

A Pattern of Their Own

There's an old saying—something about the sound of your own name being the sweetest thing you can hear. Well, right after that, I think it's seeing your name in print—especially if it's recognition of your own contribution. When we started teaching pattern writing classes, I was surprised at the people who signed up—so many people wanted to write their own stories. This was their chance to tell the world what happened and give their idea a name.

Help others play a role in the patterns effort by encouraging them to write their own pattern.



You're an Evangelist or Dedicated Champion who wants to use a Personal Touch to get those people interested in patterns who have valuable experience to share.

Most people who adopt patterns will be interested primarily in using them. But some people will want to contribute more.

Taking time to appreciate someone's effort is important in encouraging change to take place. Those who see their work as worthwhile and useful are likely to be more enthusiastic about continuing to do it and encourage others to do the same.

Writing patterns is difficult work. Those who have struggled to capture their experience in a pattern are in a good position to help others who have chosen the same path [Rising98].

Therefore:

Encourage others to write a pattern of their own.

Suggest that they write about something they have observed many times. Have a few "good" patterns to use as models. Brainstorm an outline. Discuss "A Pattern Language for Pattern Writing" [Meszaros+98]. Coplien suggests reading about pattern languages in *The Timeless Way of Building* [Alexander79] and *The Oregon Experiment* [Alexander+75].

Be enthusiastic and encouraging while the pattern is being drafted. Give immediate feedback. Help writers understand that theirs are as important as GoF or any other patterns. Be realistic. It takes time to develop a good pattern. After the pattern is written, introduce the writer to the shepherding and writers' workshop processes.

=====

Helping a person write a pattern takes time, but when a person is willing to work at it and is teamed with a mentor who enjoys teaching, the experience can be memorable and rewarding. It's also an excellent way to teach people about patterns. Some say you can't truly understand what a pattern is until you write one. After the first pattern, authors may become excited about writing more patterns. They can also help in spreading the word and building the Early Majority. This is a good way to jumpstart a patterns repository. You may wish to give a Token or Treasure to all who participate.

Not everyone is cut out to be a pattern writer. Those who dislike writing, have poor writing skills, or have trouble thinking at an abstract level will need lots of attention. Consider using Ghost Writer in these situations.

This pattern “builds” a contribution to the pattern literature and creates a new contributor to the patterns community.

We taught a pattern writing class where participants write patterns and workshop them. Often, after having successfully written a pattern in the class, students will go on to write more patterns, especially if a reward system is in place to encourage this. Authors were given a Treasure, a copy of a patterns book.

We expanded a one-day introduction to patterns to two days to allow time for pattern writing and workshopping.

An introductory-level patterns tutorial at the OOPSLA'99 conference was scheduled over two days to allow time for attendees to write and review their own patterns.

Originator: Mary Lynn Manns

Shepherded and workshopped at OOPSLA'99 (August 1999).

Shepherded and workshopped at EuroPloP'00 (July 2000).

Shepherded for PLoP'01 (August 2001).

Shepherded for EuroPloP'02 (April 2002).