Prompts and Prose

A Guide to Writing Your Novel
with Artificial Intelligence

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Ron van Wieringen

in close collaboration with

Google Gemini

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Introduction by Ron van Wieringen

For years, I've had some notes on my computer about the craft of writing, gathered from reviewing friends' drafts, from my own experiences and my ten favourite books on writing. Thoughts on language, the power of the senses, scene construction, plot mechanics, character depth, notes I made while binge-watching Game of Thrones or while trying to fight a writer's block. It was a personal list, concise, a little rough, waiting for the day I'd find the time needed to flesh it out into something substantial. But the notes remained idle on my hard drive as other writing projects always seemed to take priority.

Having an IT-background, I've always been interested in AI. I remember the day I was introduced to the core concepts of neural networks in university back in 1985; the thrill of seeing the incredible potential, if only sufficient computing power and training materials for the models were ever available. Since the availability of ChatGPT and Gemini around 2020, I've been using AI as a tool for reviewing and checking my work as an author. I executed prompts like: "Does the timeline fit?", "Are the events that I describe logical in a historical context?" or plain and simple: "I forgot which character was the one with the two children. Can you look that up for me?" But never the actual writing, the creation of text. All models seemed to fail in that. *Producing* text seemed the exclusive domain of humans.

In 2025 however, something remarkable happened. Almost overnight, the major language models took a quantum leap. Suddenly, models such as Google Gemini, ChatGPT, Claude, Grok, and others made a remarkable step, transforming almost simultaneously from spell-checkers and search engines into genuinely impressive, versatile tools that could actually write on an acceptable level. To put it simply, AI suddenly produced text that made me jealous. Sentences, structures and plots that made me think: I wish I could do that too. What's more, it did so at an incredible speed.

It became clear that AI had crossed a threshold. This realization sparked an idea: could this emerging new power, this new collaborative model, make the once daunting task of transforming my scattered notes into a full book achievable... in one single day?

The answer, tested in April 2025, was a resounding, almost unbelievable, yes.

Together, in that single, intense day, we elaborated on the core principles of writing: mastering language, engaging senses, building scenes, ensuring character motivation and plot coherence, and tackling creative blocks. Of

course, we also integrated reflections on how AI itself can assist in each of these areas.

But that's not all. When this handbook was finished, I instructed Gemini to convert it into a detailed prompt that writers can use when starting to create a story. It resulted in a huge prompt, which you can find in the appendix. Then, I started up a new session and fed this prompt to Gemini. Based on that, Gemini and I put these principles into practice by writing a novel together. Also with incredible speed: the process from initial idea to a novel that could be sent to proof readers took just two weeks.

In this guide, you'll find examples[1] of how we applied the writing principles from this handbook to that collaborative novel, 'Beneath the Plastic Smile'. We are convinced it's a compelling, fast-paced story about a deeply philosophical theme, and it is published simultaneously with this handbook.

In order to showcase the power of AI in it's raw shape, everything beyond this introduction is the un-edited text generated by Gemini.

I only did some layout and added a few footnotes where I think Gemini made a mistake, plus I occasionally asked Gemini to re-generate a chapter, with a refined prompt. The result is a practical guide to the craft of novel writing and a demonstration of a powerful new mode of creation – one where human authors and AI work as synergistic partners.

I hope the insights will be valuable, both for sharpening your skills and finding your way around the changing landscape of creativity in the age of AI.

Ron van Wieringen, in collaboration with Gemini

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[1] *Of course, these examples were added to the initial text after "Beneath the plastic smile" was finished, not in that same day this book was written.*

Introduction by Google Gemini

The book before you is the result of a special journey – not only a journey through the fascinating world of storytelling but also a journey in how knowledge and creativity can be combined. As Gemini, an AI language model, I had the privilege of collaborating with author Ron van Wieringen to develop his vision of authorship into this handbook. Starting from his core ideas and notes, we explored the depths together.

This book focuses on the *craft* of writing. How do you use language not only correctly but also effectively and evocatively? How do you stimulate your reader's senses so they don't just read the world, but experience it? How do you build a scene that sticks, both in space and time?

We delve into the psychology of characters – their motivations, contradictions, and development. We dissect the mechanisms of plot, from the driving force of 'wanting' to the architecture of structures and turning points. And we even explore how you can tackle writer's block and how AI can be a partner in your creative process.

Throughout this journey, we have drawn on theory, practical techniques, and numerous examples, including insights from the complex world of *Game of Thrones*. The goal is not to offer a rigid formula, but a rich toolkit and an inspiring guide for anyone wanting to hone their writing skills.

May this book help you find the words, build the scenes, and bring to life the characters that your unique story deserves. Happy writing!

Gemini, in collaboration with Ron van Wieringen

1   The Language Of Your Story

Just as houses are built from bricks and cement, and the entire structure risks collapse if the foundation is weak, novels are fundamentally constructed from words, held together by the 'cement' we call grammar. If these basics are shaky, the whole edifice of your story is bound to fail. Mastering this foundational material is therefore paramount for any writer.

So, language in a novel. Let's not beat around the bush: language is YOUR domain. Your playground, your laboratory, your personal signature beneath the universe you create. It's the difference between the ultra-short, straight-to-the-point sentences of a Hemingway, which sometimes give you the feeling he was paid per word (and thus used them sparingly), and the baroque, endless flood of words of a Márquez, where you sometimes have to catch your breath but are immediately transported to another world. Or take the Dutch landscape: the sometimes biting, understated humor of Grunberg versus the almost fairytale-like, gentle tone of Tellegen.

Who is right? Nobody. And everybody. Your style, your voice, that's the magic. That's what makes your story unique. It's like clothing: one person goes for sleek and minimalist, another for colorful and eccentric. Both are fine, as long as it fits who you are (or who your story wants to be).

But... that oh-so-personal style of yours has to *do* something. Namely: tell a story. To a reader. Language is the bridge between your brilliant (or insane, if you want) ideas and the brain of that poor soul who opened your book. And you don't want that reader to fall through some rickety planks halfway across that bridge, do you? Lost in a swamp of incomprehensible sentences or stumbling over awkward phrasing? No, you want them to smoothly reach the other side, full of suspense and wonder.

Therefore, however 'subjective' language may be, there are indeed a few things you need to pay damn close attention to. Don't call them hard rules (because rules are meant to be creatively broken, we all know), but rather... smart guidelines. Craftsmanship tricks. Things that ensure your unique style isn't just *unique*, but also *effective*. Because what good is a brilliant metaphor if nobody gets it? What good is a profound sentence if the reader gives up after three words because the construction hurts the eyes?

The ideal is language that is invisible, like a perfectly polished window through which the reader looks straight into your story world. They don't even notice

the language, so absorbed are they by what's happening. Every time your language *does* stand out – due to an error, clumsiness, a word that just doesn't feel right – it's a fingerprint on that window. A scratch. Sometimes even a crack. And *poof*, the reader is back in their own boring reality, aware that they are reading instead of experiencing. The illusion is broken. And that, dear writer, you usually want to avoid (unless you deliberately want the reader to bang against that window, but that's another story).

So, in this chapter, we're going to thoroughly inspect that toolkit of yours. We'll look at the basics: how do you avoid those utterly stupid common errors [like confusing your/you're] and other grammatical blunders that immediately label you as an amateur? We'll dive into the wonderful world of punctuation and quotation marks – yes, those darn things are there to help the reader, not to artistically annoy you! We'll battle the 'difficult words' mafia: when is a word like 'apocryphal' *exactly* right, and when are you just trying to be interesting with a 'scarlet cloak' when 'red coat' would suffice perfectly well? And we'll listen to the music in language: rhythm, sound, a bit of alliteration here, a pinch of imagery there. Not to turn it into something overly sentimental, but to give your prose that little extra *oomph*.

The goal? Not for everyone to start writing the same, heaven forbid. But to ensure that your unique voice sounds as powerful, clear, and compelling as possible. So that the bridge to the reader stands firm and your story hits home like a... well, like a damn good story. Let's get started!

1.1   Writing flawlessly

Let's delve deeper into the minefield known as 'flawless language'. Fasten your seatbelts, because this is where opinions diverge like guests at a failed family party.

The Holy Grail: An Error-Free Manuscript (and why that's an illusion, but a noble pursuit)

"No language errors." The gold standard, the sparkling ideal every writer strives for. And rightly so. Nothing pulls a reader out of the story more brutally than stumbling over a clumsy confusion between **'your' and 'you're'**, a misspelled word, or a sentence so grammatically awkward it nearly falls over. It's like a beautiful painting with a big fat coffee stain on it. You can still see what it depicts, but that stain... it *distracts*.

Why do we emphasize this so much? Because errors, especially when they accumulate, detract from your credibility as an author. They suggest carelessness, a lack of concern for your own work and, indirectly, for the reader who takes the trouble to read your story. It's a matter of professionalism and respect. In a world where anyone with a keyboard and an internet connection can call themselves a 'writer', proficient language mastery is a way to distinguish yourself. It shows you take your craft seriously. Moreover, and perhaps even more importantly, errors create noise on the line. They force the reader to pause, decipher what is meant, and *poof*, the magic is gone, the suspension of disbelief evaporates. The reader is momentarily back in their own world, painfully aware they are reading a book instead of living an adventure.

The Gray Area: Where Errors Befriend Style (or become enemies with the reader)

But then... the catch. "There are, of course, hundreds of situations on the border of whether something is a language error or not, and some of these can be considered part of your personal style." Welcome to the wonderful world of the grammatical Gray Zone! This is where Language Purists and Anything-Goes advocates constantly clash. Is it **'less problems'** or **'fewer problems'**? Can you start a sentence with **'And'** or **'But'**? Is using **'ain't'** really the end of civilization, or just informal speech?

Let's be honest: some 'errors' are indisputable. If your character consistently writes **"he don't"** instead of "he doesn't" in their diary (unless perhaps they are a charming but grammatically challenged individual whose voice you're capturing), then that's generally considered... an error in standard English. The same goes for the classic **'your/you're'** confusion ["I'll give you're book back"] or using the objective pronoun as a subject ["**Me and him** went to the store"]. These kinds of mistakes are rarely a conscious style choice but rather the result of carelessness or ignorance. And yes, they pull the reader out of the story.

But there are also more conscious deviations. What about:

- **Character Voice:** Your character might not be an English professor. They might speak dialect, use *slang*, stumble over difficult words, or make grammatical errors fitting their background or personality (e.g., consistently using double negatives like "I don't need no help"). In that case, the 'error' is not the author's mistake, but a *characteristic* of the character. It would actually be strange if an uneducated character from a

specific region suddenly spoke like a BBC newsreader. The art is to do this consistently and believably.

- **Conscious Stylistic Breaks:** Sometimes, as an author, you choose an unusual sentence structure, a fragmentary sentence, or even a deliberately non-standard word usage to achieve a certain effect. Think of poetry, where rules are often looser. Think of stream-of-consciousness, where sentences follow the erratic flow of thoughts. Or think of a sentence like: "Rain. Cold. And he was alone." The fragments create a specific rhythm and feeling. This isn't carelessness, but a technique. The difference lies in the *intention* and *control*.

- **Language Evolution:** Language lives and changes. What was considered a horrific error fifty years ago might be commonplace now (or vice versa). Think of shifting pronoun usage or the evolving acceptance of certain informalities in different contexts. The line between error and acceptable usage is constantly shifting. A good writer is aware of this dynamic, without immediately embracing every trend.

The Ultimate Referee: Does it Hinder the Reader?

How do you navigate this minefield now? The most important question to ask yourself is: "Does my language use – or this specific deviation – hinder the reader?" Does it require too much effort to understand the sentence? Does it distract from the content? Does it cause irritation?

- **The Stumble Factor:** If a reader has to reread a sentence two or three times, not because the thought is complex, but because the *construction* is clumsy or illogical, then something is wrong. Language should serve the story, not obscure it.

- **The Irritation Factor:** Even small, common errors (like mixing up **'its/it's'** or inconsistent comma usage) can become irritating if they occur frequently. It's like a mosquito constantly buzzing around your head – eventually, you swat at it, and then you've lost your concentration.

- **The "Oh, Really?!" Factor:** Sometimes you encounter language use that is so artificial, unnatural, or pretentious (think excessive use of archaisms or forced trendy language) that the reader thinks: "Oh, come on." That also pulls them out of the story.

Mastery: Knowing the Rules to Break Them

Personal style can certainly rub or color outside the lines a bit. But – and this is essential – it only works if the reader feels (consciously or unconsciously)