

# **AUTHOR MINDSET SUCCESS FORMULA**

**Part Two: The Science of Art**

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# AUTHOR MINDSET SUCCESS FORMULA

## Part Two: The Science of Art

**Welcome to part two of the *Author Mindset Success Formula*.**

In part one, we discussed how important it is to remind ourselves why art matters. Now, in part two, we are going to explore the science of art.

If you've struggled to complete your first novel, I know how you feel. I've been there. I spent eight years crafting my first novel.

But after completing that first novel, I went on to publish seven books including non-fiction works, novels, and even a children's picture book.

How was I able to transform my productivity in this manner?

Was it magic?

Was I inspired by the Muse?

Was I just born more talented than other people?

Absolutely not!

What I did was study my craft.

After spending eight years writing that first book, I wasn't willing to take nearly a decade to write its sequel.

Luckily, author Tim Ferris had recently released his book *The Four Hour Chef*. Ostensibly, it's a book that teaches you how to cook, but it actually uses cooking as an example of how to learn any new skill.

Early on the book, Ferris outlines what he calls the DiSSS methodology for learning new skills. DiSSS is an acronym for Deconstruction, Selection, Sequencing, and Stakes. I decided to apply the DiSSS methodology to my writing and see where it led me.

I deconstructed the process I went through to finish that first novel. I selected the key steps that helped me to succeed, and I pruned out those steps that didn't work, held me back, and stood in my way. All the challenges I faced and mistakes that I made early on, and had to go back and fix later, were removed from my workflow until all I had left were a handful of steps for success.

I took those steps and sequenced them so that each step built on the next. Finally, I established stakes that kept me on track by creating consequences for when I lost my way during the novel writing process.

Suddenly, writing a novel was no longer this grand, all-encompassing, and overwhelming project. Instead, it was a logical and simplified step-by-step process.

I'm not the first person to do this. There is a long history of studying storytelling.

Human beings are story tellers. We always have been, going all the way back to cave paintings. (Those painting are just caveman comic books!) That means we can learn from tens of thousands of years of storytelling.

The world did not start, and it won't end, with you, my friend.

I don't want to go all Project Mayhem and start yelling: "You are not a unique snowflake!" You are, you are. All my readers are unique snowflakes, but you're a snowflake that is part of the snowball that is human history rolling through time.

In 1623, John Donne wrote in the poem *Devotions* that "No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main." Donne's point was that we can't lock ourselves away and pretend we are not part of the larger world, and that includes the history of writing that came before us. (That poem was written following a period of severe illness, by the way; perhaps Donne was visited by some pneumonia angels that inspired him!)

I'm guessing you want to write something that connects with readers and moves emotionally as many people as possible. If you're going to do that, you need to acknowledge that you are part of something greater than yourself.

I'm sure you have heard the saying, "It's more of an art than a science," a million times.

Question: "How do you score a goal in hockey?"

Answer: “Oh, well, it’s more of an art than a science.”

And what do we think of when we think of the artist figure in our society? We love this idea of the artist that originated with the Romantic poets, guys like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Byron; the artist is this dude who sits alone in nature, waiting for inspiration and the muse to breathe the life of art into them.

Because this image of the romantic artist is so firmly ingrained in our minds, I don’t think we flip the “more of an art than a science” concept on its head nearly often enough. You need to say to yourself, “Writing a novel is more of a science than an art!”

You must consciously produce your writing, not simply hope it flows out of you as a perfectly constructed story brought to you by some muse. If you buy into the myth that Coleridge didn’t know what he was doing when he wrote “Kubla Khan,” that he was just high on opium and it was some purely metaphysical experience, you’ve been misled by a couple hundred years of marketing hype. I assure you, Coleridge knew what he was doing. You think a guy who wrote a book titled *Biographia Literaria* didn’t consciously approach his art?

The heart of the scientific method is repeatable tests that prove (or disprove) a hypothesis, resulting in a conclusion. In regards to story-telling experiments that have tested exactly what works, you have hundreds of thousands to draw from.

If you want to see the results of those experiments, all you have to do is visit your local library. Every one of those books is

an experiment in form and content, and the books that have stood the test of time and are still be reading today are the ones that resonated best with readers.

There is saying, “Success leaves clues.” The essential elements of effective storytelling aren’t a mystery. You don’t have to stare at that blank screen and hope the answers will come to you. The answers are already out there. You just have to model the masters. In doing so, you can stand on the shoulders of giants and use the formulas and blueprints for success that they have left behind for you.

I know some of you are reading this right now and thinking, “But Kevin... I’m an artist! I want to follow my own path. I want to do something that’s never been done before. I didn’t get into novel writing to produce some formulaic story.”

Listen, I hear you, but following a formula, learning from what has been successful in the past, does not produce formulaic art. This is because what differentiates your art from anyone else’s art is the unique perspective you bring to it.

This is the core concept of something known as literary theory.

Literary theory tells us that we can come away with vastly different readings of a text, depending on which theoretical lens is applied to the reading. A Marxist reading of a text may focus on economic issues at play; a feminist reading would focus on issues of sex and gender; a structuralist approach – the one that we are going to take to a certain extent in this book – would try to identify the text’s underlying archetypal story structures; a postcolonial analysis would bring a political perspective; while a national

approach would examine how cultural issues of nationhood play-out in the story.

You view the world through a particular lens that gives you a unique perspective on the world. You, therefore, don't need to get experimental with the formal elements of your work; especially with your first novel. Once you've got a few books in the can and a rabid fan base that will buy whatever you put out, have at it. Until then, focus on the core craft of your art form. Learn the science of your art.

That's it for part two. In part three, we'll discuss one of the most important mindset shifts an aspiring author can possibly make.