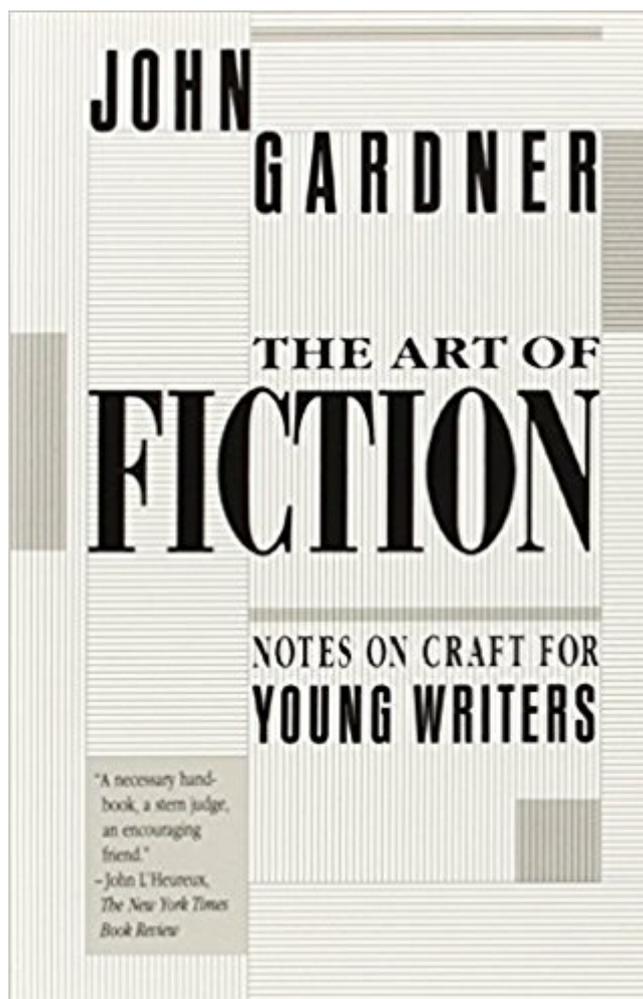


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The Art Of Fiction: Notes On Craft For Young Writers



Synopsis

This classic guide, from the renowned novelist and professor, has helped transform generations of aspiring writers into masterful writers—and will continue to do so for many years to come. John Gardner was almost as famous as a teacher of creative writing as he was for his own works. In this practical, instructive handbook, based on the courses and seminars that he gave, he explains, simply and cogently, the principles and techniques of good writing. Gardner's lessons, exemplified with detailed excerpts from classic works of literature, sweep across a complete range of topics—from the nature of aesthetics to the shape of a refined sentence. Written with passion, precision, and a deep respect for the art of writing, Gardner's book serves by turns as a critic, mentor, and friend. Anyone who has ever thought of taking the step from reader to writer should begin here.

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Customer Reviews

I recently re-read this classic book on writing fiction, and found it as relevant today as it was when it was first published. Because Gardner strives for "higher art", his musings and instructions for the beginner go much deeper than ordinary how-to books. His lengthy chapter titled "Interest and Truth" gets to the heart of what fiction needs to be, whether one is writing literary fiction or a crime novel. His "Common Errors" chapter, although relatively short and sounding as basic as one can get, offers some of the best advice on how to improve one's writing, from suggestions to creating dynamic sentences to how to imbue narrative with emotion. "Technique" covers topics such as

paying attention to rhythm and word choice and building narrative suspense. Although I yawned during the chapter on plot - Gardner's diagrams and attempts at describing structure were too mechanical for my tastes, I'm sure some readers will read it voraciously. Likewise, his thorough compilation of writing exercises will have some reaching eagerly for their keyboards. I found that the sections that had interested me on my first reading years ago were not the same ones that intrigued me this time, suggesting that this book can grow with the writer. The biggest flaw in this book, and one which might drive some readers away, is Gardner's personal biases. His intense interest in myth and classics drove his fiction, and it weighs heavily in the examples he provides. Also, he favors examples from his contemporaries - Barthelme, Coover, Barth - who might not interest younger writers who read a different set of cutting edge authors. Still, you need not be familiar with Gardner's examples to understand his points, as he himself makes few assumptions about the reader/student.

I bought this book about ten years ago; it was the text book in an undergrad Creative Writing class. It wasn't until last year that I really read it. I have just finished reading it again for the second time. I think that all of Gardner's advice for beginning writers is valid. I was shocked at the negative reviews that some other readers have posted. They find fault with Gardner because he makes reference to classic works of literature. First off, one does not have to have read EVERY book that Gardner makes reference to in order to understand his point. What shocks me is that people seem genuinely offended that Gardner thinks that aspiring writers should read! EVERY creative writing teacher expects his students to read as much good literature as possible. Why is this? Because IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO BE A GOOD WRITER UNLESS ONE IS WELL READ. You don't believe me - just ask Stephen King. If you are offended that Gardner expects you to be familiar with names like Hemmingway and Faulkner, you should be ashamed of yourself. The elitism argument isn't even supported by the text. Sure he talks about Homer and Shakespeare, but he also comments that great writing can also be found in Spider-Man comic books and other unlikely sources. (I am comforted because the negative reviews themselves are not very well-written.) These are dangerous times we live in. People no longer want to hear that they can't just pick up a pen and be the next Fitzgerald. And who's to say that Fitzgerald is any better than James Paterson, say? It's all relative, is it not? It is not. This is a book for the serious writer - for ANY writer who wishes to write better. In order to do that, one must do the work.

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