

Your First Novel
By Ann Rittenberg and Laura Whitcomb
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Pay No Attention to the Title

***Your First Novel* Is for All Novelists from Would-Be to Seasoned**

Reviewed by Carolyn Howard-Johnson, award-winning author of *This Is the Place* and *Harkening: A Collection of Stories Remembered, Tracing*, a chapbook of poetry and the How To Do It Frugally Series of book for authors.

When I teach my writing students, I urge them to keep reading, keep writing, keep taking classes. Ann Rittenberg and Laura Whitcomb, the agent and author combination who have cobbled together a definitive first book of reading for novelists, urge writers to do the same thing. Having said that, this may very well be the place for a would-be novelist to start.

It's also a great place for a seasoned writer to refresh, pick up a few new hints, get inspired and get some understanding—some real understanding—of what it is agents do.

The reason this book is so important is that both authors come from a place of experience and both have researched their lesson plans. Not only that, Dennis Lehane's foreword will inspire any writer—any writer!—to dig into their craft and the business of publishing by reading farther.

Whitcomb doesn't just give good advice; she illustrates her points liberally with quotations from the classics and newer writers who have perfected their craft. The visuals she provides for, say, "Accents and Dialect" are as clear as if they had been diagrammed for you by the sternest of English-teaching nuns. Only Whitcomb isn't at all stern. Rather her voice (another subject she discusses) will convince writers of her warmth, that she cares about writing, both her own and that of others.

Rittenberg is equally engaging. The most jaded of novelists will come away from her section of the book (publishing, queries, marketing and more!) with a sense that to know an agent may—after all—be to love one.

This book is one that should be grabbed, read, and kept reference-handy by writers at most any stage in their careers. Okay, I'll exempt Stephen King and Barbara Kingsolver, but you get the idea.

Carolyn Howard-Johnson's first novel, *This is the Place*, has won eight awards. Her book of creative nonfiction *Harkening*, won three. A UCLA Writers' Program instructor, she also is the author of another book essential for writers,

USA Book News' Best Professional Book of 2004, *The Frugal Book Promoter: How to Do What Your Publisher Won't*. The second in the HowToDoItFrugally series, *The Frugal Editor: Put Your Best Book Forward to Avoid Humiliation and Ensure Success* covers writing successful query letters and includes helpful hints from twenty of the nation's top agents. It can be purchased at Amazon. Learn more at her new site <http://HowToDoItFrugally.com>.