

The 1999 World Science Fiction Convention Writing Science Fiction

In 1999 the World Science Fiction Convention was held in Melbourne. I was fortunate to be able to attend sessions, and for anyone involved in writing, they were an inspiration.

Those who spoke included writers such as Robert Silverberg, George RR Martin (writer of Game of Thrones), Terry Pratchett, and screenwriter and producer J Michael Strasczynski (Babylon 5 and much else). Australian writers included Damien Broderick, Sean McMullen, Sophie Masson, Lucy Sussex, Terry Dowling, Jane Routley and Russell Blackford.

Robert Silverberg (born 1935), has been writing and publishing since the age of 14. His advice to writers? A general point first: No one went into writing just to make money. Some writers have done well but if it's money you want, do something else. Generally, the quick success is a rare exception to the rule. It takes a long time to learn and apply writing skills. In other occupations a long apprenticeship or study is required before one would dare take up the occupation professionally. Writing is no different. Unless you are Shakespeare or Homer on steroids, be prepared to do the hard work in order to learn to write and be published in some form. Keep your ego on a leash. Focus on your vision as a writer and follow it. Write as well as you can. To have as many people as possible try to read and appreciate it is the ideal for the writer; but you cannot always find an outlet for your best or favourite work. Some of his best work, according to his own judgement, (and he is one of the most prolific writers in the English language), has not been published. Do not get caught up in commercial or honorific considerations like literary prizes. Focus on what you want to write, stick to it, and the time may come for it to be accepted.

The general writing process he follows is: Visualise it. Orchestrate it. Write it. In his youth Silverberg wrote 40 pages a day **on a manual typewriter**. When asked how he could sustain this pace, when new writers struggle with one page a day, he replied that 'Because you cannot do what I could do then, just means you are a different person'. His inspiration? **Continue to grow or you begin to die**. While many writers are solitary beings by nature you must remain open to the world because experiences are sources of material. All the same, time for being alone to reflect, and be with your writing, is very important. When he starts to write a story, it is the most interesting and important thing he is doing - while he is doing it. His professional tip on writing? Write; finish what you started; edit; submit; re-edit if unsuccessful; re-submit. No success? Keep it aside for another opportunity and move on to another writing project. Be patient. Today there are many ways to be published, in print or electronically.