

Is Your Idea RIPE?

By Karen H Whiting

A nice, juicy, ripe piece of fruit tastes wonderful. However, an un-ripened apple or other fruit is too hard and bitter to enjoy. An overripe piece of fruit is rotten and sour. Sometimes we begin an article or story without the complete package in our mind. The idea is not ripe and will be as unpalatable as a green banana. There are four main components needed for an idea to be RIPE.

Reliable Research.

Your idea needs authority. You may be able to reference experts or you may have established your self as the authority. My research for this article comes from more than 200 articles and several books I have had published. References establish trust with your readers. Urban legends and false information remind people that they are gullible and make your audience cautious of your message unless it comes with dependable credentials.

Inspiring Illustration

Illustrations or stories involve the reader and captures the imagination so they can understand your message. The word picture your story creates must also link the reader to your point. I wrote a humorous piece about a guest, a flood, and my prayers that led him to dream about the food I prepared. However, it did not draw readers to my point about the positive power of water. I rewrote the piece using an ancestor's harnessing water for a mill and it flowed right into the point.

Passionate Point

Every article or story needs a purpose. As the creator of a piece, think of your reader and why you want to convey your topic. Care about both the topic and the reader. Refine it until it is easy to convey. To make the point powerful, the writer needs passion for the point made.

I direct a critique group because I love to help writers transfer their ideas from the mind to paper. Sometimes I want to shout, "Look, you are missing something vital. I understand you want me to cheer every word you penned but I want to help you make it reach publication and touch people." My desire gave me passion to develop this article. The acronym, RIPE, conveys the purpose of showing readers how to develop a plan before writing.

Effective Equipment

Whether you seek to educate or entertain your work must effectively direct readers so they know what to do with the new knowledge. To effectively entertain you must evoke an emotion. If you seek to editorialize, you need to engage the reader's mind with persuasive arguments and encourage them to open up and think differently. If you want to educate you need to provide instructions that are easy to follow or provide knowledge the reader can use and pass on to others.

In this case, I am educating readers. To understand how to apply this information read on and discover techniques to nurture your idea to make it ripe.

Nurture Your Idea.

First, write the idea on paper. It may be a story or illustration that you want to share. It may be the main point or even some new fact discovered while researching something else. Or, it may be you have some guidelines or instructions you think will help others. Thus, you have at least one of the four components.

Now list the missing components and consider how to cultivate them. Here are some suggestions:

☆ Reference. There are several places to research:

- Find professionals through the Internet or yellow pages. Submit questions to profnet.com, a source that links reporters to authorities.
- Also, look up the topic in a Biblical cyclopedic index if you want to use God as a reference.
- Check out quotes from famous people.
- See if you can be your own expert. List your credentials that make you an authority.

☆ Illustration. Look for a story to match your ideas:

- Talk to people and seek stories from anyone who has experience. When I wrote about September 11th, I used stories of three people with different experiences related to the attack.
- Read extensively and look for examples to draw from. Because I had read about bamboo trees with my child who loved Panda bears I used the illustration of the bamboo tree's root system and unusual growth pattern in an article on the need to pray before beginning projects.
- In fiction you can create a story. In nonfiction you can ask your readers to imagine a situation and thus create an illustration.

☆ Point. You may have an idea but it may not be focused. Or you may be trying to teach too much in one article, making lots of bunny trails that leave a reader confused. Focus in on a single purpose.

- Write down every reason you want to write your article. Then examine each. Ask yourself what one do you want the reader to remember.
- Look at the other parts you already chose. If you have a great illustration ask what can it teach. If you have an instruction you want to pass on, such as how to weave a plot then let that lead you to your point. If you have some new research to share then consider why people need to know it and that will bring you to your focus.
- ☆ Equipment. You know what you want to give your audience but now you must decide how to share that information each reader can use.
 - Go through the process in your mind or in reality. If it is a how to piece on a craft make it and at each step stop and write down the directions.
 - If it is to entertain then think of how you can make it more humorous or more creative. Act it out and perform it aloud as a drama.
 - If you want to give your reader a challenge to act on think of how to package in a memorable way. A short punchy sentence, alliteration, or an acrostic. I used the acronym *ripe* as a simply way to remember the components of a great article to help you decide if you are equipped to begin your writing. Each word of the acronym represents one word. Each of the words represents an idea, a part needed for the whole package.

Once you define all the components you know you have a RIPE idea for a juicy article. Choose how to weave it together and start writing.