

THE WRITING LIFE

by Bobbi Linkemer

bobbi@writeanonfictionbook.com

The Creative Process is Messy

I have been teaching a course in *Writing, Publishing, & Promoting Your Nonfiction Book* for several years. With all due modesty, I must say, my teaching skills have improved. Actually, they pretty much had to, since I had no idea what I was doing when I began. (My apologies to my early students.)

For the last couple of years, people have been asking for a follow-up of some kind, either a writers' group or an advanced class. We've tried writers' groups, with mixed results. Those who were committed, kept on writing; and those who weren't so sure, got stuck somewhere in the process and stopped.

This year, the community college decided to offer an advanced class as an experiment. Thirteen people signed up. I wrote a very explicit description of what, in essence, we were going to invent as we went along.

The problem with inventing something as you do it is that you have no idea what it's going to look like. Although I pride myself on having a high tolerance for ambiguity, I was frankly a little uneasy about the lack of structure.

"This is not a class; it's a workshop," I said on the first night. "And, I'm not teaching; I'm *facilitating*." That was fine with some people, not so fine with others. My plan for that first session was pretty sketchy. The idea was to respond to the needs of the students; but, until the end of that evening, I didn't know what those needs were.

I ruminated about my lack of control for a couple of days but finally realized that "sketchy" is what a painting is before it becomes a painting. In other words, inventing a process as you go along is the nature of the creative process. It is, by definition, unformed and messy. That's why it's called "art" and not paint by number.

