions that 'fiction writer' means 'a novelist for an adult readership', that writing short stories is merely a stepping stone to writing novels, that children's and genre (for example, romance or crime) fiction is 'lighter' or easier to write than 'serious' fiction, and that children's and genre writers are not talented enough to write 'serious' fiction. In fact, I believe that good short stories are more demanding to write than novels, and some of the most interesting fiction being published is written by children's and crime writers.

The chapters in this book are grouped loosely according to the types of material covered—for example, 'Plot' is grouped with 'Planning' and 'Structure', and 'Character' with 'Dialogue' and 'Point of View'—but no chapter can be read in isolation, for all of the aspects of fiction work together.

I often use the terms 'tension' and 'suspense'. These mean more than simply tightening the screws in a mystery or thriller novel. Almost all novels and stories rely on their effects by posing questions and maintaining doubts about outcomes.

The questions 'Will she make the same mistake?' or 'Will he get the girl?' can be made just as suspenseful for the reader as 'Who committed the murder?'

GOOD WORK HABITS

Experienced Writers

I write the first draft of a story or novel with a blue ballpoint pen on the backs of used A4 paper, then type it up on the computer, print it out, edit it by hand, type in the corrections and print it out again—many times. By the time a novel is ready for submission I have a wine carton full of manuscript drafts.

But does it help you to know that? We are often curious about the writing habits of published writers, as though their methods might be the key to our own artistic or financial success. Consider the following:

Saul Bellow's habit was to work every day from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. without distractions. Colleen McCullough wrote ten drafts of *The Thorn Birds*, at times working eighteen hours a day. Anthony Trollope had a full-time job, but forced himself to write three hours a day, 10 000 words a week; he wrote fifty novels in forty years. Scott Turow spent eight years writing *Presumed Innocent* while commuting to work on the morning train. Peter Carey writes up to 1500 words a day, Erica Jong 300. V. S. Naipaul always writes several drafts, including handwritten drafts of typed drafts, and threw out 20 000 words of his novel, *The Mimic Men*. Michael Ondaatje writes five or six drafts by hand in notebooks before transferring the material to a computer for a further nine or ten drafts. P. D. James spends up to three years on each of her novels, half of this time on thinking and planning. Alex Miller took five years and six drafts to write *Conditions of Faith*, Sena Naslund four years and four drafts to write *Ahab's Wife*, and Roald Dahl six hundred hours over five months to write the short story, 'Mrs Bixby and the Colonel's Coat'. Gerald Murnane can spend hours on a paragraph, and he wrote seven drafts of *Landscape with Landscape*. The *Writers at Work* collections, comprising interviews that first appeared in the journal, *Paris Review*, reveal that most writers work in the mornings, but others work all day or only at night. Some write many drafts, the first quickly and subsequent ones more carefully, while others rewrite as they progress. All write regularly, every day if possible, even if they have other jobs; all know the value of rewriting; and all treat writing as hard, intermittently pleasing, work.

As these examples show, the real key is hard work, dedication and persistence. There is no trade secret. It all has to be discovered from within, through work and trial and error, and management of your twin natures—your creative side, which knows no rules, and your practical side, which criticises, edits and shapes.

Practical Advice

It's pointless to wait for inspiration. The brilliant idea that you jot down in your notebook at 2 a.m. or at a traffic light may be no more than a sentence that has lost its force the next time you read it, whereas sitting down every day and writing a few pages whether you feel like it or not will produce a sizeable output of work within a few months. You'll often find that writing unlocks more writing, that your mind will begin to focus and the ideas to flow once you start writing, and you can always go back and rewrite your false starts.

Try to establish a modest schedule that fits in with the other aspects of your life: for example, getting up two hours earlier or staying up two hours later; deciding upon a target of three pages or 1000 words a day; setting a deadline of twelve months to complete the first draft of your novel. Regularity is the key: it's better to write 100 words every day than have a blitz of writing once a month.

Write whether you feel like it or not. You might find that you're dependent upon a little behavioural obsession before you can start: some writers line up their pens and pads neatly, others sharpen their pencils, write standing up at a podium, play music, do exercises, drink tea, read their e-mails. Try going over the previous day's writing: this will help you to correct mistakes and absorb yourself in the voice of the work. Don't exhaust all of your material in one burst but stop at a point that allows you to go on the next day. Consider dealing with the task a day at a time. If you're writing a long work, such as a novel, don't tell yourself 'Today I'm writing my novel' but 'Today I'm starting the love scene', or 'Today I'm introducing the main character's mother'. You might write best when you're detached from the material, but you should never be indifferent to it, for this will show in the writing.

If you're 'blocked', you might find that it's better to do something related to your project than go shopping: a long walk to clear your head, for example, a trip to the library to follow up research issues, or a session of editing your manuscript. If that doesn't help, you may have to put the manuscript aside for some days or weeks and start a new project. Try not to worry about 'talent' or the lack of it. Writing ability comes from desire, temperament and the careful management of your instincts and feelings, and can be developed over time. Paradoxically, as you become a better writer you'll become more absorbed with writing as a craft, and probably find that writing gets harder rather than easier. Michael Ondaatje has said: 'There's this illusion

that if you've written four books you can write a fifth. But I always have a complete uncertainty that I can write another book, and an enormous sense of gratitude when I find I can.'

Revise, and revise again. Try to be honest. Who are you? What do you believe? Are you writing from within yourself or merely copying? Read your work aloud, perhaps onto a tape, listening for words, phrases and sentences that seem awkward or too long, and passages of dialogue that don't ring true. Correct the spelling and grammar if you can; never assume that that's the editor's job.

Not everything you write need or should be submitted to a publisher, of course. At the same time, understand that over-revision might destroy the freshness and spontaneity of your voice. The cut-off point between enough and too much revision is problematic. How does one assess that? Putting your manuscript aside and reading it with fresh eyes later is usually helpful (see Chapter 14), as is regular or systematic feedback on each manuscript draft (see below).

Daily Maintenance

Meanwhile, try to prepare for writing even when you are not actually doing it. Learn to be observant, sceptical, inquiring and speculative. Keep a notebook for ideas, snatches of dialogue, character sketches, descriptions and observations, and folders for useful newspaper clippings. Some of these you might never use, others you'll alter drastically; many will be vague stirrings that might be precursors of a more developed work, a few you'll sit on until another idea or image 'awakens' them.

It can take some writers years to develop a comfortable or authentic style, while in others it's there from the start. Learn to appreciate words, their sounds, meanings, playful possibilities, rhythms and conjunctions with other words. Read widely in all forms of writing, including 'junk' writing, in order to see how writers use and misuse language. Try copying out passages of writing you admire: look at them on the page and read them aloud, noting how the sentences are paced and punctuated and asking yourself why they're arranged like that and what effect it has compared to a different arrangement. Vladimir Nabokov once said: 'After many false tries, false moves, you have the sentence you recognise as the one you are looking for.'

GOING PUBLIC

Getting Feedback

Most writers, beginner and experienced alike, seek informed responses to their manuscripts and advice about writing craft from time to time. This is not always easy to get. A lucky few of us may develop a long-term, mutually advantageous relationship with a writer friend but, for most of us, good feedback is rare, sporadic or comes from a formal source.

In the first instance, try putting your work aside for some time (several days or weeks). When you come back to it you are bound to see it much more objectively. In this way you learn to give *yourself* feedback.

When approaching another person for feedback, try to choose someone who has experience or whose judgement you trust, bearing in mind that a loved one or friend might automatically praise your work or be reluctant to criticise it. You might also find, as I do, that when you talk to others about a book you're writing (or have to describe it in a grant application), the magic leaks away and you no longer want to write it.

It can be helpful to belong to a local writing group (a writers' organisation or local library may have details). These provide a supportive atmosphere in which to write and develop editing and rewriting skills, and the most active publish annual anthologies of their members' work.

Next, consider enrolling in a writing workshop. These are advertised in writers' newsletters and are offered by writers' centres, educational institutions and private tutors. Some are short-term and intensive (for example, a weekend), others long-term (for example, once a week for a

year). Most workshops allocate time to formal instruction, group discussion and workshopping participants' manuscripts. Amy Tan's first novel, *The Joy Luck Club*, grew out of feedback on a short story that Tan had presented to a writers' workshop. However don't be surprised if few members of a writing group give consistently valuable advice. There's not much you can do with a comment like, 'I don't really like your main character'. What does it mean? Is it a personal reaction or a statement about writing craft? Is your main character under-developed, wasted, inconsistent?

Even though most published novels and stories are written without benefit of formal instruction, you might also consider enrolling in a degree or diploma writing course offered by a university or TAFE college. You can't assume that a course can train you to write or be a writer, however, for only years of solitary dedication can accomplish that, and don't become a 'professional student' of such courses as a way of avoiding writing. The best that a good writing teacher can do is stimulate, demonstrate and encourage you to teach yourself by getting you to place more demands upon yourself.

Be wary of correspondence courses, for these may be costly and you forgo the benefit of personal contact with professional writers and your peers.

The Internet provides many opportunities for writers seeking feedback on their work. Where writers once used the Internet mainly for gaining information, they can now also take part in on-line discussions, read the electronic versions of magazines and newspapers such as *overland* and *The New York Times Book Review*, submit their work to electronic magazines and book publishers, or publish their work on their own websites. This form of publishing has the potential to reach a large and international readership, and to create opportunity for lively—if not always well-informed—feedback.

Finally, you might consider paying a manuscript assessment service for a written report on your work, or apply to work with a mentor through a writers' organisation.

Ultimately, however, no amount of external feedback can substitute for developing and valuing your own sense of authority.

Join the Writing Culture

Writing is a solitary activity. This suits most writers, and how else is a story or novel going to get written? But sometimes isolation can be crippling, and so you might consider taking part in the wider literary and writing culture. Many new writers attend readings in pubs, libraries, bookshops and other venues in order to meet other writers, gain a sense of what's being written, and find an outlet for their work. They also join writers' organisations—most of which offer workshops, public lectures, newsletters and information about short-story and poetry competitions—and regularly visit bookshops and read book reviews.

Your First Submission

Although getting into print involves the issues of finding a publisher, copyright and negotiating contracts (all of which lie outside the scope of this book) *state of mind* is also important. Once you have finished your final draft, selected an appropriate magazine or publishing house and submitted the manuscript, prepare to wait three or more months for a decision. Rather than sit chewing your nails, begin a new project at once. Identify your strengths and interests and follow these, and learn to identify opportunities. For example, I saw that my successful short story, 'The Bamboo Flute', which won an award and was published in a literary magazine, could be expanded and reworked as a novel for children. Since publication in that form it has sold tens of thousands of copies around the world and has never been out of print.

Don't expect to be published immediately, although this may happen. Most new writers, and even many established writers, either have their work rejected or are asked to revise it. A well-known literary quarterly might receive 5000 short stories each year, and publish no more than a dozen of them. A book publisher might be sent 5000 unsolicited manuscripts each year but accept less than ten of them. If your manuscript is rejected, try not to think that *you* have been

rejected. It may be that the publisher's list is full for the next year or two, they've just published a story or novel much like yours, they're only accepting manuscripts submitted via an agent or by authors already on their list, they don't publish fiction. Perhaps your subject matter (for example, inner-urban grunge) is no longer fashionable, or your manuscript simply needs more work. You're unlikely to be given a detailed response; after all, it's not the job of a publisher or an editor to give feedback unless your manuscript has been accepted. Either read your manuscript again with a critical eye, or send it elsewhere. The now-famous Australian novelist Elizabeth Jolley once had thirty-nine rejections in one year. Mem Fox's children's book, *Possum Magic*, a worldwide best-seller, was rejected by ten publishers and underwent many rewrites before it was finally published.

Even so, writing can be a world of envy, disappointment and depression—for all writers.

Alternatives to Commercial Publication

Novels and shorter works published on the Internet have the potential to attract large and diverse readerships. Internet publishing also offers alternative types and means of *authorship*: for example, the opportunity to co-write a story or novel with several other writers, interact with another's work (alter it, help write it, add to or subtract from it), or contribute to an ongoing 'serial'. Books published on compact disc offer video, sound and animation in addition to text and illustrations.

Or, at a more basic level, you might consider handing out broadsheets of your work, reciting on street corners or reading in pubs and on community radio. Self-publishing is becoming popular, as more and more authors, frustrated in their attempts to be published by traditional means, or wanting greater control over subject matter, literary quality, design and layout, decide to pay for the printing, promotion, distribution and sale of their books.

But don't confuse self-publishing, in which the author makes informed decisions about all stages of the process, with *vanity* publishing, in which the author merely pays to be published. Vanity book publishers charge very high sums and give little, if any, attention to promotion and distribution—because they have already been paid. Bookshops are unlikely to stock vanity publications or reviewers to review them. There are also several unscrupulous publishers of 'world' anthologies of stories and verse in which authors are expected to pay to have their work published and to buy the volume in which it appears. There is no 'quality control' of vanity publications, no feedback by an informed editor, no way of knowing if you're writing poorly or well.

Dealing with Family and Friends

When you begin writing regularly, certain changes will occur to your daily life. Some of them you'll bring about yourself; others will happen inevitably.

Your announcement that you intend to write will be greeted with mixed reactions from family and friends. If you're young you may be treated indulgently, or told there's no money in it (which is true), or told to get a good job first and write in your spare time. If you're retired, your writing may be viewed as a harmless way of passing the time. If you leave a good job to write, there may be frowns and recriminations. If you live with others, your insistence upon quietness, uninterrupted writing time, new equipment, a space in which to work, and a reallocation of domestic responsibilities might attract indifference, hostility or trade-offs. If you have little success early in your writing career the reaction might be: 'I told you so.' And you'll meet people who say, when you tell them that you're a writer, 'Yes, but what's your real job?' Writing is both undervalued and misunderstood.

Of course, those closest to you might also be understanding and supportive, recognising your need to write, helping you to create the best possible environment in which to write, and not forever judging your progress. You can return the favour by making compromises and not setting yourself up as a rare genius who must be tolerated and pampered. Value yourself and your work, but be prepared to learn, too, for a long apprenticeship is ahead of you.

