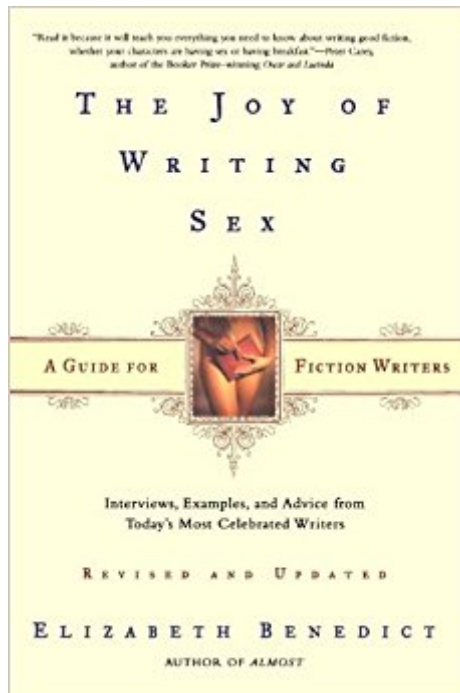


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# The Joy Of Writing Sex: A Guide For Fiction Writers



## Synopsis

Twelve years after it was first published, *The Joy of Writing Sex* remains the classic writer's resource on creating compelling sex scenes. Elizabeth Benedict covers all the issues, from the first time, to married sex and adultery, to sex in the age of AIDS. Her instruction, supported with examples from the works of today's most respected writers—among them, Dorothy Allison, Russell Banks, Alan Hollinghurst, Joyce Carol Oates, Carol Shields, and John Updike—focuses on crafting believable sex scenes that hinge on freshness of character, dialogue, mood, and plot. In this revised edition, Benedict addresses the latest sexual revolution, intimacy on the Internet; adds new interviews with Edmund White, Darren Strauss, Stephen McCauley, and other writers; and updates her selections to include examples from the best fiction of the past few years.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Even though writing about sex probably ranks on the joy scale somewhere between reading about it and having it, Elizabeth Benedict feels that many writers don't do justice to the act. So she has developed a novel idea: a guide book for fiction writers seeking to create better sex scenes.

Benedict, a teacher in Princeton University's Creative Writing Program, doesn't concern herself with pornography but rather with a contention that sex scenes are pivotal in carrying the plot, story and character of some novels. Her point is emphasized through many interviews she conducted with authors on their experience with and views on writing about sex. Now, if she would only visit the film industry . . . --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Novelist Benedict (Safe Conduct, Farrar, 1993), currently on the faculty of Princeton University's Creative Writing Program, has written a book for fiction writers who would like to write better sex scenes. She is not concerned with pornography but with using sex as an element of plot to carry the story forward. The author quotes from many writers whom she interviewed to illustrate her points, from Sandra Cisneros on the young girl who lost her virginity at 12 in *Woman Hollering Creek* to Carol Shields on sex between long-married couples in *Stone Diaries* to Allen Barnett in a chapter on sex in the age of AIDS. Benedict's focus is on writing good sex scenes, which don't rely on clinical sex but rather on character, dialog, and plot. Well done; recommended for writing collections. ?Lisa J. Cihlar, Winfield P.L., Ill. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

It was helpful and gave me ideas on layering and creating context and tension in sex scenes. However, it was not exactly what I was looking for, because it turns out that writing sex for mainstream literature is different from writing erotica, and I am doing the latter. But now I know! If you want your sex scenes in non-erotica to be more grounded, realistic and forward your plot, this would be helpful. If you're just trying to turn people on, not so much.

This is a book about writing sex scenes and erotica, but more importantly, it's a book about good writing, period. Even a writer who does not include a single erotic or explicit scene in his work would benefit greatly from reading this book. I've owned this book for a decade and have read it many times, and it's on my short list of the four or five most important books a beginning writer of fiction can read. The best thing about it is it answers some simple agonizing but common questions an author has--even if there is no explicit sex in his work. For instance, she concisely answers one of the most agonizing questions beginning writers have: "What do I call it". Meaning the genitals of a man or woman character. I mean (I went through this myself) I don't want to offend anybody, and the terms used by practically everybody would be vulgar in polite company, but I don't want to be cute or evasive or trite. So what do I call it? A fellow writing friend of mine asked me to read some of his work, and in it he referred to a man's member as his "manhood". I laughed so hard I almost fell out of my chair. I do not want to evoke that reaction in one of my serious works of fiction, however few erotic scenes they might contain. So in answer to this question which has undoubtedly agonized many of the best writers (James Lee Burke calls it a "phallus", which is technically correct but might not be immediately recognized for what it is by the average reader) in comes Benedict riding a white

horse and waving a simple answer over her head. Like anything else, you call it what your character would call it. Bang! Simple as that, and right on the nose. A doctor might use clinical terms, but most others will use the common and vulgar terms amongst friends and lovers. Like Alexander, Benedict cleaves the Gordian knot with a single sword stroke and settles a question about an issue so many writers worry about and never seem to get right, in their attempts to be polite. Don't worry about who you might offend. Think about what the character would call it, and have the character call it that. Period. It isn't like 99% of people have never heard the word "d\*ck" before. That's just one single practical bit of advice you get from this book. There is such a density of useful knowledge in this short book it should weigh as much as if it were solid Uranium. Again, like I said, there's so much good teaching about good writing in this book, even if your own fiction contains no intimate scenes whatsoever, you have much to gain from reading Benedict's book. A caveat: this is a book about writing about sex. The author, quite appropriately, includes extremely explicit segments quoted from some of the best writers of erotica or simply erotic scenes in history. Informative, and very instructive (not just in writing about intimate scenes) but if that sort of thing offends you, you should probably avoid this book. But if not, you need to read this book. You will learn a lot about not just writing intimate scenes well, but about writing well, period.

This book is extremely helpful in understanding just how much work sex scene and the dynamics that go into can help when you're writing one. My MFA professor recommended it after I had written a scene for a short story and a lot of what is written in this book is very straightforward and even includes some exercises for you at the end. But a great deal of this is practical advice and things you should know as you go along. I would recommend this to anyone interested in the importance of a sex scene in literature, as well as how to create one properly.

This is a nonfiction book for fiction writers. I recommend this book for any romance writer - writing any love scenes and especially those writing erotica romance love scenes. Most people, who are not writers, think writing sex scenes have to do with writing sex, but as the mind is the most important organ in sex, you have to write strong conflict in a love scenes and you have to describe sensations and feelings in a way that's real and unique and keep in mind the love scene also has to reveal more about the characters and move the plot forward. In other words it takes some high quality writing and good skill with the craft to create a strong, moving, believable love scene. This book did help me improve my love scenes and I am sure it will do the same for other writers.

I found this book to be thought-provoking and useful. As a romance writer, I would have appreciated some guidance for genre writers, as *The Joy of Writing Sex* seemed to be geared mostly toward literary authors. Still, I'm finding myself referring back to the book frequently as a guide for my work.

I had the pleasure of hearing a lecture and visiting with Elizabeth Benedict, which inspired me to choose this book when I was pondering the best way to approach the sexuality component of a couple of characters in a mystery novel. I'm glad I did. Despite the title, this book is really about the joy of writing great fiction - and how to use sex as another tool for advancing plot, enhancing characterization, writing revealing dialogue, etc. Although the topic is ostensibly the act of sex, Benedict's book is really about how the act of sex helps readers understand what's going on in your book and in your characters' lives in a way that most people understand is about far more than the plumbing of our human anatomy. Benedict structures her book well and productively, with lists where appropriate and a consistent format in each chapter. Her best advice (which you'll have to read the book to truly appreciate): make sure there's always at least two things going on.

An excellent book full of tons of insight! I love how it's laid out and it gives lots of helpful interviews with authors to help aspiring authors to improve their understanding of the chemistry that goes into a love scene. I recommend this book highly as a great reference to gain insight into what makes a romance novel tick.

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