
Questions for Tess Gerritsen

Posted by Mary Dunn - 2009/07/15 14:18

:huh: Do you have a question for Tess? Post it here. But be aware that Tess is a very busy woman and we cannot guarantee that she can or will be able to answer your question. But we can try.

So use this thread to post your question for Tess.

Mary

Re:Questions for Tess Gerritsen

Posted by Abby Manahan - 2009/07/24 10:16

Thanks Mary for setting up this forum.

I'd like to ask Tess about her strategies for reading during her research for Gravity. I read the piece on how she collected and conducted her research but I'd like to get more specific. Reading comprehension is really important in our tech school due to the technical nature of manuals and textbooks our career and tech (vocational) students are asked to read. I'm always looking to collect ideas/anecdotes on how people get through difficult, technical reading.

Tess, how did you sort through the reading as you were doing your research? Did you take notes, write in the margin, highlight, use post its? Did you read first and then conduct interviews to verify information? Or vice versa to supplement the interview information? What was the most difficult piece you had to read to prepare for Gravity? What made it challenging...vocabulary, data, paragraph-long sentences;) ? Did you read selectively, as in, focused on abstract/summary and conclusion to get the gist?

Thanks for taking the time to consider these questions!

Re:Questions for Tess Gerritsen

Posted by Mary Dunn - 2009/07/24 18:10

You are very welcome Abby! Any time we as science teachers can read fun fiction based on solid science content I want to be a part!

I have written to Tess and forwarded your questions. Now we just wait to see if she has the time to reply.

Keep your fingers crossed!

Mary

Reply to Abby from Tess....

Posted by Mary Dunn - 2009/07/25 10:25

Hi Abby,

When I'm using written text as a source, not only do I use a yellow highlighter to mark the text, I also keep a separate notepad to jot down any interesting information that I think might be useful for my story. At this point in research, I don't know which information I'll use -- I'm just keeping track of details that I find fascinating. In my notes, I also write down the page number where I found that bit of info, so I can go back and read it more thoroughly, should I need to review it. There's nothing more frustrating than looking at my notes a month later, seeing something really cool that I'd noted, and not remembering where I read it.

I'm also a big fan of Post-it notes, esp. the big ones that have lots of room to write on. I subscribe to the Journal of Forensic sciences, and when I come across an article that I find really useful, I'll use a Post-it to mark the page, with the written subject matter easily visible at a glance.

If the subject matter is highly technical, and I know I'll need live people as sources, I always do as much reading as I can

prior to meeting the interview subject. I want to know the terminology first. I want to be prepared enough to know WHAT to ask, and to understand the expert's responses. It's frustrating for a source person to waste time explaining elementary background. For GRAVITY, I familiarized myself with common acronyms, so I'd understand their language. That was a challenge, but it sped up the interview process. It allowed us to launch straight into the subject matter.

The most difficult part of my research for GRAVITY was that my plot demanded catastrophes that hadn't yet happened in the space program. No orbiter had yet crashed on landing, and I didn't know how to make it happen. Which meant I needed NASA to imagine a disaster that they hadn't already prepared for, something so unexpected that there'd be no contingency for it. Since they pride themselves on having contingencies for every possible malfunction, this was a challenge to them. Not to mention, a challenge for me!

I guess my approach to research would be this:
Read. Learn the lingo. Prepare your questions. Then, and only then, talk to the experts.

Tess

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Re:Questions for Tess Gerritsen

Posted by Abby Manahan - 2009/07/26 11:51

I'm so excited to hear back from Tess!

Again Mary thanks for facilitating my questions!

Tess, I really appreciate you sharing the nuances of your reading and research process. I look forward to sharing your anecdote with students and teachers at my school. Your point about formulating and asking questions is well taken. It's a skill that we need to cultivate much more in our students, especially in this age of the Internet where it's information overload from lots of sources even unreliable ones. It's also one of the best ways to analyze and synthesize new knowledge.

Thanks again!

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