

Excerpted from:

An Accomplished Writer Takes a “MasterClass” from a Gargantuan Selling Writer

Joyce Maynard

[...] Some of the topics Mr. Patterson covers in his MasterClass: Where he gets his ideas. How he designs his characters – and what makes a character compelling. Villains. Creating tension. Dialogue. Here he goes into some detail about the importance of writing dialogue that doesn't sound like real life – which would be tedious. But rather, writing dialogue that's wittier, tighter, more filled with dramatic tension and suspense, than what actually happens around the dinner table, or anyplace else in the real, not-particularly-exciting lives people try to escape when they pick up a James Patterson novel.

My friend James Patterson is a big believer in the importance of a great outline. These days, in fact, the outline may be the main thing he actually writes, while he turns over the actual writing to his stable of co-authors. This is how he manages to turn out three or four novels a year, and still fit in a few holes of golf most days.

Still, James Patterson believes in hard work. Seven days a week, in his case – though Mr. Patterson doesn't call writing *work*, because he loves it so much. This is a man with an unmistakable passion for what he does.

Some other things James Patterson believes in: Research. Surprises. Action. (If a story isn't galloping along, it's sinking. Fast.) He'll

tell you that your first sentence had better be a killer. And that every page needs to contain a measure of drama and intrigue; suspense and excitement that keeps the reader in her chair. (I say “her chair” because it turns out that the vast majority of James Patterson's millions of readers are women. A fact I might not have anticipated.)

James Patterson came to writing from the world of advertising, and he remains (as I, sadly, am not) a businessperson. “Don't set out to write a good thriller,” he says. “Set out to write a No. 1 thriller.”

It's a refreshing aspect to the man, that he harbors no illusions about his gifts. “Let's face it,” he tells us. “I'm not writing *War and Peace*.”

“I'm not that concerned with style. ...Don't think about the sentences,” he advises. Just keep that train roaring along. [...] To James Patterson, any one of us out there taking this class may be the next James Patterson. And if we aren't... well, you don't have to become Jimi Hendrix to get some joy out of fooling around on the guitar. And let's not forget, Buddy Holly only played three chords.

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