

Fashioning Fabulous Forewords

by Ami Hendrickson

The Foreword's Function

The foreword is a strange literary beast. It introduces the larger work and / or the author – much as an emcee introduces a keynote speaker. It doesn't contribute any additional information about the book's subject matter, but it serves as a means of validating the book's existence.

Often, the foreword of a book is written by someone that the general public recognizes more readily than the actual author. A foreword may be only a few paragraphs long – yet the foreword's writer may share byline space on the cover. (“With foreword by Mr. Great Muckety Muck.”)

A foreword's primary purpose is to boost book sales. It's a means of introducing someone who may not be well-known via an expert in the field or a celebrity who, by dint of being famous, is an expert on everything.

Forewords often have a personal, chatty feel to them. The foreword writer may reminisce about how he or she met the author of the main project, thus adding weight to the author's credentials (“Oooh! He knows Mr. Great Muckety Muck! He must know what he's writing about...”).

Forewords also tend to involve anecdotes that -- ideally -- have something to do with the work at hand. These generally serve as a practical or real-world example of whatever themes or ideas may be expressed later in the book itself. Again, they serve to simply reinforce that the writer knows his or her stuff.

“Allow Myself to Introduce... Myself”

But a foreword isn't all about the book it introduces. If done correctly, the foreword can be as valuable a tool for the person writing it as for the author of the actual book.

To begin with, writing a foreword keeps the writer's name in front of the public. This can be especially useful if there is significant lag time before another major project (book, album, movie...) that features the foreword's writer is to be released. It is also a plus if the person writing the foreword is not known primarily as a writer. It can broaden that person's audience and, perhaps, appeal to a whole new segment of the population.

The foreword writer has the opportunity to remind people of why he or she is well known-- or at least qualified to write a foreword to a work-- in the first place. A simple “author of *100 Secrets of the Super Stars*” after the writer's name at the end of the

foreword serves as a frame of reference and solidifies credibility.

Fantastic Forewords

If you've been asked to write a foreword to a book, kudos and congratulations are in order. Forewords aren't written by just anyone, you know. Generally, the only people who are asked to write such things are Those Who Matter.

You have been asked to write the foreword, and to introduce the author and the book to the world at large, because you have paid your dues in some manner. Maybe you are a recognizable name within a certain field. Perhaps you have distinguished yourself in a way that is relevant to the book's subject. Perchance you're just the most famous person the author knows and he or she is calling in a favor.

So-- yay, you! Now what do you do?

First, if possible, get your hands on the manuscript you'll be "forewording." If you are the conscientious sort, and if it interests you, read it. If you're not (or it doesn't), at least skim the Table of Contents or read a random chapter on something you find worthwhile.

Then, write a short anecdote about something that happened in your life that has some bearing, no matter how far-fetched, on the book. If you're not sure of the book's purpose, write about something that relates to the chapter you just read.

Feel free to name-drop *shamelessly* here. If you won an Olympic medal, reference an Olympic event. If you defended a famous celebrity in a murder trial, mention it. Don't hesitate to remind people why you are well known in the first place-- just in case they can't remember why they know you. (The public is notoriously dim-witted, with a frighteningly short attention span.)

Now, say something about the author. Have you met? How long have you known each other (or known OF each other)? Can you relate a personal, non-humiliating anecdote about the author? What about telling of something the author did that affected you?

Remember, part of your job is to introduce the author to the world. Do your job as well as possible.

If you don't know the author, rather than admitting that you're writing for a total stranger, talk about the relevance of the project and rave about how much you believe in its validity. If you can't do *that*, perhaps you're not the one to be writing this particular piece of prose...

Finally, you will appear *veddy literary* and oh-so-clever if you can reference an idea from your opening paragraph again at the end. Think of it as bringing the whole foreword full circle.

If, for instance, you related a story that involves your mother, something as simple as “I know Mom would approve” will do the trick. If you talked about a particularly odious elementary school teacher, you might try something like “If you see Mrs. Schaffer, tell her I know who put the tack on her chair... and I ain’t telling!”

Remember, a foreword is like a letter of introduction from one friend to another. It’s best if it’s a bit chatty, engaging, and personal. Tell tales. Spin a yarn or two. Open a tiny little window into a personal moment.

The more readable you make your foreword, the more people will read it, rather than skipping it entirely and diving straight into the book. And that, of course, is the whole point!

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About the Author:

Ami Hendrickson is an award-winning screenwriter and bestselling author. She has written for some of the leading horsemen in the world including the United States Hunter Jumper Association (USHJA), hunter trainer and judge Geoff Teall, neurosurgeon Dr. James Warson, and Clinton Anderson, of Downunder Horsemanship. Find out about her latest projects at www.amihendrickson.com.

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