

642 words

101 Slightly Unpredictable Tips for Novelists and Screenwriters

Subtitle: Innovative Ways to Jack Your Creative Productivity and Help you Sell What You Write

By Larry Brooks

StoryFix 2009

ISBN: E-book

Nonfiction/How-To/Writers

Contact Reviewer: [hojoreviews@aol.com](mailto:hojoreviews@aol.com)

Publisher's Site: [www.storyfix.com](http://www.storyfix.com)

### **Some New, Some Old, All Essential**

## **Mixed Bag of Wonderful Ideas**

Reviewed by Carolyn Howard-Johnson, award-winning author of *This Is the Place* and *Harkening: A Collection of Stories Remembered, Tracing*, a chapbook of poetry, and the author of the HowToDoItFrugally Series of books for writers.

One thing about an assortment of tips is that a reader won't get bored reading them. Even 101 of them..

For one thing she doesn't feel guilty if she skips around. Another is that an experienced writer might get a chance to review something she's forgotten or get exposed to subjects she might otherwise not choose to read.

Ta da! Enter Larry Brooks's *101 Slightly Unpredictable Tips for Novelists and Screenwriters*. It's a useful and fully entertaining book for those who write in either genre—or both. Some might think those two genres an odd mix but as a novelist with one intense class in screenwriting and one screenplay tucked away in a drawer, I've long advocated novelists learn more about screenplays and have an inkling that works the other way round, too.

That insight hit me once as I sat in on a class for novelists taught by longtime Extension instructor Phyllis GeBauer at UCLA. Observing classes taught by experienced instructors is part of the training UCLA Extension Writers' Program requires of its newbies. The class was on structure (which screenwriters know a lot about) and one of the students was a screenwriter who had decided an easier path to getting his story optioned was to make it into a novel. He wasn't understanding the examples of narrative and a few other elements very well. Finally he admitted that he hadn't read a novel in "probably more than ten years." Nor had he read any books about the making of one.

Often writers switch genres without thoroughly grounding themselves in the new one. We get comfy and confident in our success with one. But when we switch, we need to take classes, read up on the new craft and—yep, read extensively in the new genre itself.

Another mistake writers who never plan to move from one kind of writing to another make is assuming that knowing something about the other kinds of writing won't make a difference in their careers.

Enter Larry Brooks who does a lot of mixing it up in one book. Hooray for Larry. And yet there is not a tip in this book—whether it’s about craft or about marketing—that can’t be used by writers of any ilk or at least adapted to benefit their careers.

Some of the tips made me laugh. I mean, you just had to turn to them first. “Watch Dr. Phil” was one of those. “Get Used to Conflicting Advice” was another. So true for those of us taught grammar rules in high school only to learn they had little or nothing to do with real writing or style choices.

Some of Brooks’s tips are similar to the ones I give in my *The Frugal Editor* (and that made me laugh, too!). Some are darn creative. Some inspirational. Some obvious ones were of the “Why didn’t I think of that variety.” Some are super practical like tip number sixty-nine. I want you to go read it for yourself.

Brooks has a knack for renaming old writing essentials; he calls them “pearls.” They are really more like bb’s shot from a Red Ryder rifle into the part of our anatomy that gets too comfortable. As writers—regardless of what we write—we definitely don’t want to get too comfortable.

Here’s something else I like. He doesn’t miss important marketing tips. As a writing instructor he knows there are probably thousands of great—really great—books and screenplays lying fallow in drawers. Regardless of how many times we hear that a great book will always find its place in the world, here’s some conflicting advice: Most of us in the publishing world know that many great books are still unread or unseen because the writer lacks skills needed to bring them successfully into the light where they can be recognized and enjoyed.

---

Carolyn Howard-Johnson’s first novel, *This Is the Place*, won eight awards. Her book of creative nonfiction *Harkening*, won three. A UCLA Writers’ Program instructor, she also is the author of another book essential for writers, USA Book News’ Best Professional Book *The Frugal Book Promoter: How To Do What Your Publisher Won’t*. The second in the HowToDoltFrugally series is *The Frugal Editor: Put Your Best Book Forward to Avoid Humiliation and Ensure Success* is a USA Book News pick and a winner of Readers Views Literary Award. And Carolyn’s campaign for the series won the New Millennium Award for Marketing. Learn more at [www.howtodoitfrugally.com](http://www.howtodoitfrugally.com)