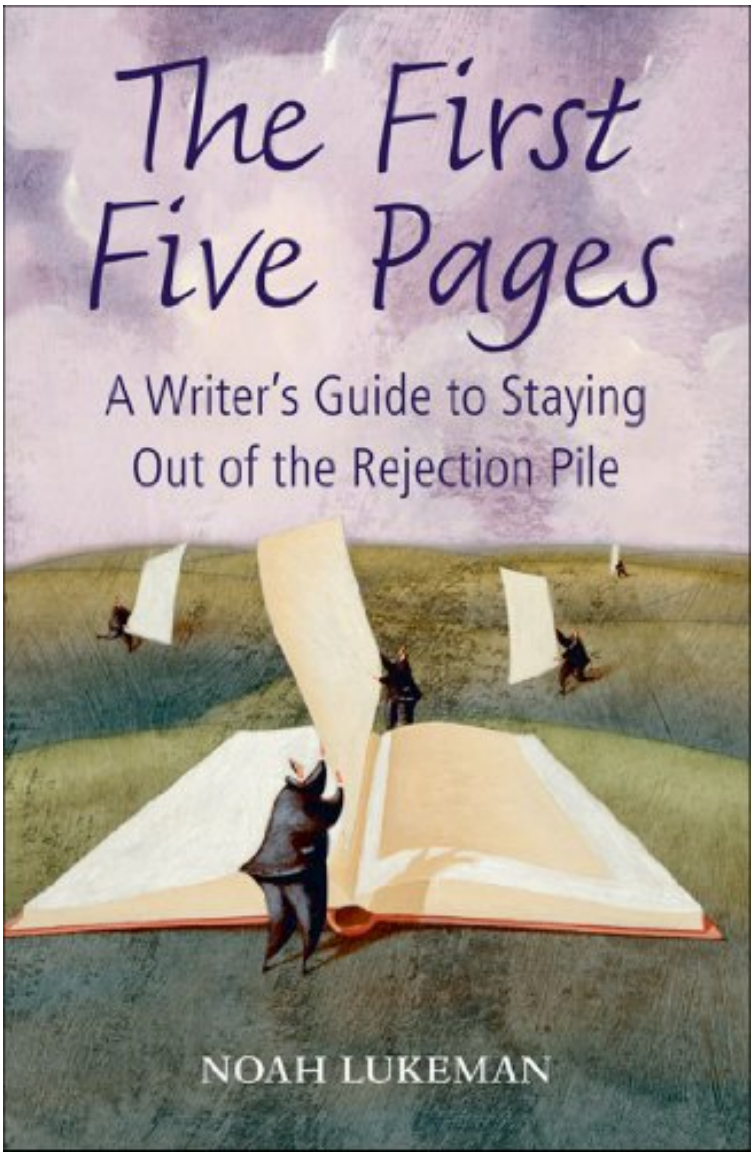
The First Five Pages: A Writer's Guide to Staying Out of the Rejection Pile



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Par Noah Lukeman : The First Five Pages: A Writer's Guide to Staying Out of the Rejection Pile before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The First Five Pages: A Writer's Guide to Staying Out of the Rejection Pile:

Description : Description du produit IF YOU'RE TIRED OF REJECTION, THIS IS THE BOOK FOR YOU. Whether you are a novice writer or a veteran who has already had your work published, rejection is often a frustrating reality. Literary agents and editors receive and reject hundreds of manuscripts each month. While it's the job of these publishing professionals to be discriminating, it's the job of the writer to produce a manuscript that immediately stands out among the vast competition. And those outstanding qualities, says New York literary agent Noah Lukeman, have to be apparent from the first five pages. The First Five Pages reveals the necessary elements of good writing, whether it be fiction, nonfiction, journalism, or poetry, and points out errors to be avoided, such as * A weak opening hook * Overuse of adjectives and adverbs * Flat

or forced metaphors or similes * Melodramatic, commonplace or confusing dialogue * Undeveloped characterizations and lifeless settings * Uneven pacing and lack of progression With exercises at the end of each chapter, this invaluable reference will allow novelists, journalists, poets and screenwriters alike to improve their technique as they learn to eliminate even the most subtle mistakes that are cause for rejection. The First Five Pages will help writers at every stage take their art to a higher -- and more successful -- level.

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And those outstanding qualities, says New York literary agent Noah Lukeman,have to be apparent from the first five pages.The First Five Pages: A Writer's Guide to Staying Out of the Rejection Pile reveals the necessary elements of good writing, whether it be fiction, nonfiction, journalism, or poetry, and points out errors to be avoided, such as:- A weak opening hook- Overuse of adjectives and adverbs- Flat or forced metaphors or similes- Undeveloped characterizations and lifeless settings- Uneven pacing and lack of progressionWith exercises at the end of each chapter, this invaluable reference will allow novelists, journalists, poets, and screenwriters alike to improve their technique as they learn to eliminate even the most subtle mistakes that are cause for rejection. The First Five Pages will help writers at every stage take their art to a higher - and more successful - level..comThe difference between The First Five Pages and most books on writing is that the others are written by teachers and writers. This one comes from a literary agent--one whose clients include Pulitzer Prize nominees, New York Times bestselling authors, Pushcart Prize recipients, and American Book Award winners. Noah Lukeman is not trying to impart the finer points of writing well. He wants to teach you "how to identify and avoid bad writing," so that your manuscript doesn't come boomeranging back to you in that self-addressed, stamped envelope. Surprise: Agents and editors don't read manuscripts for fun; they are looking for reasons to reject them. Lukeman has arranged his book "in the order of what I look for when trying to dismiss a manuscript," starting with presentation and concluding with pacing and progression. Each chapter addresses a pitfall of poor writing--overabundance of adjectives and adverbs, tedious or unrealistic dialogue, and lack of subtlety to name just a few--by identifying the problem, presenting solutions, giving examples (one wishes these weren't quite so obvious), and offering writing exercises. It's a little bizarre to think about approaching your work as would an agent, but if you are serious about getting published, you may as well get used to it. Plus, Lukeman has plenty of solid advice worth listening to. Particularly fine are his exercises for removing and spicing up modifiers and his remedies for all kinds of faulty dialogue. --Jane SteinbergExtraitIntroductionMost people are against books on writing on principle. So am I. It's ridiculous to set down rules when it comes to art. Most of the truly great artists have broken all the rules, and this is precisely what has made them great. What would have become of Beethoven's music if he'd chased rules instead of inspiration? Of van Gogh's paintings?There are no rules to assure great writing, but there are ways to avoid bad writing. This, simply, is the focus of this book: to learn how to identify and avoid bad writing. We all fall prey to it, to different degrees, even the greatest writers, even in the midst of their greatest works. By scrutinizing the following examples of what not to do, you will learn to spot these ailments in your own writing; by working with the solutions and exercises, you may, over time, bridge the gap and come to a realization of what to do. There is no guarantee that you will come to this realization, but if you do, at least it will be your own. Because ultimately, the only person who can teach you about writing is yourself.People are afraid to admit they'd dismiss a work of art instantaneously, whether it's the first five pages of an unsolicited manuscript or the first five pages of Faulkner. But the truth is they do. When it's a "classic," most read on and finish the book to keep up pretext and not seem so presumptuous as to pass instant judgment on a great work. But they've secretly made up their mind after page 5, and 99 percent of the time, they're not going to change it. It is not unlike the person who walks into a museum and dismisses van Gogh in the flash of an eye; he would be scorned by critics, probably called a fool, but ultimately art is art, and this person has the right to pass his own judgment whether he's stared at it for a second or for a year.In truth, though, this book is not concerned with the argument of whether one should dismiss a work of art instantaneously -- this we'll leave to sophists -- but rather, more simply, with whether a work is technically accomplished enough to merit a serious artistic evaluation to begin with. It is not like walking into a museum and judging the van Goghs and Rembrandts; it is like walking into an elementary school art fair and judging which students exhibit more technical skill than others. An artistic evaluation is

another, largely subjective can of worms. This book's objective is much simpler, much more humble. It is like a first reader who has been hired to make two piles of manuscripts, one that should be read beyond the first five pages and one that shouldn't. Ninety-nine percent of today's unsolicited manuscripts will go into the latter. This book will tell you why.When most professional literary agents and book editors hear the title of this book, they grab my arm, look me in the eyes and say, "Thank you." I can see their pent-up frustration at wanting to say so many things to writers and simply not having the time. I've come to understand this frustration over the last few years as I've read thousands of manuscripts, all, unbelievably, with the exact same type of mistakes. From Texas to Oklahoma to California to England to Turkey to Japan, writers are doing the exact same things wrong. While evaluating more than ten thousand manuscripts in the last few years, I was able to group these mistakes into categories; eventually, I was able to set forth definite criteria, an agenda for rejecting manuscripts. This is the core of The First Five Pages: my criteria revealed to you.Thus, despite its title, this book is not just about the first five pages of your manuscript; rather, it assumes that by scrutinizing a few pages closely enough -- particularly the first few -- you can make a determination for the whole. It assumes that if you find one line of extraneous dialogue on page 1, you will likely find one line of extraneous dialogue on each page to come. This is not a wild assumption. Think of another art form -- music, for example. If you listen to the first five minutes of a piece of music, you should be able to evaluate a musician's technical skill. A master musician would scoff at even that, saying he could evaluate a fellow musician's skill in five seconds, not five minutes. The master musician, through diligence and patience, has developed an acute enough ear to make an instant evaluation. This book will teach you the step-by-step criteria so that you, too, may develop that acute ear and make instant evaluations, be it of your own writing or of someone else's. By its end, you'll come to see why this book should not have been titled The First Five Pages but The First Five Sentences.Agents and editors don't read manuscripts to enjoy them; they read solely with the goal of getting through the pile, solely with an eye to dismiss a manuscript -- and believe me, they'll look for any reason they can, down to the last letter. I have thus arranged the following chapters in the order of what I look for when trying to dismiss a manuscript. You'll find that, unlike many books on writing, this book's perspective is truly that of the agent or editor.Subsequently, I hope this book might also be useful to publishing professionals, particularly those entering the industry. Unlike other fields, publishing requires no advanced degrees; many neophytes, especially today, come straight from college or from media-related fields. Even if prospective agents or editors inherently know how to judge a manuscript -- even if they have that "touch" -- in most cases they still won't be able to enunciate their reasoning beyond a vague "this manuscript doesn't hold my interest." It is crucial they know their precise reasons for rejecting a manuscript if they even mean to talk about them intelligently. This book will help them in this regard. Everyone will ultimately develop his own order of elimination, his own personal pet peeves, and thus this book does not pretend to be the last word on the issue; but in its nineteen chapters, it covers many of the major points of a manuscript's initial evaluation.Young publishing professionals must also keep in mind that, in some rare cases, the first five pages might be awful and the rest of the manuscript brilliant (and vice versa). They should thus not always keep too rigidly to the criteria and should also employ what I call the three-check method, which is, if the first five pages look terrible, check the manuscript a second time, somewhere in the middle, and then again a third time, somewhere toward the end. (It is extremely unlikely you will open to the only three terrible points in the manuscript.) This method should especially be employed if you are evaluating manuscripts for the first time and should be used until you feel supremely confident in the evaluation process.The main audience for this book, though, is you, the writer. Along with the criteria, this book offers an in-depth look at the technique and thought processes behind writing and has been designed to be of interest to the beginning and advanced writer alike, both as a general read and as a reference and workbook. There is so much to know in writing that even if you do already know it all, there are bound to be some things that have fallen to the back of your mind, some things you can use being reminded of. There is a lot of advice in this book; some you might use, some you might disagree with. Such is the nature of writing, which is, like all arts, subjective; all I can say is that if you walk away from these pages with even one idea that helps you with even one word of your writing, then it's been worth it. In the often frustrating business of writing -- workshops, conferences, books, articles, seminars -- this is a helpful principle to keep in mind.You may feel uncomfortable thinking of yourself as a "writer." This is commonly encountered in new writers. They will often duck the label, insist they're not writers but have only written such and such because they had the idea in their head. There is a widely perpetuated myth that to be a "writer," you need to have had many years' experience. Despite popular conviction, a writer needn't

to wear black, be unshaven, sickly and parade around New York's East Village spewing aphorisms and scaring children. You don't need to be a dead white male with a three-piece suit, noble countenance, smoking pipe and curling mustach. And it has nothing to do with age. (I've seen twenty-year-old writers who've already been hard at work on their craft for five years and are brilliant, and sixty-year-old writers who have only been writing for a year or two and are still amateur. And, of course, one year for one writer, if he works ten hours a day on his craft, can be the equivalent of ten years for someone else who devotes but a few minutes a week.) All you need is the willingness to be labeled "writer," and with one word you are a writer. Just as with one stroke, you are a painter; with one note, a musician.This is a more serious problem than it may seem, because to reach the highest levels of the craft, above all you'll need confidence. Unshakable confidence to leap forcefully into the realm of creation. It is daunting to create something new in the face of all the great literature that's preceded you; it may seem megalomaniacal to try to take your place on the shelf beside Dante and Faulkner. But maybe they once felt the same. The more we read, ingest new information, the greater the responsibility we have to not allow ourselves to succumb to the predicament Shakespeare described some three hundred years ago: "art tongue-tied by authority."Of course, confidence is just the first step. The craft of writing must then be learned. The art of writing cannot be taught, but the craft of writing can. No one can teach you how to tap inspiration, how to gain vision and sensibility, but you can be taught to write lucidly, to present what you say in the most articulate and forceful way. Vision itself is useless without the technical means to record it.There is no such thing as a great writer; there are only great re-writers. As you've heard before, 90 percent of writing is rewriting. If first drafts existed of some of the classics, you'd find many of them to be dreadful. This process of rewriting draws heavily on editing. And editing can be taught. Thus the craft of writing, inspiration aside, can to a great extent be taught. Even the greatest writers had to have been taught. Did they know how to write when they were toddlers?As an editor, you approach a book differently than a general reader. You should not enjoy it; rather you should feel like you're hard at work -- your head should throb. You should constantly be on guard for what is wrong, what can be changed. You may relax only when you finish the book -- but not even then, because more often than not you'll awake in the middle of the night three days later, remembering a comma that should have been on such and such a page. The only time an editor can truly relax is when the book is bound. Even then, he will not.When an editor reads, he is not just reading but breaking sentences into fragments, worrying if the first half should be replaced with the second, if the middle fragment should be switched with the first. The better editors worry if entire sentences should be switched within paragraphs; great editors keep entire paragraphs -- even pages -- in their head and worry if these might be switched. Truly great editors can keep an entire book in their head and easily ponder the switching of any word to any place. They'll remember an echo across three hundred pages. If they're professional, they'll be able to keep ten such manuscripts in their head at once. And if you're the writer, and you call them a year later and ask about a detail, even though they've read five thousand manuscripts since then, they'll remember yours without a pause.Master editors are artists themselves. They need to be. Not only can they perform all the tasks of a great editor, but they'll also bring something of their own to a text, give the writer a certain kind of guidance, let the writer know if a certain scene -- artistically -- should be cut, if the book should really begin on page 50, if the ending is too abrupt, if a character is underdeveloped. They'll never impose their will or edit for the sake of editing, but like a great actor, let it grow within them and then suggest changes that arise from the text itself. Like the great Zen master who creates priceless calligraphy with one stroke, the master editor can transform an entire page with one single, well-placed word.But even if you become the master editor, you will still need a support group of astute readers to expose your work to fresh perspectives. This is a point I will raise many times throughout this book, so it is best if you can round them up now. These readers may or may not be in line with your own sensibility -- it is good to have both -- but they should be supportive of you, honest, critical, but always encouraging. Even the most proficient writers cannot catch all of their own mistakes, and even if they could, they would still be lacking the impartial reaction. Outside readers can see things you cannot. If you change one word due to their read, it's worth it.Finally, this book differs from most books on writing in that it is not geared exclusively for the fiction or nonfiction writer, for the journalist or poet. Although some topics, to be sure, will be more relevant to certain types of writers and the majority of examples are from fiction, the principles are deliberately laid out in as broad a spectrum as possible, in order to be applied to virtually any form of writing. This should allow for a more interesting read, as writers of certain genres experiment with techniques they might not have considered otherwise, like the screenwriter grappling with viewpoint, the journalist with dialogue, the poet with pacing. It is always through the

unexpected, the unorthodox, that artists break through to higher levels of performance.