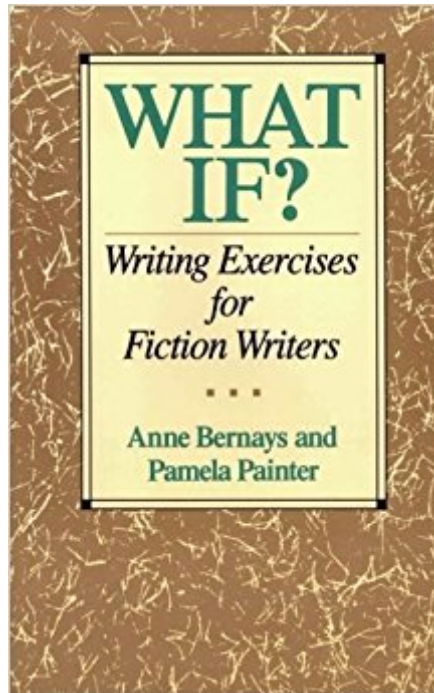




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# What If? Writing Exercises For Fiction Writers



## Synopsis

What If? is the first handbook for writers based on the idea that specific exercises are one of the most useful and provocative methods for mastering the art of writing fiction. With more than twenty-five years of experience teaching creative writing between them, Anne Bernays and Pamela Painter offer more than seventy-five exercises for both beginners and more experienced writers. These exercises are designed to develop and refine two basic skills: writing like a writer and, just as important, thinking like a writer. They deal with such topics as discovering where to start and end a story; learning when to use dialogue and when to use indirect discourse; transforming real events into fiction; and finding language that both sings and communicates precisely. What If? will be an essential addition to every writer's library, a welcome and much-used companion, a book that gracefully borrows a whisper from the muse.

## Book Information

Paperback: 256 pages

Publisher: William Morrow Paperbacks; Reissue edition (November 20, 1991)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0062720066

ISBN-13: 978-0062720061

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 0.6 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 7 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (119 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #134,594 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #225 in [Books > Reference > Writing, Research & Publishing Guides > Publishing & Books > Authorship](#) #550 in [Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Literature > Creative Writing & Composition](#) #902 in [Books > Reference > Writing, Research & Publishing Guides > Writing > Fiction](#)

## Customer Reviews

If you did one exercise a day from Anne Bernays and Pamela Painter's "What If?" you would be writing for more than a third of a year. The book is packed with 115 exercises. The goal of a writer is to write, preferably every day. This book not only provides exercises, it also includes discussions of writing before each exercise to teach the skills necessary to become a good writer. Bernays and Painter finish off their book with 24 short stories, from a variety of authors, to provide the reader with examples of the lessons. The book is split up into fifteen different sections (two of these are devoted to the short stories and short-shorts), each with several exercises. Each section discusses a

particular part of story writing including, beginnings, plot, POV, characterization, dialogue, styles and rewrites. I found the majority of the exercises useful, and nearly all of the lessons and discussions worthwhile. There were even a few "Ah-ha!" exercises that instantly solved, or gave me ideas on how to tackle, a problem that I'd been dealing with. This book can be used in two ways. The first is to use it to strengthen your weaknesses. If you feel that your writing is lacking in a certain area, you can focus entirely on the lessons and exercises to improve that area. The second way to use this book is to read it straight through for the lessons and advice while using the exercises to further your writing. Either way, I believe that any writer will find "What If?" a useful tool.

I teach creative writing in the UCLA Writer's Program (online) and always recommend this book to my students as one of the two best books (along with Janet Burroway's "Writing Fiction") on the craft of writing ever penned. I have used the information in this book time and again in writing my own novels and stories ("The Death of Tarpons" (novel), "Monday's Meal" (story collection), "Over Easy" (thriller forthcoming from Random House, 1999). A more intelligent book than this has yet to be written. If you aspire to create memorable, quality prose, you must buy this book! It will aid you throughout your writing career in thousands of ways. Five stars is not enough to award this book, which I'm sure is destined to become a classic if it is not already considered so.

Last year I had the privilege of having a non-fiction book published and I continue to work as a journalist. Obviously, these skills haven't prepared me for writing my first novel. But not to worry. At my side (actually on my writing desk) is a copy of What if? and it has taught, inspired and encouraged me in my quest for the great American novel. Not only that, it's just plain fun to read and work the exercises. The chapters on characterization, point of view, dialogue and plot are excellent. I recommend this to any writer that needs to hone his fiction writing skills or learn them for the first time. Hats off to the authors -- Anne Bernays and Pamela Painter.

I teach short fiction writing at a college in Michigan. I've used the first edition of this book for four semesters, and I just had a chance to peruse the second edition. Great stuff! The exercises in this book teach the elements of story writing, but they do it in an interesting and interactive way. Students will learn about Starting in the Middle, Strong Dialogue, Conflict, Endings, Titles, Naming Characters, the Internal Life of Characters, and much more. I use the text in an introductory course, so I don't get to all of the exercises. Some cover more advanced issues than others, but this book is helpful to almost any level of fiction writer. I am a writer too, and every time I use the book with my

students, my own stories get a little stronger. If you're a fiction teacher, try this book. If you're a writer looking to advance your skills, this book could also be a big help. You'll find stuff that goes beyond the routine fiction-writing advice.

I have been teaching writing and using this book for over five years. It has been beyond invaluable for me and my students, and I don't know how I am going to live without it. The earlier, brown version is not the greatest, but the "Revised and Expanded" 1995 edition (blue cover) is fabulous. We were supposed to get a new 2000 edition in January, but now I heard that Prentice-Hall has decided not to do the new edition. So "What If?" is now out of print. NO!

I was privileged to be one of Pamela Painter's graduate students in the MFA Creative Writing Program at Emerson College back in the mid-1990's. What a class! What an instructor! She invoked fear in most of us... but only because of her awesome talent and knowledge. My copy of this book has been through a lot since then. I have gone on to teach Creative Writing and Advanced Screenwriting at the university level and also at the extended education level with senior citizens. I have found these exercises to be versatile enough to inspire the creative minds of both 20-year olds and 80-year olds. My students have always raved about the wonderful merits of this book. At the present time, I teach Creative Writing as a volunteer in my son's first grade class and have adapted several of the exercises for his age group. While the exercises are not easy for them, I am consistently amazed at how they raise the bar and do their best to finish the writing asked of them... and with wonderful results! The creativity that I have witnessed as a result of these writing exercises, from the youngest writers to the most-seasoned, has absolutely overwhelmed me. When the mind is challenged, great things emerge. Needless to say, I am impressed with the versatility of this book... a book that can span generations and age gaps... a book that doesn't go out of style... a book that every fiction writer should have! I can't recommend it highly enough. Thank you, Pam Painter and Anne Bernays for putting together such a valuable writing tool!

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