

Devotions: Gifts of Wisdom

By Karen Whiting

Devotions give readers precious gifts of wisdom carefully packaged with love. Short and tightly written, an inspirational piece reveals one Biblical principal. Readers seek out devotions, in snatches of time, to fill their minds with uplifting thoughts and inspiration of how God works in the lives of people.

The average daily devotional is 250-400 words and pays a \$10-\$35. They are widely read and touch many lives. A devotional in *Upper Room* is read by millions of people in more than forty countries. Study many devotionals before writing one.

Learn to use few words to convey an image that illustrates a message. Learn from proverbs 25:11, “Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word fitly spoken.” That creates a beautiful picture, appeals to the senses, and conveys insightful thoughts.

Furst, a seed is planted and cultivated. The tree grows, and at the right time, the farmer picks the luscious ripe apple. When an idea comes to mind, plant it in your heart. Cultivate it with prayer. Reflect on one for readers to remember and build the devotion around that basic theme.

The apple shines when someone polishes it. Polish the focus sentence with editing. Don’t rush to serve the words without adding a shine. Use active verbs but avoid commanding readers with words that sound peachy such as *must* or *do*.

The setting of silver is the serving plate that conveys love and care for the other person. An apple on a paper plate would provide the same nourishment but not the same message of love. The backdrop shows the apple to its best advantage. Consider the reader in choosing the appropriate setting of words. Readers can be young children, teens, men, or women, each requiring a different approach, a different setting though the message may be the same.

Devotions for young children are usually written in story form, such as found in *Keys for Kids*, or church take-home papers. Youngsters learn truths through the character.

Devo’zine uses language, graphics, poetry, and current topicsrelatable to teenagers. Catchy devotional titles, such as, ‘Getting Into The Heart Of It,’ grab the young reader’s attention.

Devotions in *The Upper Room*, intended for an international adult audience, must contain illustrations with universal appeal. Readers in developing countries may not understand fax machines or waffle grills, so the writer needs to use nature, people, and universal.

To polish the devotional ask questions. Does the title match the focus and grab the reader’s attention? Is it a play on words such as “A Stitch in Time,” about my daughter’s need for stitches in

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her tongue? Does it relate to universal problems, or create an image, such as, “The Lost Pen.”

Does it stay focused? Will the reader easily picture the illustration and remember the message? Will something that touches the reader’s senses remind them of the devotion and its message?

Is it tightly written? Read the words aloud to hear the flow. Is it paced for the audience? Is it full of active verbs with high energy for teens, or a gentler pace for older readers?

Review the conclusion. Did the devotion end with a take away for the reader to apply in daily life? Some devotions need a matching prayer or thought for the day. These should re-emphasize the message. The take away can be turned into the prayer to assist the reader in applying the message. As an apple provides sweetness to the lips and energy to the body the devotion should provide joy and energy to the soul.

The following checklists may help you evaluate devotions. These are tools to pinpoint strengths and weaknesses. Each devotion will not have every item checked. For example, some may contain humor, while others may evoke tears, or a thoughtful reflection.

Devotion's Strengths

- Title matches focus
- Title grabs attention
- Fresh, creative approach
- Presents an eternal truth
- Universal theme for reader identification
- Evokes an emotion
- Contains humor
- Insightful application/ take-away
- Focuses on a single idea
- Creates a word-image
- Appeals to one or more senses
 - sight hearing taste touch smell
- Good read-aloud-ability
- Appropriate for specific audience
- Bible verse, or quote, matches the message

Short-comings

- Title vague or plain
- Overused or trite theme
- Not well-focused
- No sensory appeal
- Poor transitions
- Lacks flow
- Passive, inactive verbs
- Too wordy, needs tightening
- Clichés
- No specific reader benefit/ take-away

Bio: Karen Whiting (www.karenwhiting.com) has written devotions for numerous publications plus more than a dozen devotional books for various ages. Her latest book *52 Weekly Devotions for Families Called to Serve* combines hands on fun with devotional stories for parents and children to enjoy together. She started writing with devotions for periodicals.