

Letting Your Writing Simmer

By Mary Anne Hahn

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Mary Anne Hahn
hahnmah@aol.com

WriteSuccess <http://writingsuccess.com>

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417 words

One of the most important lessons I've learned about writing--and one of its most difficult aspects for many of us--is what I've come to call the "simmering process."

You've just finished an article, story or query letter, and you get that adrenaline rush that comes with the completion of a job well done. Your prose sings. That opening paragraph, the one you'd struggled with for days, is perhaps one of the finest things you've ever written. Not one word wasted, and nary a dangling participle. You simply can't wait to ship it off to the editor, or your agent, or your customer.

But that's exactly what you have to do--wait. In other words, let it simmer a day or two.

But why wait? The sooner you send it out, the sooner you'll get the acceptance, the byline, the paycheck, right?

Well, maybe. On the other hand, you might be sending your work out before it's truly finished. The piece might still be undercooked, a little raw on the inside. And at this point, having just put what you thought was the final touch on your creation, you might be standing too close to it to spot its imperfections.

I have learned to let my essays and articles simmer, like a pot of stew on the stove, before submitting them. And it constantly amazes me, what I see in an article or essay I've written, after I've stepped away from it for a while. Typos and poor word selections seem to jump off the page at me, which I can now correct and improve. That wonderful paragraph that I once believed I could not live without appears unnecessary now, so I remove it. I replace that original lame title with a perfect one, one that will more likely beckon an editor to read it.

It happens every time. No matter how terrific the concept, how skillful the writing, I find that putting some distance between me and what I've written allows the seasonings in my words to work their magic.

If you're still itching to show your masterpiece prematurely, try throwing yourself into an entirely new writing project, or take a walk, or clean out your garage. I guarantee that once you return to it, and

view it with a fresh eye, you'll find flaws you can fix and untapped potential you can unleash. Your end result will be a something that you'll be proud to put your name on.

Here's to your writing success!

Mary Anne Hahn is editor and publisher of WriteSuccess, the free biweekly ezine for writers who want to pursue successful full-time writing careers. To subscribe, send a blank email to: writesuccess-subscribe@yahoogroups.com .

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