

My Bookcase Holds Volumes That Have Guided Me for Years

By Irv Sternberg

Preparing for this writing assignment gave me the opportunity to actually inventory my collection of more than one hundred volumes. Here is what I found:

First, there are my loyal old friends--essential reference books I've used for years to provide credibility to my writing. There are dictionaries produced by Webster; Funk & Wagnall's in two volumes, and "Dictionnaire Moderne," which translates English into French and vice versa. Alongside them are John Bartlett's "Familiar Quotations," J.I. Rodale's "Synonym Finder" and Brewer's "Dictionary of Phrase and Fable" which informs me that a "bower" is a woman's private room. And, of course, there is my well-used Roget's Thesaurus, "Best Quotations for All Occasions" by Lewis Henry, and the Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory which enlightens me about the difference between "free verse" and the Welsh use of "free meter."

These books accompany my forty-two volume collection about the process of fiction writing, including "Making Shapely Fiction" by Jerome Stern and "Revising Fiction" by David Madden. They've mentored me for years and helped me publish ten books after the age of 62.

Perhaps the most important reference book is also the skinniest, William Strunk and E.B. White's classic 92- page "The Elements of Style." If you must choose only one book for your shelves, this is the one.

Next on my shelves are a collection of books by admired writers: John Steinbeck, Mark Twain, Edgar Allan Poe, Annie Dilliard, Ernest Hemingway, Philip Roth, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Frederick Forsythe, Ken Follett, Jack London and Graham Green. A full shelf holds the works of writer friends such as John Dunning, Margaret Coel, Francine Matthews Steven White, Wick Downing, Michael Allegretto, and others.

Growing up in the New York metro area, I followed the Yankees, Giants and Dodgers and became a lifelong baseball fan. I joined the Society of American Baseball Research (SABR) which provided me with a steady stream of books about the history of baseball and biographies of Sandy Koufax and other greats. The cry of "batter up" echoes from that shelf only a few feet from my desk. Among those books are several framed photos and a number of small souvenirs

Because I am sentimentally attached to some of my old college textbooks, you'll find on my shelves a two-volume set of the Complete Words of Shakespeare and another two-volume set of English Literature. Across the room is another bookcase that stores books of maps and a half-dozen photo albums.

Another shelf holds a random selection of paper backs whose titles caught my fancy over the years. Some are still unread, waiting for me to find the time to pick them up and delight in what I find when I turn the pages. Books have that effect on me, which is why I collect and keep them. They're like old friends with whom I share fond memories. And, because I am a writer, I should mention the forty-two books about the writing process which have guided me for years and have helped me produce ten books, all after the age of sixty-two.