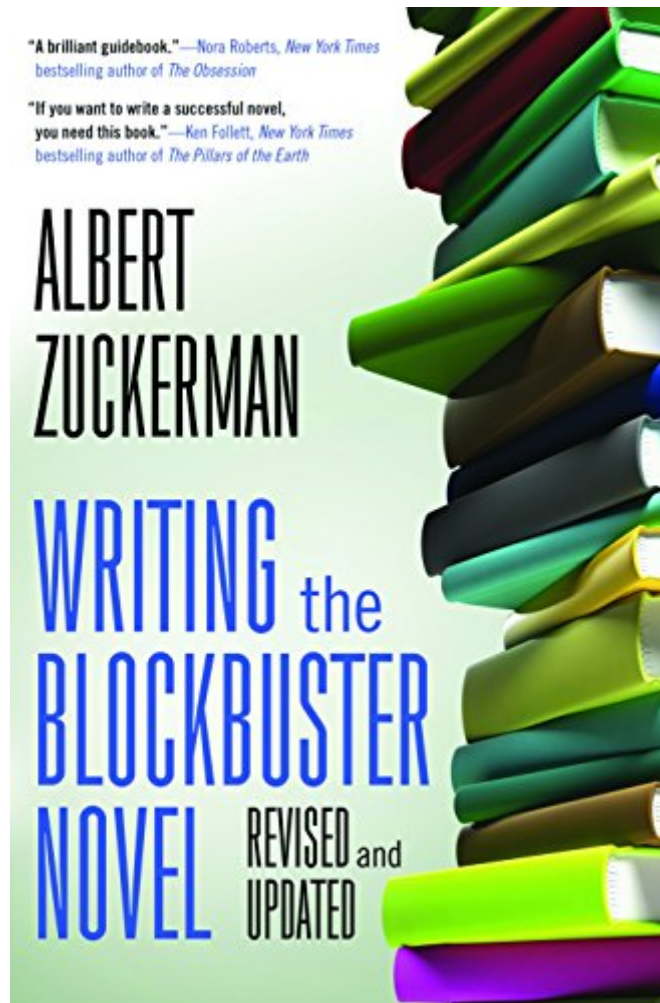




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# Writing The Blockbuster Novel



## Synopsis

Albert Zuckerman, legendary literary agent, has worked with many bestselling authors, including Ken Follett, Olivia Goldsmith, Antoinette Van Heugten, Michael Lewis, and F. Paul Wilson. Zuckerman is a master at teaching writers the skills necessary to crack the bestseller list. For this revised edition of *Writing the Blockbuster Novel*, Zuckerman has added an analysis of Nora Roberts's *The Witness*, which he uses along with classic books like *Gone With the Wind* and *The Godfather*, to illustrate his points. Zuckerman's commentary on Ken Follett's working outlines for *The Man From St. Petersburg* provide a blueprint for building links between plot and character. A new introduction discusses social media and self-publishing. *Writing the Blockbuster Novel* is an essential tool for any aspiring author. As Dan Brown said in an interview: "Not long ago, I had an amusing experience meeting the author of a book I received as a gift nearly two decades ago a book that in many ways changed my life. I was halfway through writing my first novel when I was given a copy of *Writing the Blockbuster Novel*. [Zuckerman's] book helped me complete my manuscript and get it published. [When] I met Mr. Zuckerman for the first time. I gratefully told him that he had helped me. He jokingly replied that he planned to tell everyone that he had helped me write *The Da Vinci Code*."At the Publisher's request, this title is being sold without Digital Rights Management Software (DRM) applied.

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## Customer Reviews

If you want to write "serious" literature, look elsewhere. But if you want to write a blockbuster novel, one that will top the bestseller charts and be read for decades to come, then you NEED this book! Not a course in literature or even in novel writing (Zuckerman presumes that you know the basics) this book is a guide to writing the "big book," the book all agents dream of finding, the book that will earn you the million dollar advance, be sold to the movies, etc. While it's not absolutely necessary to read the blockbuster novels Zuckerman cites in this work, it does help, and some familiarity with them is certainly necessary. Knowing example is the best teacher, Zuckerman takes us, step-by-step, through each of the requisite elements of a blockbuster novel--elements that each and every big book share. The book is not for everyone, though. If you aspire to short-story writing or the writing of small, quiet books that may be excellent but will never "take the world by storm" then you'll probably find Zuckerman "too commercial." But if it's commercial you're looking for, this book is truly worth its weight in gold. Thank you Mr. Zuckerman for writing it, and a special thanks to Ken Follett for sharing his early drafts with us. You both did far more than you'll ever know and we appreciate it.

This book should prove very helpful to writers of commercial fiction. It's not necessary to read the blockbusters (Man from St. Petersburg, GWTW, Godfather, Thorn Birds) to follow Zuckerman's arguments, though the novels will certainly help any writer learning the craft. The Follett outlines demonstrate how a serious (and ambitious) novelist crafts his work prior to writing. The outlines give a very detailed look at the novel in its various stages of development, and Zuckerman's analyses of them are dead-on. However, Zuckerman pays too little attention to the other novels: he's not nearly as detailed or insightful of their inner workings as he is with Follett's, which he edited. Moreover, the inclusion of "Garden of Lies," a novel written by his wife, seems to be a ploy to squeeze royalties out of an anachronistic book that few nowadays would consider a blockbuster. But Zuckerman is an agent, after all, so such tactics shouldn't scare die-hards off. Zuckerman warns that the first-time novelist attempting a blockbuster might be biting more than he can chew, since he isn't talking about any ordinary bestseller, but a "blockbuster." However, some of his advice (e.g., not to write a historical work) must be taken with a grain of salt because, even as he points out, most of the works he's dealing with are period pieces. In addition, anyone looking for a "how to write" book will not find much guidance here (Zuckerman assumes we know the basics of conflict, structure, character,

etc.). Nor does he delve into the matter of how to sell your work. Overall, an excellent resource to your writer's library, and well worth the price. Writers who aspire to blockbusterdom (or just plain bestseller status) owe Zuckerman a big thanks.

I'm torn. Normally, there are books I recommend to absolute beginners, & books I push on those who are about ready for publication. Zuckerman says more than a few things that someone who's just starting out should really ponder, but most of the book is for Serious Students. In any case, please understand that Zuckerman's agenda is right there in the title: the "Blockbuster" part. This isn't about High Art -- it's about aiming for best-seller status, & improving your chances (however marginal) of getting there. It's not an "easy how-to" sort of book: he expects you to read, & to study, & to do some actual work at becoming the sort of writer who can turn out a million-seller. To get the most out of this, you really ought to read *Gone with the Wind* and *The Godfather* and especially Follett's *The Man from St. Petersburg*. Literally half the book is taken up by only two chapters (of fourteen) on respectively "The Outline Process" and "Revision" -- the two parts most shunned by the majority of writers who expect fame &/or fortune to fall at their feet. In particular, creating & evolving an outline is something very likely to set your teeth on edge. Zuckerman does a great job (via Follett) of showing how a good idea becomes great, & then sells a million, by putting the outline through repeated upgrade. For that reason alone, most hopeful writers will reject it. I'm still struggling with it myself, but I have to admit that a little doggedness here has already improved an idea of mine that I knew would never be fine art, but more & more looks like it could be a great thriller. If you want platitudes & "support" for your noble writerly efforts, or you want to write nothing but lit'ry fiction... then, yes, this is very much the wrong book for you. If you want to turn out a respectable potboiler, & maybe make it something more progressive, read & follow this book, especially those two chapters.

Get this book! Even without studying the works Zuckerman references, tools crucial to a novelist are lucidly described. The references give context for his examples. I read the work three times: the first time, without referring to the material; the second pass, having several of the reference works at hand; and the third, working through some of the examples. One reviewer understandably was irritated about having to use these references. If you want to pair them down, get only Follett's *The Man from St. Petersburg*. Zuckerman refers to it most often - and the novel is fun too. Along with Sol Stein's, *Stein on Writing*, Zuckerman's will sit next to Strunk and White on my shelf.

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