

What Writing Fiction
Will Teach You About
Writing Documentation

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Go Set a Watchman, by Harper Lee

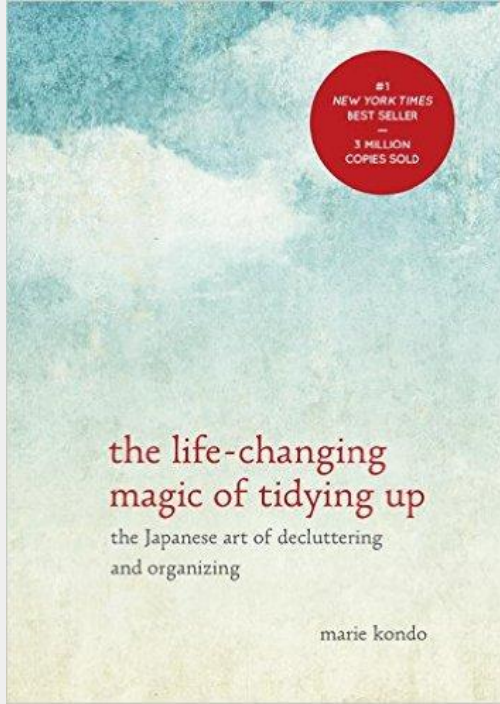
(1,599,189 copies sold)

Old School (Diary of a Wimpy Kid #10), by Jeff
Kinney

(1,483,855 copies sold)

Grey, by E.L. James

(1,406,868 copies sold)



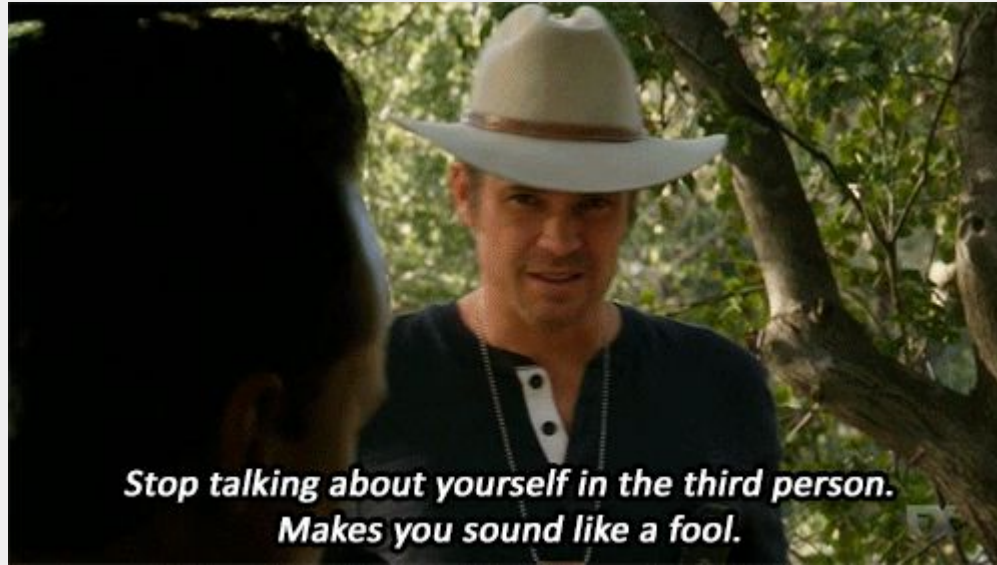
The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up,
by Marie Kondo (1,143,422 copies sold)

The Process of Writing Fiction

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1. Never open a book with weather.
2. Avoid prologues.
3. Never use a verb other than "said" to carry dialogue.
4. Never use an adverb to modify the verb "said"...he admonished gravely.
5. Keep your exclamation points under control. You are allowed no more than two or three per 100,000 words of prose.
6. Never use the words "suddenly" or "all hell broke loose."
7. Use regional dialect, patois, sparingly.
8. Avoid detailed descriptions of characters.
9. Don't go into great detail describing places and things.
10. Try to leave out the part that readers tend to skip.

My most important rule is one that sums up the 10. If it sounds like writing, I rewrite it.



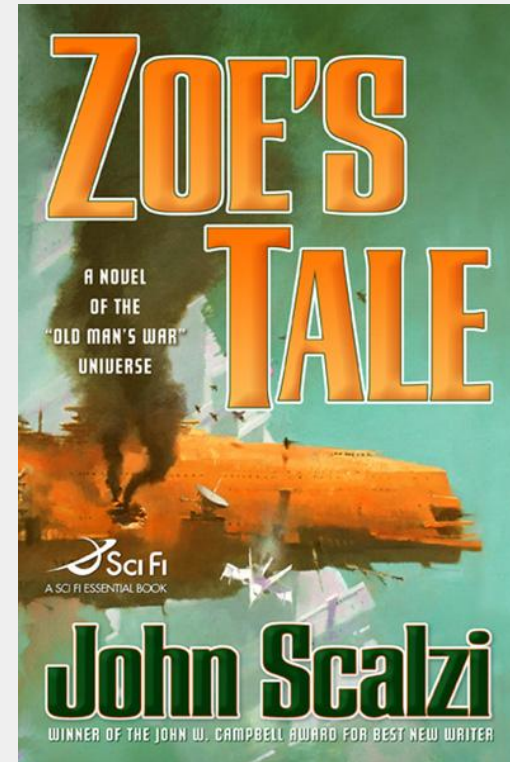
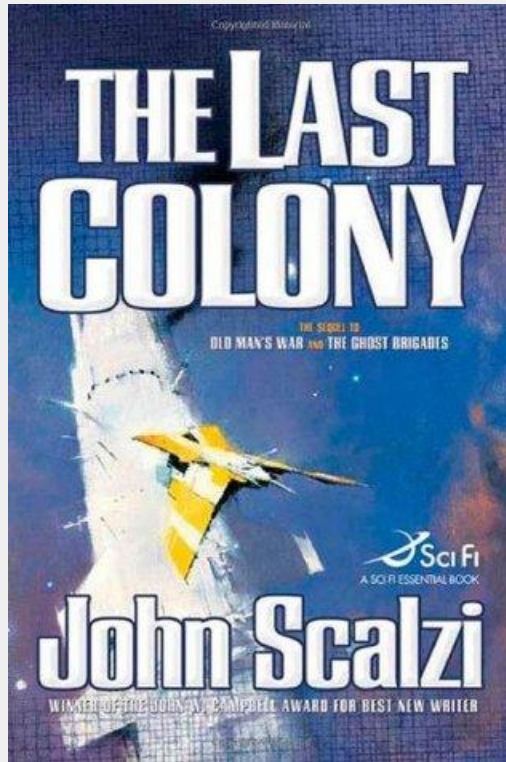
Justified, adapted from Elmore Leonard's *Pronto* and *Riding the Gap*

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1. Never start a piece of documentation with a general description of your community or ecosystem.
2. Better yet, avoid starting with anything that isn't relevant to your documentation.
3. Keep your verbs simple and actionable.
4. Write clearly. Don't use adverbs or other fancy parts of speech if you don't need 'em..
5. Keep your exclamation points under control.
6. Keep surprises out of your documentation.
7. Use jargon sparingly.
8. Link to in-depth information but don't rehash it in your documentation.
9. Leave out anything else that's not relevant to the task at hand.
10. Try to leave out the part that readers tend to skip.

Understand Your Audience

“Your audience is one single reader. I have found that sometimes it helps to pick out one person—a real person you know, or an imagined person—and write to that one.”



Write What You Know

“Every secret of a writer’s soul, every experience of his life, every quality of his mind, is written large in his works.”

<i>Opinion Clues</i>	<i>Transitions</i>	<i>Introductory Words</i>
Always	Additionally	In my opinion
Never	Obviously	Based on what I know
Better / Best	Of course	I know you will have to agree
Worst	Consequently	My favorite
Definitely	Besides	
Favorite	Furthermore	
Worthwhile		
Inferior		
Superior		
Optimal		

Be Brief

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“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.”

“For sale, Baby shoes, Never worn.”

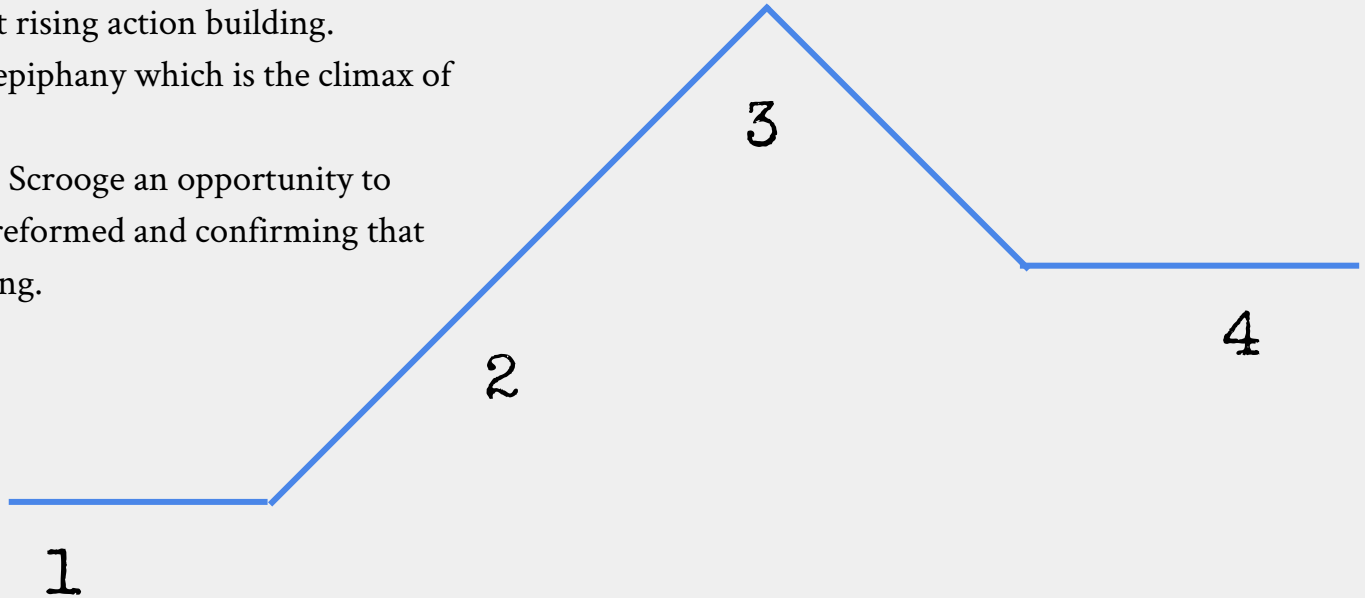
Emotion Matters

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The Muppet Christmas Carol, adapted from Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* @thursdayb

1. Scrooge starts out the story like it's any other day, until Marley's ghost shows up and kicks off the rising action.
2. Each of the three ghosts of Christmas — Past, Present, and Future — keep that rising action building.
3. Scrooge has his grand epiphany which is the climax of the whole story.
4. The action falls, giving Scrooge an opportunity to prove that he really is reformed and confirming that we've got a happy ending.



Kill Your Darlings

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Giphy / Unclear Origin

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Provide Context

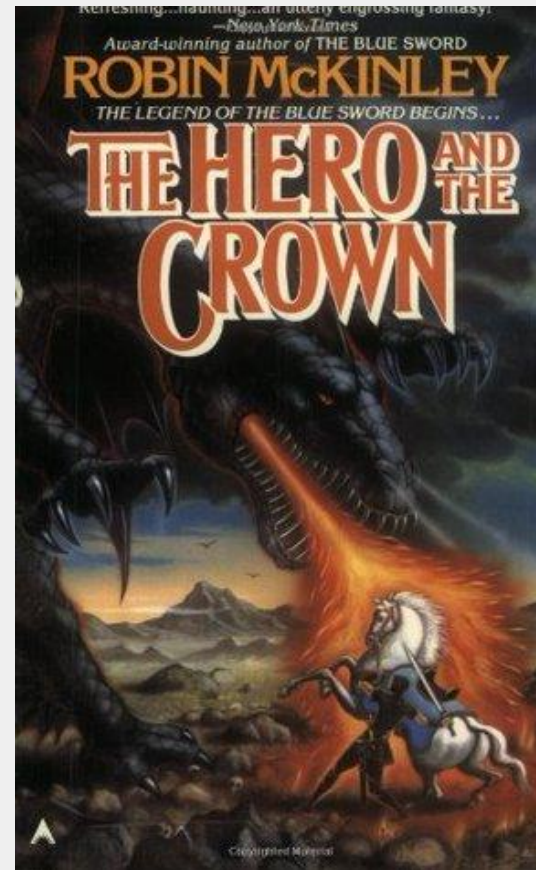
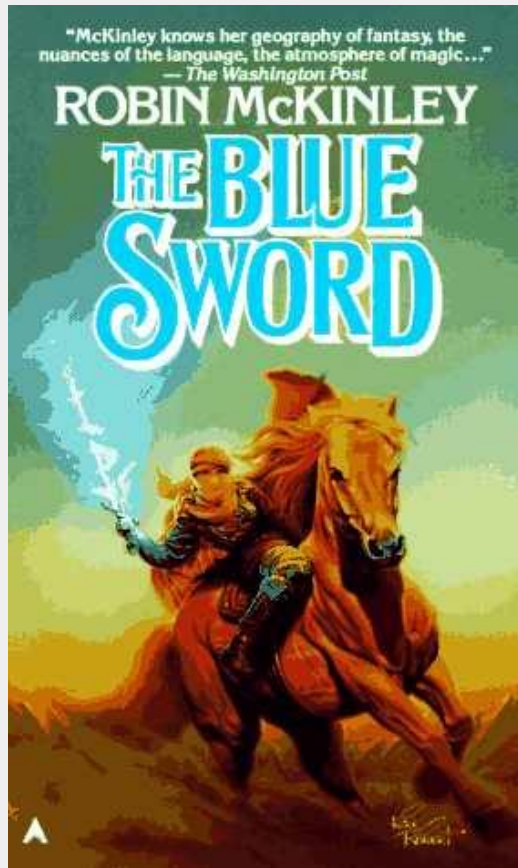
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Game of Thrones, adapted from George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*

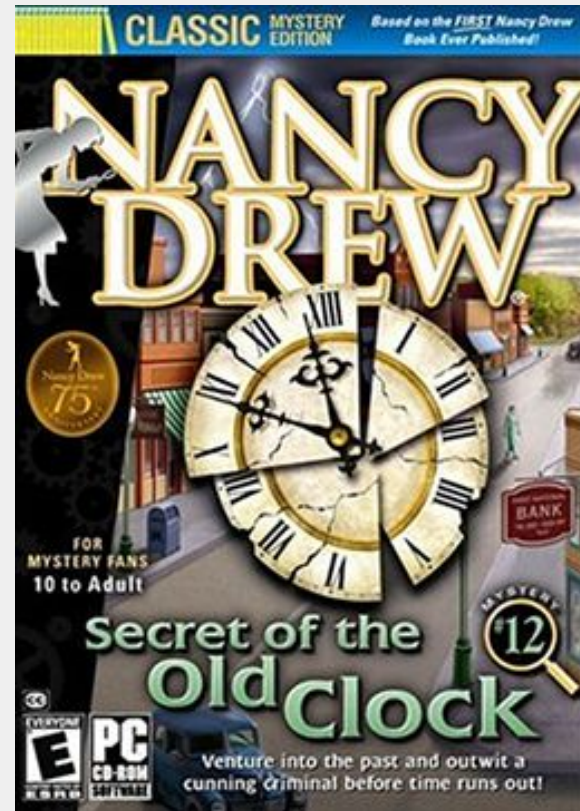
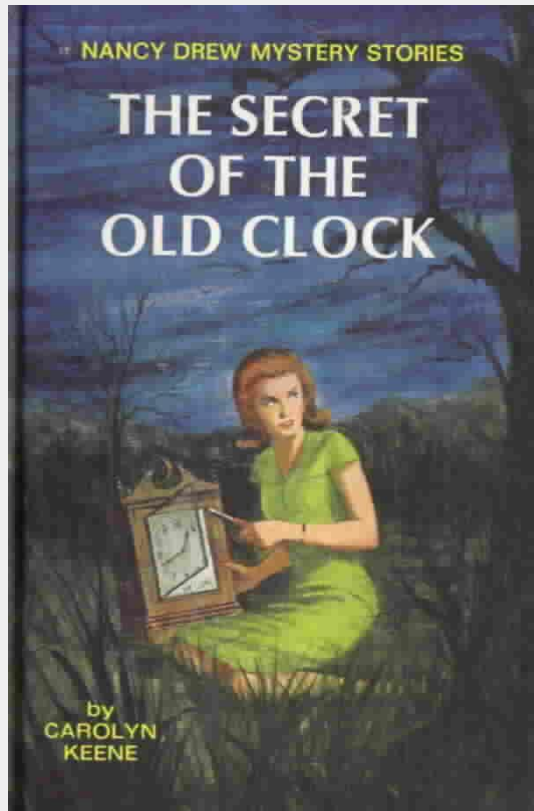
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Set a Reading Order



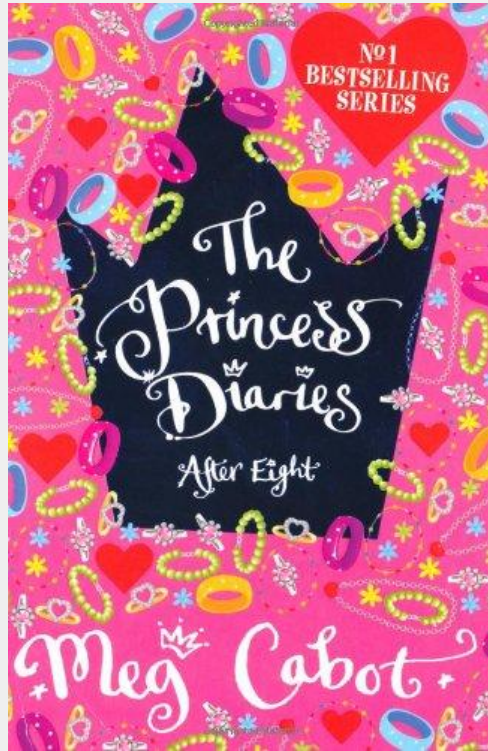
Maintain the Canon

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Encourage Fan Fiction

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Use Beta Readers and Workshops

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Sabrina, the Teenage Witch, adapted from Archie Comics' *Sabrina, the Teenage Witch*

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Reading and Writing are Connected Habits

“Just write every day of your life. Read intensely. Then see what happens. Most of my friends who are put on that diet have very pleasant careers.”

Sin and Syntax, by Constance Hale

Bird by Bird, by Anne Lamott

The Seven Basic Plots, by Christopher Booker

On Writing, by Stephen King