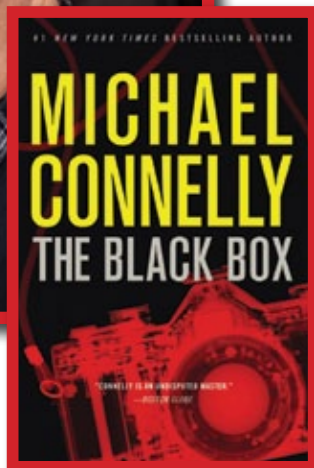




# America's Favorite Suspense Authors On the Rules of Fiction

## WRITING MOMENTUM, MICHAEL CONNELLY'S WAY

By Anthony J. Franze  
Photo Credit: Philippe Matsas



*In this series, author Anthony J. Franze interviews other suspense writers about their views on “the rules” of fiction. For the past few months, Anthony has profiled authors who are teaching at this summer’s CraftFest, the International Thriller Writers’ writing school held during the organization’s annual ThrillerFest conference. This month, #1 New York Times bestselling author Michael Connelly shares his advice.*

Michael Connelly is a writer’s writer. As a journalist, he was short-listed for the Pulitzer Prize. He went on to become an acclaimed crime reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*. And when he turned to fiction, he achieved a level of success experienced by few writers, including more than fifty million books sold, too many literary awards to list, and blockbuster movie adaptations of his work. Connelly’s latest novel, “The Black Box,” proves again that he remains at the top of his game.

But when it comes to the rules of writing, well, Connelly said he’s not the kind of writer who has a neat little set of rules. When we spoke recently, Connelly said that he uses just a few devices to “keep the writing momentum going.” By that he means combating the struggle most writers confront to stay excited about writing. Writing momentum, Connelly said, serves an obvious practical purpose: getting the book done. “But more important, if I can’t wait to write those pages, hopefully the reader can’t wait to read



them. Conversely, if I feel like I'm blocked or trudging along, the reader may too. I need the momentum and excitement.”

So how does Connelly keep the momentum of a runaway train after two decades as a novelist? He pointed out some advice he's received from other authors along the way.

### Write Every Day.

Connelly credits novelist Harry Crews for impressing upon him the need to write every day. “Crews knew how difficult it is to stay focused and that writing each day not only helps the writer develop discipline, but also prevents the story from wandering away.” If you write every day—even for just fifteen minutes—you immerse yourself in the characters and the plot, which keeps you eager to move the story ahead.

If you can't write every day, Connelly said, make sure the story is always close, churning in your head. “To use a surfing metaphor, it's a lot of paddling for a short ride, so you've got to find ways to keep the wave going. Writing every day is a method to help you stay on the board.”

### Make Sure Your Characters Want Something on Every Page.

Connelly said he follows Kurt Vonnegut's advice: “Every character should want something, even if it is only a glass of water.” This helps keep the characters active, which builds momentum. Also, “showing how people get what they want shows the kind of person they are, their character. A great book, something I want to read or write, is all about character. So when I write, I do this by showing the big and little things characters want; the big things, like they want to solve a murder, or small things, like the character desperately wants a cigarette.”

At the end of each writing day, Connelly prints off that day's pages and the next morning he reviews each page and asks himself, *What does each character want?* Then, “I rewrite, rewrite, and rewrite. I start the next day editing the prior day's work, which also gets me into writing.”

### Be Wary of the Outline.

Connelly recognizes that writers differ on the virtues of an outline. He gave up outlining after his first novel because “it made writing seem like work,” a momentum killer. In his early years as a novelist he still worked as a journalist. When he came home at night to work on his novel, he didn't like being chained to an outline. “It felt like a boss telling me what to do.” Today, he usually knows the beginning and ending of the book, but enjoys the freedom and fun of leaving the middle unknown. It's the middle that keeps him excited to return to the blank page. “I know I'm plugged in if I don't need my alarm clock; I wake myself up ready to go.” That said, if an outline or some other device is a writer's way to stay energized about the story and to keep the momentum going, Connelly said, “go for it.” ■

*\*Anthony J. Franze is the author of the debut legal thriller, “The Last Justice.” In addition to his writing, Anthony is a lawyer in the Appellate and Supreme Court practice of a major Washington, D.C. law firm and an adjunct professor of law. Anthony is active in the International Thriller Writers association where he Co-Chairs ITW's Debut Authors Program and is the Assistant Managing Editor of the Big Thrill magazine. Anthony lives in the D.C. area with his wife and three children. Learn more about Anthony at <http://www.anthonyfranzebooks.com/>*

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