

Editorial Graphics and Publishing Services
Notes on Writing from Successful Writers

Some of the advice may be helpful, some of it encouraging, and some may do no more than raise a smile. Here then is some free advice—from one writer to another.

- “There is no rule on how to write. Sometimes it comes easily and perfectly: sometimes it’s like drilling rock and then blasting it out with charges.”
(Ernest Hemingway)
- “Writing is an adventure.”
(Winston Churchill)
- “There are no dull subjects. There are only dull writers.”
(H. L. Mencken)
- “Writing is just work—there’s no secret. If you dictate or use a pen or type or write with your toes—it’s still just work.”
(Sinclair Lewis)
- “Nothing you write, if you hope to be any good, will ever come out as you first hoped.”
(Lillian Hellman)
- “English usage is sometimes more than mere taste, judgment and education—sometimes it’s sheer luck, like getting across the street.”
(E. B. White)
- “Many people hear voices when no one is there. Some of them are called mad and are shut up in rooms where they stare at the walls all day. Others are called writers and they do pretty much the same thing.”
(Meg Chittenden)
- “I love being a writer. What I can’t stand is the paperwork.”
(Peter de Vries)
- “When I finish a first draft, it’s always just as much of a mess as it’s always been. I still make the same mistakes every time.”
(Michael Chabon)
- “Writing is like everything else: the more you do it the better you get. Don’t try to perfect as you go along, just get to the end of the damn thing. Accept imperfections. Get it finished and then you can go back. If you try to polish every sentence there’s a chance you’ll never get past the first chapter.”
(Iain Banks)
- “The writer learns to write, in the last resort, only by writing. He must get words onto paper even if he is dissatisfied with them. A young writer must cross many psychological barriers to acquire confidence in his capacity to produce good work—especially his first full-length book—and he cannot do this by staring at a piece of blank paper, searching for the perfect sentence.”
(Paul Johnson)
- “Real writers are those who want to write, need to write, have to write.”
(Robert Penn Warren)
- “Writing became such a process of discovery that I couldn’t wait to get to work in the morning: I wanted to know what I was going to say.”
(Sharon O’Brien)

- “I write to discover what I think. After all, the bars aren’t open that early.”
(Daniel J. Boorstin)
- “Writing is easy: All you do is sit staring at a blank sheet of paper until drops of blood form on your forehead.”
(Gene Fowler)
- “You fail only if you stop writing.”
(Ray Bradbury)
- “Writing is not hard. Just get paper and pencil, sit down, and write as it occurs to you. The writing is easy—it’s the occurring that’s hard.”
(Stephen Leacock)
- “I notice that you use plain, simple language, short words and brief sentences. That is the way to write English—it is the modern way and the best way. Stick to it; don’t let fluff and flowers and verbosity creep in. When you catch an adjective, kill it. No, I don’t mean utterly, but kill most of them—then the rest will be valuable. They weaken when they are close together. They give strength when they are wide apart. An adjective habit, or a wordy, diffuse, flowery habit, once fastened upon a person, is as hard to get rid of as any other vice.”
(Mark Twain)
- “Writing is a form of therapy; sometimes I wonder how all those, who do not write, compose, or paint can manage to escape the madness, the melancholia, the panic fear, which is inherent in the human condition.”
(Graham Greene)
- “You can be a little ungrammatical if you come from the right part of the country.”
(Robert Frost)
- “What this means, in practical terms for the student writer, is that in order to achieve mastery he must read widely and deeply and must write not just carefully but continually, thoughtfully assessing and reassessing what he writes, because practice, for the writer as for the concert pianist, is the heart of the matter.”
(John Gardner, *The Art of Fiction: Notes on Craft for Young Writers*, 1983)
- “A writer is somebody for whom writing is more difficult than it is for other people.”
(Thomas Mann)
- “What is written without effort is in general read without pleasure.”
(Samuel Johnson)

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<http://grammar.about.com/od/yourwriting/a/advice.htm>.

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