

BEST QUOTES ON WRITING [CONTINUED]

Try writing first thing in the morning, the moment you wake up. The dreamier your mind is, the more creative you'll be. Your brain dreams during the night, but it also thinks. We don't get to make use of that sleep-thinking if we don't turn to our work first thing. Make your coffee in a dreamy way. Then move directly to work. Do not check to see if your husband is still breathing.

--Eric Maisel

When you start to write, accept that you're going to make mistakes. A lot of writers get blocked trying to perfect the work in their head. They want to avoid making a mess on the page, but you actually have to make a mess, that's the genuine process.

--Eric Maisel

Get up early. If I wait until I get home from work, then I'm too tired or too hungry or I just want a glass of wine. But if I make myself get up and do it before I start my day, then I can do it. For me, it's really about discipline and time management.

--Molly Birnbaum

Never write for money. It's a good idea to have a job on the side so that you're not forced to compromise on your writing for the sake of money. If you have a job which is paying the bills, then you can be fearless.

--Mridu Khullar
Relph

I love to hike alone with a specific question in mind, and the deal I make with myself is that I can't go home until I figure out the answer. Inevitably, on these walks, the ideas flood in, and when they do, I take my phone out of my pocket, hit the voice memo button and 'write' the scene.

--Susan Henderson

Famous writers often surrounded themselves with quiet if they had the financial means to do so. Usually this meant buying a house in natural surroundings and setting up a study in which to work. Emily Dickinson's reclusiveness makes more sense once you visit her pleasant sun-filled house in the woods in Amherst, Mass. Her bedroom, where she wrote every morning, radiates a serenity that seems to call for verse, even to this day.

--Joy Lanzendorfer

To truly write well about people, issues and the world around you, get out into life. Roll around in it. Travel. Get dirty. Observe. Talk. Listen. Only then go back to your computer, writing nook, typewriter or coffee shop to do the heavy lifting of putting pen to paper.

--Julia Rappaport

Turning one's novel into a movie script is rather like making a series of sketches for a painting that has long ago been finished and framed.

--Vladimir Nabokov

Good prose is like a windowpane.

--George Orwell

In newsrooms there is little patience for the use of a difficult word where a simpler one will do. 'Good prose is like a windowpane,' wrote George Orwell in his famous essay 'Why I Write,' a rule that would seem to counsel against ever stopping a reader with an unfamiliar word. It's good advice for beginners, but serious readers are also lovers of language. I find that the occasional obscure word, used correctly, spices prose.

--Rick Atkinson

I learned to write fiction the way I learned to read fiction—by skipping the parts that bored me.

--Jonathan Lethem

Having your book turned into a movie is like seeing your oxen turned into bouillon cubes.

--John le Carre

Any reviewer who expresses rage and loathing for a novel is preposterous. He or she is like a person who has put on full armor and attacked a hot fudge sundae.

--Kurt Vonnegut

One of the best places to find stories is in the human instincts. If you want to touch people and make them feel, get down to the bedrock emotions, the fundamental instincts we all have, dormant though some of them may be. The desire for a mate, for shelter, for food, for money—those are problems we all understand, and all of us can feel....Great need will always produce a story.

--Louis L'Amour

When I'm asked how I make things seem real, I answer, 'by appealing to the five senses.'....It is simple enough to appeal to the visual sense, but how often do we include a smell, a sound (other than in dialogue), something tactile or a taste?

--LaVyrle Spencer

The life of reality is confused, disorderly, almost always without apparent purpose, where in the artist's imaginative life there is purpose. There is determination to give the tale, the song, the painting, form—to make it true and real to the theme, not to life....I myself remember with what a shock I heard people say that one of my own books, *Winesburg, Ohio*, was an exact picture of Ohio village life. The book was written in a crowded tenement district of Chicago. The hint for almost every character was taken from my fellow lodgers in a large rooming house, many of whom had never lived in a village. The confusion arises out of the fact that others besides practicing artists have imaginations. But most people are afraid to trust their imaginations and the artist is not.

--Sherwood Anderson

If fiction is to be truthful about what human beings really are and do, we have to define knowledge as a goal of the imagination. After all, when I go down to the library and find out about doing the laundry in Borneo or in 1877, I'm not learning through experience, but through the imagination: I read, and recreate the reality in my mind till I know it. That's what writing, fact or fiction, is for. What I 'know' comes to me from experience, maybe from hearsay, maybe from books or other arts. What matters is what I make of it—what I do with it.

--Ursula K. Le Guin

Write in the morning. Edit at night. Write what most scares you. It's supposed to be hard. Just when you reach the point of deepest despair is when you will have a breakthrough. Relish the process. Work hard at your craft. Believe in your writing. Don't give up.

--Melissa Coleman

In the talk of people, especially of those on the streets, lies an endless wealth of story-stuff. Nor is it necessary to go about haunting street corners with a notebook in your pocket and an amplifier in your ear. It is necessary only that you do not stop your ears with smugness or indifference or indolence. Going about your workaday rounds, assuming you're neither in solitary confinement nor a hermit, you'll hear all the words of which people's lives are constituted. And if you listen long enough, the commonest speech will begin to rhyme like poetry. For people never say anything the same way twice; no two of them ever say it the same. The greatest imaginative writer that ever brooded in a lavender robe and a mellowed briar in his teeth, couldn't tell you, though he try for a lifetime, how the simplest strap-hanger will ask the conductor to be let off at the next stop....It is all for the taking. All the manuals by frustrated fictioneers on how to write can't give you the first syllable of reality, at any cost, that any common conversation can. All the classics, read and re-read, can't help you catch the ring of truth as does the word heard firsthand.

--Nelson Algren

While I rewrite heavily as I go along, this is a dangerous procedure for most beginning writers. I have met so many who have spent years rewriting, over and over again, their first 100 pages, so that they never reached page 101, and never will, and have never written a completed book and never will. It is much preferable to write a book through from start to finish, to do it all, and then go back and redo it or revise it, rather than regale one's friends with an eternal work-in-progress.

--Irving Wallace

The most important and hardest thing for any writer to learn is the discipline of sitting down and writing even when you have to spend three days writing bad stuff before the fourth day, when you write something better. If you've been away from what you've been working on even for a day and a half, you have to put in those three days of bad writing to get to the fourth, or you lose the thread, you lose the rhythm. When you are a young writer, those three days are so unpleasant that you tend to think, 'I'll go away until the mood strikes.' Well, you're out of the mood because you're not sitting there, because you haven't had that period of trying to push through till the fourth day when the rhythm comes.

--Joan Didion

The curious thing about writer's block, the only mysterious thing about it, is that its cause is not always apparent. Often one has to be one's own doctor and diagnose it, using considerable intuition....Young writers will often go struggling on, like good horses, until they literally drop, not realizing that their prose is no longer fresh....A more experienced writer may realize the dullness of his prose, and stop, and call it a block, but he may not realize it is due to simple tiredness. There is such an anxiety and inner pressure connected with writing that many writers do not care to admit the need for loafing, for doing nothing at all for a few days.

--Patricia Highsmith

Through the years, I've met plenty of people who tell me that someday, when their lives are perfect, they, too, will write books. Most of the time I'm skeptical about that. Perfection is hard to come by. Many would-be writers talk about writing and expect perfection to announce its arrival by whacking them over the head. By then, the time for writing will have passed them by.

—J. A. Jance

For me, the writing life doesn't just happen when I sit at the writing desk. It is a life lived with a centering principle, and mine is this: that I will pay close attention to this world I find myself in. 'My heart keeps open house,' was the way the poet Theodore Roethke put it in a poem. And rendering in language what one sees through the opened windows and doors of that house is a way of bearing witness to the mystery of what it is to be alive in this world.

--Julia Alvarez

When I bought my first computer in 1983, the man who installed the word-processing program fixed it so that when I booted up, these words flashed across my screen: 'A writer is someone who has written today.' Those words were a gift to me then, and I'm passing them along to you.

—J. A. Jance

A writing profession allows a deep relationship with the world. And then the actual process of writing allows you to think about it.

--William
Langewiesche

Writing is like being in love. You never get better at it or learn more about it. The day you think you do is the day you lose it. Robert Frost called his work a lover's quarrel with the world. It's ongoing. It has neither a beginning nor an end. You don't have to worry about learning things. The fire of one's art burns all the impurities from the vessel that contains it.

--James Lee Burke

What a writer has to do is write what hasn't been written before or beat dead men at what they have done.

--Ernest Hemingway

I think I succeeded as a writer because I did not come out of an English department. I used to write in the chemistry department. And I wrote some good stuff. If I had been in the English department, the prof would have looked at my short stories, congratulated me on my talent, and then showed me how Joyce or Hemingway handled the same elements of the short story. The prof would have placed me in competition with the greatest writers of all time, and that would have ended my writing career.

--Kurt Vonnegut

You have to follow your own voice. You have to be yourself when you write. In effect, you have to announce, 'This is me, this is what I stand for, this is what you get when you read me. I'm doing the best I can—buy me or not—but this is who I am as a writer.'

--David Morrell

If you're writing for a magazine or a newspaper, then you're a guest. It's as if you're a guest violinist in some great conductor's orchestra. You play to his rhythm, to his audience. You're invited in and he edits you and tells you what he wants. On the other hand, when you're writing a book the only reason you're writing it is to say it your own way, in your own words, and tell the story the way you see it.

--Teddy White

In truth, I never consider the audience for whom I'm writing. I just write what I want to write.

—J. K. Rowling

I would advise anyone who aspires to a writing career that before developing his talent he would be wise to develop a thick hide.

--Harper Lee

I threw the thesaurus out years ago. I found that every time you look up a word, if you want some word and you can think of an approximately close synonym of it and look it up, you only get cliché usages. It's much better to use a big dictionary and look up derivations and definitions of various usages of a different word.

--James Jones

I try to write a certain amount each day, five days a week. A rule sometimes broken is better than no rule.

--Herman Wouk

I do not rewrite unless I am absolutely sure that I can express the material better if I do rewrite it.

--William Faulkner

Editors have told me that I'm the only writer they know who cares what happens to his piece after he gets paid for it. Most writers won't argue with an editor because they don't want to annoy him; they're so grateful to be published that they agree to having their style...violated in public. But to defend what you've written is a sign that you are alive.

--William Zinsser

I make a very tight outline of everything I write before I write it....By writing an outline you really are writing in a way, because you're creating the structure of what you're going to do. Once I really know what I'm going to write, I don't find the actual writing takes all that long.

--Tom Wolfe

We're past the age of heroes and hero kings. If we can't make up stories about ordinary people, who can we make them up about?...Most of our lives are basically mundane and dull, and it's up to the writer to find ways to make them interesting.

--John Updike

When you get the thing dead right and know it's dead right, there's no excitement like it. It's marvelous. It makes you feel like God on the Seventh Day—for a bit, anyhow.

—Dorothy Sayers

I think that the joy of writing a novel is the self-exploration that emerges and also that wonderful feeling of playing God with the characters. When I sit down at my writing desk, time seems to vanish...I think the most important thing for a writer is to be locked in a study.

--Erica Jong

The conclusion to be drawn is that I am happiest writing in small rooms. They make me feel comfortable and secure. And it took me years to figure out that I need to write in a corner. Like a small animal burrowing into its hole, I shift furniture around, and back myself into a cozy corner, with my back to the wall...and then I can write.

--Danielle Steel

The writer has to be the kind of man who turns the world upside down and says, look, it looks different, doesn't it?

--Morris West

I'm very concerned with the rhythm of language. 'The sun came up' is an inadequate sentence. Even though it conveys all the necessary information, rhythmically it's lacking.

The sun came up.

But, if you say, as Laurie Anderson said, 'The sun came up like a big bald head,' not only have you, perhaps, entertained the fancy of the reader, but you have made a more complete sentence. The sound of a sentence.

--Tom Robbins

I've always had complete confidence in myself. When I was nothing, I had complete confidence. There were 10 guys in my writing class at Williams College who could write better than I. They didn't have what I have, which is guts. I was dedicated to writing, and nothing could stop me.

--John Toland

Writing is a struggle against silence.

--Carlos Fuentes

The task of a writer consists of being able to make something out of an idea.

--Thomas Mann

At night, when the objective world has slunk back into its cavern and left dreamers to their own, there come inspirations and capabilities impossible at any less magical and quiet hour. No one knows whether or not he is a writer unless he has tried writing at night.

--H. P. Lovecraft

Put down everything that comes into your head and then you're a writer. But an author is one who can judge his own stuff's worth, without pity, and destroy most of it.
--Colette

Becoming a writer means being creative enough to find the time and the place in your life for writing.

--Heather Sellers

If you don't have time to read, you don't have the time (or the tools) to write. Simple as that.

--Stephen King

Substitute 'damn' every time you're inclined to write 'very'; your editor will delete it and the writing will be just as it should be.

--Mark Twain

Don't say you were a bit confused and sort of tired and a little depressed and somewhat annoyed. Be tired. Be confused. Be depressed. Be annoyed. Don't hedge your prose with little timidities. Good writing is lean and confident.

--William Zinsser

No tears in the writer, no tears in the reader. No surprise in the writer, no surprise in the reader.

--Robert Frost

You don't start out writing good stuff. You start out writing crap and thinking it's good stuff, and then gradually you get better at it. That's why I say one of the most valuable traits is persistence.

--Octavia E. Butler

Cut out all these exclamation points. An exclamation point is like laughing at your own joke.

--F. Scott Fitzgerald

A scrupulous writer, in every sentence that he writes, will ask himself at least four questions, thus: 1. What am I trying to say? 2. What words will express it? 3. What image or idiom will make it clearer? 4. Is this image fresh enough to have an effect?

--George Orwell

I try to leave out the parts that people skip.

--Elmore Leonard

If you have any young friends who aspire to become writers, the second-greatest favor you can do them is to present them with copies of *The Elements of Style*. The first greatest, of course, is to shoot them now, while they're happy.

--Dorothy Parker

Everywhere I go I'm asked if I think the university stifles writers. My opinion is that they don't stifle enough of them.

--Flannery O'Connor

It is necessary to write, if the days are not to slip emptily by. How else, indeed, to clap the net over the butterfly of the moment? For the moment passes, it is forgotten; the mood is gone; life itself is gone. That is where the writer scores over his fellows: He catches the changes of his mind on the hop.

--Vita Sackville-West

Tears are words that need to be written.

--Paulo Coelho

Nothing's a better cure for writer's block than to eat ice cream right out of the carton.

--Don Roff

The best thing I think a writer can do—a young would-be writer—is to learn to do something besides write, to get some experience in the world, something as romantic, perhaps, as the Peace Corps, or something as practical as being doctor, lawyer, or Indian chief. The American writer is an isolated man; he's morally isolated from other Americans. He needs a sense of cause or responsibility to others. He's caught in a life which, if he make a living by his writing, means that he doesn't run in rush-hour traffic, he had no responsibility to staff. While he is undoubtedly doing something of importance, something socially useful, he has a sense of isolation. The result can become, as one novel follows the next, the hollow echo of words, not the resounding echo of life.

--Herbert Gold

When your story is ready for rewrite, cut it to the bone. Get rid of every ounce of excess fat. This is going to hurt; revising a story down to the bare essentials is always a little like murdering children, but it must be done.

--Stephen King

Genius gives birth, talent delivers.

--Jack Kerouac

The first sentence can't be written until the final sentence is written.

--Joyce Carol Oates

Make your novel readable. Make it easy to read, pleasant to read. This doesn't mean flowery passages, ambitious flights of pyrotechnic verbiage; it means strong, simple, natural sentences.

--Laurence D'Orsay

If you tell the reader that Bull Beezley is a brutal-faced, loose-lipped bully with snake's blood in his veins, the reader's reaction may be, 'Oh, yeah!' But if you show the reader Bull Beezley raking the bloodied flanks of his weary, sweat-encrusted pony, and flogging the tottering, red-eyed animal with a quirt, or have him booting in the protruding ribs of a starved mongrel and, boy, the reader believes!

--Fred East

Take yourself seriously. You have to make a conscious effort to go from someone who wants to write to someone who is going to write. And there is a clear distinction because once you have decided you are going to write you will make time for it. It's like eating or going to the gym or paying a bill. It's something you have to do because you have to write to be published. It took me awhile to learn that myself, so I don't say that as an admonishment, but as an encouragement. Give yourself permission to say: If I am going to be a writer, I have to make time to write and that is OK.

--Sherri Winston

Don't start selling the book before you write the book. People tell me about how they have this great idea for a book, and they've thought about it, and it could be a movie. They've already mapped out the marketing future, and they haven't sold a manuscript because they haven't even written the novel. Write the book, and if you can sell it, someone will find a market for you.

--Sherri Winston

It's important to note that nobody knows what is going to be successful, either commercially or critically, and in a way that's a good thing because it forces us to fall back on writing what we're really interested in. The journey of writing a piece and finishing it is really about self-discovery, and when we're lucky, other people are interested. And sometimes they're not. But other people's interest is icing on the cake; it's not the cake itself.

--David Henry Hwang

You just want to make something beautiful so badly, and some days it doesn't come out. We have to remember what it felt like when we were little: For a writer, the journal you had as a kid, when you sat under a tree and wrote and wrote and wrote. Get back to the true joy that you had in creating.

--Danielle Krysa

No one can wrestle the pencil out of your hand. You get to keep going in absolute defiance.

--Hillary Casavant

Creativity is intelligence having fun.

--Albert Einstein

We are, as a species, addicted to story. Even when the body goes to sleep, the mind stays up all night, telling itself stories.

--Jonathan Gottschall

If you don't have a conflict or a challenge, you don't have a story.

--Tom Kellner

Prose is architecture, not interior decoration.

--Ernest Hemingway

It's called a pen. It's like a printer, hooked straight to my brain.

--Dale Dauten

I have a cheat-sheet for each one of my characters about their personality, the way they look, etc. So there is no possible way that I could have writer's block.

--R. L. Stine

All fiction should be an escape for readers.

--John Katzenbach

The thing that impacts my work the most is the 'micro.' I had a 1958 Sears catalog and if I would get stumped with a scene or with a character, I could flip through it and notice that the ladies were all wearing gloves, and they carried handbags and they wore hats. And if I wondered if people had big metal garbage cans in their garages in 1958, I could go to a Sears catalog and see that, yes, they did, and this is what it costs.

--Lori Roy

His [William Styron] prose, laid down in an elegant hand on yellow legal pads with Venus Velvet No. 2 pencils, came at a trickle. He labored over every word, editing as he went, to produce manuscripts that, when he placed the final period, needed very little in the way of revision.

--Alexandra Styron

Just because I can write does not make me a writer. Writing is an act; being a writer is a state of mind, a lifestyle, a necessity.

--Neil Evans

I've always taken my manuscript and said, You know what? This is horrible. Or, you know what? I can't do this. Or, I can't show up another day and leave my office another day, having only written three sentences. And the reminder that this is part of the runner's pain, that you think you're not going to get up that hill, and that you've felt that way before. It's what allows you to show up again the next day, and it allows you to get to the other side, and it allows you to get to a point where you can see the beauty of your work, after all that labor.

--Alexandra Styron

What they don't explicitly tell you in school (but what everyone half-jokes about) is that being a writer is not typically financially lucrative. People want to write. But it's extremely competitive, and the odds are against you. Only the driven and extremely talented can make a living of it. And that's if they are also lucky—and love it enough to make sacrifices.

--Neil Evans

Writing informs everything I do....It's the power skill in my toolbox. Knowing how to tell a story makes me a better web designer. Knowing how to copy edit makes me meticulous. Knowing how to take and give criticism makes me an excellent collaborator. Having a background in writing allows me to be a better communicator and thus a better worker and person.

--Neil Evans

You must stay drunk on writing so reality cannot destroy you.

--Ray Bradbury

Readers understand that memory is not fact, and that memoir is not journalism. The pact I made with my reader was this: I won't lie to you. I won't exaggerate or fabricate. I will tell the truth as I recall it. Readers know that it's impossible to accurately recreate a conversation from this morning, let alone one from 50 years ago. My job is to recreate the cadences, contents and emotion from scenes I remember as honestly as I can....the dialogue is cobbled together from real memories of how real people really talked.

--Monica Wood

Run your own race. Some other writer will always write lovelier books, reach more readers, make more money, win more awards. The writing trade—which is full, full, full of rejection and failure—is a lifelong lesson in humility, and we are wise to take that lesson into the other arenas of our life. Writing is engaging, gratifying and often profoundly discouraging and difficult. But not as discouraging and difficult as coal mining or warfare.

--Monica Wood

Days when I'm most frightened by what I think is bad work or that I haven't been productive when I look at my work and hang my head or pull my hair out—if I've learned anything, then it's that that is part of the process and that you have to show up again the next day.

--Alexandra Styron

Many writers want to start with sentence one and let the words flow out in order until they reach the conclusion. There may be drafts that come that easily, but if the words aren't coming when you start at the beginning, attack whichever part of your work inspires you. Write in a disorganized fashion, then find the structure later.

--Laurie Helgoe

I'm writing in the van as we drive. These guys are playing music and watching television. It doesn't bother me that much. I put headphones on and tune it out and go to work. I'm not one of these people who needs birds tweeting and beautiful lakes.

--James McBride

Through writing, through that process, they realize that they become more intelligent, and more honest and more imaginative than they can be in any other part of their life.

--Russell Banks

The fulfillment of writing is not the page of words itself, but its performance—on a stage or in the reader's head. Shakespeare's poems and plays still connect with audiences who are many centuries and cultures removed from his life and times. He cared about his audience, because his livelihood depended on them. A true writer writes not for herself, but for an audience. Strive to be read.

--Lisa Klein

For me the most important lessons of Shakespeare for the writer are about process as much as product. He unabashedly used predecessor's works as templates. Judging by the multiple versions of Hamlet, Lear, Shrew, and others, he was an obsessive reviser of his own work; and his sheer volume of output suggests he spent his time in the chair.

--Jess Winfield

Don't start until you can't not start. There's a difference between when something is kind of living in your head as a good idea and when something is gnawing at your gut. Sometimes that can take years....you can wait those two years years until the play you've been thinking about is burning to get out of you and you have to write it.

--Sarah Treem

Think of the freedom it gives you if you can say to yourself, 'Maybe what I have written today is messy, clumsy, raggedy, but that's my poem for today.' Maybe there is a neater poem buried inside it that I can work on tomorrow.

--William Stafford

You don't need to handle poetry with gloves on. A lot of people worry that poetry is a sacred format and that it can only be approached by certain types of people or certain types of minds, and if you're not already a poet that you aren't welcome into the club. And that is both untrue and also unfair. I think that it is way more important for people who don't consider themselves poets or haven't written poetry before to experiment and bring what they know from other forms into that world. I would love to see someone who is traditionally a science writer start writing poetry. Or I would love to see what happens when a historian writes poetry. That's how the art form grows and breathes and expands and makes room for what else is possible.

--Sarah Kay

Have people who can give you cold and honest feedback. You can't get better in a vacuum. You need to have people read your work and not just tell you that they like it.

--Tanis Rideout

I am, really, a great writer; my only difficulty is in finding great readers.

--Frank Harris

A writer is not a confectioner, a cosmetic dealer, or an entertainer.

--Anton Chekhov

Sometimes that's a year, sometimes it's 18 months, where all I'm doing is taking notes. I'm reconstructing the story from the back to the front so that I know where the front is.

--John Irving

Grasp the subject, the words will follow.

--Cato the Elder

Talent is an accident of genes—and a responsibility.

--Alan Rickman

Style and Structure are the essence of a book; great ideas are hogwash.

--Vladimir Nabokov

Can you love a typewriter as you love a pen? They save time and trouble, which is true, but a book needs time and trouble.

--Rumer Godden

You get tired, of course, often in despair, but the struggle, the challenge, the feeling of being extended as you never thought you could be, is fulfilling and deeply, deeply satisfying.

--Rumer Godden

Happiness... it lies in the joy of achievement, in the thrill of creative effort.

--Vincent Van Gogh

When writing humor I never write a rough draft with the idea that I'm going to go back and make it better. Never. I never leave a sentence, I never leave a word unless I'm pretty sure that's the best I can do with that and that's what I want. That doesn't mean that I won't change some stuff later, maybe, but I'm really not a believer in drafts for humor. I know there are people who do that all the time and that's the way they write, but I don't think that it's humor writing that they are doing. To me, you've got to get it right. It's kind of like if you're going to do a magic trick and the ball doesn't disappear, you can't say, 'Well, I'll get to that part later on. No! You've got to learn how to make that ball disappear right now, or you're never going to be able to do this trick. Make this sentence funny before you try to write another sentence, or else decide you're not going to do this joke. When I'm finished and I put the last period on the last sentence—that's the way I think it should be, not that I'm going to go back and look at it later.

--Dave Barry

The hardest part about being a writer is that you don't have to do it ever. You're not going to a factory. There's no time clock. It's just you and your computer, and you could walk away any time and make a peanut butter sandwich or 10. The best way to deal with that is to not have peanut butter in your home. The truth is the fundamental discipline that is just as important as any specific writing skill, [and that] is the discipline of sitting down and doing it. That's where most people fail at becoming a professional writer.

--Dave Barry

I don't much believe in the idea of characters. I write with words, that is all. Whether those words are put in the mouth of this or that character does not matter to me.

--Guillermo C.
Infante

A great many people now reading and writing would be better employed keeping rabbits.

--Edith Sitwell

What I like in a good author isn't what he says, but what he whispers.

--Logan P. Smith

The writer interweaves a story with his own doubts, questions, and values. That is art.

--Naguib Mahfouz

Nothing goes by luck in composition. It allows of no tricks. The best you can write will be the best you are.

--Henry David
Thoreau

A book is made from a tree. It is an assemblage of flat, flexible parts (still called 'leaves') imprinted with dark pigmented squiggles. One glance at it and you hear the voice of another person, perhaps someone dead for thousands of years. Across the millennia, the author is speaking, clearly and silently, inside your head, directly to you. Writing is perhaps the greatest of human inventions, binding together people, citizens of distant epochs, who never knew one another. Books break the shackles of time, proof that humans can work magic.

--Carl Sagan

The artist must be in his work like God in his Creation, invisible and all-powerful, so that he is felt everywhere but not seen.

--Gustave Flaubert

I need to write to be happy.

--Nora Roberts

Victor Hugo may hold the distinction of initiating the tersest telegram exchange of all time. "?" the author is said to have cabled to his publishers, inquiring about the sales of *Les Misérables*. Soon, he received his reply: "!"

--Megan Garber

We have become a nation of promiscuous punctuators. In a paper published in 2006 in the *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Carol Waseleski noted that exclamation points 'rarely function as markers of excitability'; instead, they may function as 'markers of friendly interaction.' When a single point denotes basic human warmth, more points are needed to convey enthusiasm (!!), even more to convey excitement (!!!), and more still to convey giddiness (Prime Rib Saturday!!!!). The same holds for question marks and even ellipses: more marks are required to add emotional coloring to words rendered in black and white.

--Megan Garber

I do not write for an audience.

--Leon Uris

There are people who have tremendously important things to say, but they say it so poorly that nobody would ever want to read it.

--Theodore Sturgeon

I've always been suspicious of those people who say they don't read when they're writing. I, on the other hand, have learned that it's really important to be reading as much as possible, to not be afraid of the influence of other writers. In fact, I'll have 10 or 12 books open on my desk and dip into them randomly for inspiration along the way....Reading other people's work helps me as a writer by reminding me that there's always someone better out there. I'll use an analogy. You know in basketball, the only way you get better is when you play against better players, and you have to up your game. So, if you've got Phillip Roth, Lorrie Moore, Hemingway and Kathryn Harrison on your desk with you, you've got to up your game.

--Sherman Alexie

I don't read novels whilst I'm writing one; I just haven't got a wide enough brain to concentrate on incoming and outgoing in the same time zone.

—Dawn French

When you write alone, you are changing in a dark room without a mirror or a second opinion. You face the very dangerous prospect of walking outside with eyeliner smeared on your cheeks, a pair of unmatched shoes, or (for those truly like me), without the moment of self-reflection that allows you to say 'Hey, maybe these lime green tights aren't the best to wear at a funeral.' With no one to ask the critical questions that challenge your work, or help you reflect upon your work, you not only deny the work some wildly inspired new directions, but you stifle its chance to turn on the lights and be revealed.

--Linsey Jayne

The only excuse for a metaphor is that it presents an image or idea in a way that refreshes it for the reader. My working maxim is: If you find yourself using a metaphor or simile you've heard or read before, delete it. It's better to avoid figurative language altogether than contribute to the gleefully robust disease of cliché.

--Glen Duncan

As far as vocabulary goes, I just use what I believe to be the best words for the job. There are readers for whom having to look up a word is some sort of moral affront. I don't have a response to that. It's a reading mentality (and a worldview) I find completely alien.

--Glen Duncan

Rather than being a writer, I was a narrator of the movie in my brain.

--Herschel Cobb

Everything you write has to be true to yourself, but on the other hand, I am aware there's somebody walking through the book with me, and I don't want them to be bored. It's like when you're having a conversation, you're like, am I droning on and on and on? Are they falling asleep? I'm always aware of that in a book, too. I'm always thinking: Is my reader still with me? Is she being entertained while she is hopefully learning something interesting?

--Jean Kwok

Writing is really hard. Writing is the hardest thing I know how to do. It is. It's absolutely harder than anything I have ever done, and I was a physics major. I have worked in labs. I've worked in an investment bank. I've really done a lot of things, and there's no question that writing is absolutely the most difficult thing I have ever tried to do.

--Jean Kwok

Every blank page is a locked room. Language is the tool with which I jimmy the latch. Imagination is the lantern by whose glow I search for the secrets inside. Intrigued though a little wary, the reader may tiptoe in after me. The task now is to avoid my awkward eviction or the reader's hasty retreat. Usually that's a matter of control: a slow yet cheery deliberation as in walking down an icy street on one's way to a party. Other times it can demand a pitch next to madness.

--Tom Robbins

Challenge every single sentence; challenge it for lucidity, accuracy, originality and cadence. If it doesn't meet the challenge, work on it until it does.

--Tom Robbins

Remember that language is not the frosting; it's the cake. Rhythmical language and vivid imagery possess a power of effect that is independent from content.

--Tom Robbins

Don't talk about it; you'll talk it away. Let the ideas flow from your mind to the page without exposing them to air. Especially hot air.

--Tom Robbins

If you don't actually like to write, love to write, feel driven and compelled to write, then you're probably better off abandoning your ambition in favor of a more legitimate career.

--Tom Robbins

Never be afraid to make a fool of yourself. The furthest out you can go is the best place to be. (But pushing the envelope has to come naturally; you can't force it.)

--Tom Robbins

Always compare yourself to the best. Even if you never measure up, it can't help but make you better.

--Tom Robbins

Write every day without fail, even if it's only for half an hour, even if you're savagely hung over and your grandmother has just fallen out of a third story window.

--Tom Robbins

Above all, have a good time. If you aren't enjoying writing it, you can hardly expect someone else to enjoy reading it.

--Tom Robbins

Stop worrying about getting published and worry about getting better. If you make the work good enough, it will get published.

--Tom Robbins

I've always been turned off by crybaby writing, in fiction as well as in memoir. Yes, bad, sad things happen to people; bad, sad things have happened to me; but I learned long ago that misery is perpetuated and enlightenment obstructed by people taking themselves far too seriously. A book, be it memoir or novel, is no place to throw oneself a pity party; and I, for one, have never wanted my books to contribute to the weariness in the world.

--Tom Robbins

The memoirist has license, I think, to mess a bit with the lighting, the stage set, the costumes and the incidental music that's being performed in the orchestra pit—but not, however, with the script, with the play itself. And because of that very need for fidelity, I found writing true stories far harder than just making things up.

--Tom Robbins

It's important to know the ending of the book, something toward which to write, even if it changes during the writing process.

--Phillip Margolin

Non-writer's block: a disease that keeps many potential writers from taking the step from having an idea to writing it. It's an insecurity that many aspiring writers are familiar with: the fear of writing, often caused by the fear of failure.

--Phillip Margolin

The most important part of the writer's anatomy is not the brain, where ideas are born, or the hands that transfer those ideas into concrete form, but the backside. Although intelligence and creativity are essential components to the writing process, a writer must dedicate the time to a blank page. Thinking about writing won't produce a manuscript.

--Phillip Margolin

In my experience, the big difference between published and unpublished writers is that published writers sit down and write.

--Phillip Margolin

Get all of your ideas out of your head and on to paper. Once you have finished this bad first draft, you will really have written a very detailed outline. Now you can spend time rewriting and editing to make the bad outline into a good book.

--Phillip Margolin

If I could I would always work in silence and obscurity, and let my efforts be known by their results.

--Emily Bronte

Writing is not a profession but a vocation of unhappiness.

--Georges Simenon

For me, inspiration isn't a fount constantly bubbling over—more like a trickling stream, really. I've found that I write best when I give my mind the chance to wander and my ideas the time to process. And I'm often at my most creative when I'm knitting. Something about the rhythmic, comforting sound of clicking needles, the graceful motion of looping yarn—up, around, down, through—is conducive to my creativity.

--Rachel Randall

I'd much rather do an obviously commercial writing project than get a day job.

--Poppy Z. Brite

You'd have to be a literary critic or a psychiatrist to pick the writer out of his work. Every fictional story goes through this sort of blender process where you take some real experience...you know what's real or true when you put it into the blender with fiction, and then it gets all mixed up with something that didn't really happen, but there's still a little of you in there. I think the writer is in there no matter what you do. You can't really remove yourself from it.

--Ransom Riggs

Write drunk; edit sober.

--Ernest Hemingway

I don't really believe in that whole 'wait for the muse to strike' thing. I'm more of a 'sit your ass in a chair and start typing' guy....People treat writer's block like it's this kind of mythical, mystical ailment. It's actually a very specific problem, and that is that something is wrong with your story, or wrong with your scene, and you're trying to do something that is not motivated by your characters. If your writer's block is so complete that you don't even know where to start, it's probably that you're not spending enough time at the keyboard. It's all part of the process. I also think writer's block comes from judging yourself too much, and [thinking] I only wrote one sentence today! I'm terrible!

--Ransom Riggs

Success in creating a good story is what happens when you write because you can't bring yourself not to write, because the story or poem or novel burning inside you demands to be written with an insistence and passion that overrides everything else in life.

--Eleanore D.
Trupkiewicz

Writing is an act of courage. Sometimes it's just too scary to face the page. Or too frustrating: We've worked hard, and still our skills seem small, our writing clumsy, our ideas foolish and hackneyed. Who needs it? Our friends get along just fine without opening the vein every day to pour their blood onto the page. They have more time to do things—have fun, enjoy themselves.

--Jack Heffron

Now is the time to be more creative. Today. Trust that there is no better time, that no time in the future will offer you more of what you need. I often hear people talk about a time when they will be able to write—when they retire, when the kids are grown and gone, or when they can quit their moonlighting job. Postponing your writing life is like postponing a new diet. It can be an excuse of never starting. My advice: Start now, if only in a limited way. A time in the future may exist that will hold fewer obstacles, but these can be dealt with today, and, as we've discussed, removing all the obstacles can hurt creativity. There's an old saying about life that applies to writing: Happiness is not a destination. It is a companion we can choose to accompany us on our journey.

--Jack Heffron

Benjamin Franklin took morning 'air baths' in the nude while reading and writing.

--*The Writer*

It is the artist who realizes that there is a supreme force above him and works gladly away as a small apprentice under God's heaven.

--Alexander
Solzhenitsyn

When I was a journalist at a daily newspaper, I worked in the arts. I was often in situations where I was standing, watching, observing, taking in everything. I would get so angered when someone would interrupt me and say: ‘Now that there’s a moment of silence, we can talk about the show, the photo op, etc.’ In that silence, I was very busy. How can we help people around us understand the importance of silence for writers?

--Natalie Goldberg

Writing is an athletic activity. Just like running. You can’t just talk about running. Ultimately, you have to do it. You can’t talk about being on a diet. Finally, you have to stop eating so much. You can’t talk about writing. You have to pick up your pen and do it.

--Natalie Goldberg

In order to write, you have to read other people. That’s how you get inspired. Those writers are your teachers. You’re studying the mind of the author you’re reading.

--Natalie Goldberg

Collaboration on a book is the ultimate unnatural act.

--Tom Clancy

The artist doesn’t have time to listen to the critics. The ones who want to be writers read the reviews, the ones who want to write don’t have the time to read reviews.

--William Faulkner

The important thing in writing is the capacity to astonish. Not shock—shock is a worn-out word—but astonish.

--Terry Southern

Man cannot produce a single work without the assistance of the slow, assiduous, corrosive worm of thought.

--Eugenio Montale

If there is a special Hell for writers, it would be in the forced contemplation of their own works.

--John Dos Passos

The first draft isn’t writing. It’s like a sculptor going to a quarry and chiseling out a block of stone—that sculptor has used some of the same gestures as sculpting, but that stone is simply the raw material from which the sculpture will emerge. You aren’t writing until you look at that first draft and begin making decisions and, yes, judgments about it.

--Douglas Kearney

If there's a book you really want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it.

--Toni Morrison

What I have learned in time, in 32 years of writing, is that it's a lot of work, and if I just show up, and I work and work, there is a moment, a magical moment, at some point, when it gives. And then you don't need the effort anymore. It's like dancing. When you're dancing and counting the steps, you're not dancing. When your body just goes—then you're dancing, and then there's a rhythm, there's a velocity, there's a feeling, there's a joy that you cannot describe. And it happens in spite of me. I think that's the moment in writing when the book starts to happen. From that point on, it's all joy. At the beginning, it's work.

--Isabel Allende

Landscape and human destiny are often inseparable in my work. So I want my readers constantly aware of the world my characters inhabit. My goal is for the reader to see, hear, smell and feel the setting, and by doing so, understand my characters and their motivations better.

--Ron Rash

I am Southern; I write what I know. I also write from a place of deep ambivalence; my relationship with my beloved, blood-soaked, beautiful, enraging homeland is passionate and ongoing. I think we have to write into what we darkly love and dearly hate. All my best book ideas are lurking down in the depths of my black and salty mental illness, and much of that swampland was formed and influenced by growing up in this specific place and time. It's worth noting that I never wrote anything distinctly Southern until after I moved to Chicago for seven years. I needed the distance in both time and space to see the South clearly. When I was part of it, I did not realize how weird we are, and I could not view it clearly enough to depict it with my mingled love and horror. So write what you know? Yes. But not what is raw.

--Joshilyn Jackson

I feel I capture the South in the place I describe—what's growing and what the weather is like—and of course in the language I use. Writing with the South as my backdrop is what comes most naturally. In one of my early books, my editor circled where a character said 'I might could go' and then said she didn't think this character would use poor grammar. I said that she 'might would,' since I had no idea there was anything wrong with that construction. I have to work hard not to have my natural habitat show through.

--Jill McCorkle

If I can rip my lips off on a chili lime pistachio while sniffing a lemon ginger soap and toying with the sleeves of my biggest cardigan, the words come roaring out.

--Lydia Netzer

I found a charming small inn...called the Bee and Thistle, which was officially closed, but the owners kindly agreed to allow me to stay there to get my book done. Every morning, someone would come to make me a delicious breakfast, then leave me alone in a large wing chair by a fire, where I sat for around 10 hours a day, losing myself in my words. I had no wi-fi, no family, no distractions whatsoever and the words flowed freely.

--Jane Green

I wrote the entire last six chapters of my book on public transportation in Chicago....I found that it was easiest for me to write while on the bus or train. Sometimes I would get on the Red Line at Chinatown and ride it all the way to Howard. It was a way of trapping myself with the story, but also using my surroundings as inspiration.

--Olivia Cole

It's also critical that you not edit yourself as you go. If you do, you'll likely never get past the first paragraph.

--Christina Hamlett
Pasadena

While it's important to write every day if possible, writers should also be flexible and roll with life's punches. It's true that if you have a set schedule, there's more of a writing flow, but I think it's necessary to write at other odd times during the day (or night) so that you don't get boxed in by your schedule and can write no other time. Don't restrict yourself to your own cozy writing corner. Be able to write on the go, on the back of napkins, late at night, on lunch breaks and days and weeks apart, if necessary. Train yourself to write anywhere and everywhere, so you're not tied to a single muse.

--Eleanor Hyde

Inspiration exists, but it has to find you working.

--Pablo Picasso

The finest language is mostly made up of simple unimposing words.

--George Eliot

I knew I was living 'the writer's life' when I watched a neighbor digging his car out to drive to work after a snowstorm—and all I had to do was walk to my home office and turn on my computer.

--Penny Thomas

I hate writing; I love having written.

--Dorothy Parker

Creativity comes from trust. Trust your instincts. And never hope more than you work.

--Rita Mae Brown

If you are a writer you locate yourself behind a wall of silence and no matter what you are doing, driving a car or walking or doing housework you can still be writing, because you have that space.

--Joyce Carol Oates

No writer, no matter how gifted, immortalizes himself unless he has crystallized into expressive and original phrase the eternal sentiments and yearnings of the human heart.

--Alfred de Vigny

A writer writes. Period. No matter if someone is buying your work or not.

--Len Wein

Writing is the only thing that, when I do it, I don't feel I should be doing something else.

--Gloria Steinem

Having a high IQ is not equivalent to being highly creative....Above a certain level, intelligence doesn't have much effect on creativity: most creative people are pretty smart, but they don't have to be that smart, at least as measured by conventional intelligence tests. An IQ of 120, indicating that someone is very smart but not exceptionally so, is generally considered sufficient for creative genius.

--Nancy Andreasen

When the psychologist Kay Redfield Jamison looked at 47 famous writers and artists in Great Britain, she found that more than 38 percent had been treated for a mood disorder; the highest rates occurred among playwrights, and the second-highest among poets. When Joseph Schildkraut, a psychiatrist at Harvard Medical School, studied a group of 15 abstract-expressionist painters in the mid-20th century, he found that half of them had some form of mental illness, mostly depression or bipolar disorder; nearly half of these artists failed to live past age 60.

--Nancy C. Andreasen

Samuel Taylor Coleridge once described how he composed an entire 300-line poem about Kubla Khan while in an opiate-induced, dreamlike state, and began writing it down when he awoke; he said he then lost most of it when he got interrupted and called away on an errand—thus the finished poem he published was but a fragment of what originally came to him in his dreamlike state.

--Nancy C. Andreasen

I don't write consciously—it is as if the muse sits on my shoulder and I slip into a state that is apart from reality.

--Neil Simon

It is during this nap that I get a lot of my work done. I find that when the ideas come to me, they come as I'm falling asleep, they come as I'm waking up, they come if I'm sitting in the tub. I don't normally take baths...but sometimes I'll just go in there and have a think.

--Unknown

Probably any amount of this does not seem to have anything to do with the story and perhaps it has not. I am sick of these ones with their clear restrained writing and I am going to try to get in the whole business and to do that there has to be things that seem as though they had nothing to do with it just as in life. In life people are not conscious of these special moments that novelists build their whole structures on...Gertrude Stein once told me that remarks are not literature. All right, let it go at that. Only this time all the remarks are going in and if it is not literature who claimed it was anyway.

--Ernest Hemingway

Alright, let's establish one firm rule: from when I get up—at 7 or 7:30—until, say, 12:30...allowing one break for a modest, circumscribed, abrupt meal of porridge or eggs at about 10:30, nothing else will be allowable—no cooking, no cleaning, no walking, no talking or playing, etc.

--Lydia Davis

There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.

—Maya Angelou

How clearly I remember my childhood experiences of being catapulted into a book world....That first tumble into Wonderland is not easily forgotten, and it's also something that can't quite be replicated in adult life with the same intensity. The worlds you inhabit in childhood are stitched into the fabric of who you will grow to be. How lucky we are, then, and how big a responsibility rests on our shoulders, to be the one shaping these worlds for the next generation of readers.

—Ammi-Joan
Paquette

No flower of art ever fully blossomed save it was nourished by tears of agony.

--Isadora Duncan

Back of every creation, supporting it like an arch, is faith. Enthusiasm is nothing: it comes and goes. But if one believes, then miracles occur.

—Henry Miller

I would have bet twenty to one against my own success. I would lose only pen and paper; and if the one chance in twenty did turn up in my favor, then how much might I win!

—Anthony Trollope

In writing, as in so many pursuits, it's not the most gifted but the most determined who succeed.

—Norman Mailer

Self-consciousness is the enemy of all art, be it acting, writing, painting or living itself, which is the greatest art of all. Creativity, at heart, is the essence of man's being.

—Ray Bradbury

Having imagination it takes you an hour to write a paragraph that if you were unimaginative would take you only a minute.

—Franklin Pierce
Adams

I've always found it best to have a routine. I go to my study at the same time every day and climb into my bay window. I may not be inspired every day, but on the days I am, I need to be in place to write. If I'm not particularly inspired, I'll revise or do research or correspondence.

—Diane Ackerman

No one has ever written, painted, sculpted, modeled, built, or invented except literally to get out of hell.

—Antonin Artaud

Writing...was the most liberating creative experience I've ever had. As the characters developed, some of the things I originally thought they might do just didn't pan out. That's the coolest thing in the world: it's at the heart of creation. It's like you're honing these chess pieces, and then they start to move on their own.

--Albert Brooks

The problem is that we view writing as a luxury, something special to allow ourselves as soon as we've taken care of the countless nagging duties that seem to come first. Once you put writing first, the rest of your life will fall into place.

—Sue Grafton

Curiosity about life in all of its aspects, I think, is still the secret of great creative people.

—Leo Burnett

The opportunity to create a small world between two pieces of cardboard, where time exists yet stands still, where people talk and I tell them what to say, is exciting and rewarding.

—Chris Van Allsburg

That's the motivation of an artist - to seek attention of some kind.

—James Taylor

Aesthetic matters are fundamental for the harmonious development of both society and the individual.

—Friedrich Schiller

You can't tell whether a sentence needs work until it rises up in revolt against your fingers as you retype it.

—Nora Ephron

In a nervous frenzy, I fling words as if flinging mud at a wall. Blurt out, heave out, babble out something—anything—as a first draft.

—John McPhee

Revising is the sculpting part of the creative process. Dorothy Parker liked having written far better than writing. For every five words Parker wrote, she changed seven. Hemingway rewrote the ending of *A Farewell to Arms* 39 times. When *The Paris Review* asked if he had technical problems or was stumped, he said he was 'getting the words right.'

—Candy Schulman

The pages are still blank, but there is a miraculous feeling of the words being there, written in invisible ink and clamoring to become visible.

—Vladimir Nabokov

When I stand before God at the end of my life, I would hope that I would not have a single bit of talent left, and could say, 'I used everything you gave me.'

—Erma Bombeck

She used to drag her mattress beside her low window and lie awake for a long while, vibrating with excitement, as a machine vibrates from speed. Life rushed in upon her through that window - or so it seemed. In reality, of course, life rushes from within, not from without. There is no work of art so big or so beautiful that is was not once all contained in some youthful body, like this one which lay on the floor in the moonlight, pulsing with ardor and anticipation.

—Willa Cather

Writing is nothing more than a guided dream.

—Jorge Luis Borges

I write to discover what I think. After all, the bars aren't open that early.

—Daniel J. Boorstin

What people identify as writers' block, I see as fear. The first step to getting over it is recognizing what you're afraid of: Are you afraid to reveal something about yourself, are you afraid your story will fail, are you afraid someone will judge you?

Whatever is keeping you silent is the thing you need to look at deeply and move beyond.

—Jacqueline
Woodson

Writing books is hard. It dredges up all of our anxieties and insecurities, and it makes us feel small and scared and lonely.

—Laurie Halse
Anderson

Books aren't written. They're re-written. Including your own. It's one of the hardest things to accept, especially after the seventh rewrite hasn't quite done it.

—Michael Crichton

Keep your day job, live frugally and be prepared for the long haul. The worst thing writers can do to themselves and their dreams is to have unrealistic expectations about how much money they are going to make. Writing is hard. Writing under the pressure of paying the rent and feeding children is ridiculously hard.

—Laurie Halse
Anderson

The whole point of writing is to have something in your gut or in your soul or in your mind that's burning to be written.

—Jerome Lawrence

I am writing in the garden. To write as one should of a garden one must write not outside it or merely somewhere near it, but in the garden.

—Frances Hodgson
Burnett

Truth is stranger than fiction, but it is because Fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities; Truth isn't.

—Mark Twain

Timing and arrogance are decisive factors in the successful use of talent.

—Marya Mannes

Reminder to myself: a fist draft is just one word followed by another followed by another. Nothing more is expected than that.

—Lauren Stacks

Leave off your day's writing in mid-sentence. That'll get you off and running the next day.

—James Scott Bell

What I've learned about writing I've learned by trial and error, which is how most writers have learned. I had to overcome my academic training, which taught me to write in a way that was useless to me.

—Verlyn Klinkenborg

Most of the sentences you make will need to be killed. The rest will need to be fixed.

—Verlyn Klinkenborg

You must write every single day of your life. You must read dreadful dumb books and glorious books, and let them wrestle in beautiful fights inside your head, vulgar one moment, brilliant the next. You must lurk in libraries and climb the stacks like ladders to sniff books like perfumes and wear books like hats upon your crazy heads. I wish you a wrestling match with your Creative Muse that will last a lifetime. I wish craziness and foolishness and madness upon you. May you live with hysteria, and out of it make fine stories—science fiction or otherwise. Which finally means, may you be in love every day for the next 20,000 days. And out of that love, remake a world.

—Ray Bradbury

Write fat, edit lean. In that first draft, put all the extra stuff in, anything that comes into your head. What happens is we self-edit as we're writing—*Oh, that's not going to make it in the final.* Don't worry about that. Put it in. It's going to add flavor, and it's going to inform the text. Once you're done with that, *then* go through and put it on a diet. You know, we *want* a fat baby. They've got the chubby cheeks, the chubby arms, the chubby fingers—we love that! That's good. When the baby grows up, *then* we want the lean muscle.

—Garth Stein

When work does not go well, no life is more miserable than that of a writer. But when it does go well, when the illumination has focused a work so that it goes limpidly and flows, there is no gladness like it.

—Caron McCullers

Writers and readers have a trust. You give me your time, and I'm going to give you a really good story that's provocative and it's going to make you think and it's going to make you close the book and have that feeling of catharsis: *I wish I could spend more time with these characters*. And if you're not there yet, *don't* put your book out there; it's a betrayal of the trust. So in that sense, if you adhere to that, like I've tried to, the pressure is in just getting the book to that level.

—Garth Stein

Words—so innocent and powerless as they are, as standing in a dictionary, how potent for good and evil they become in the hands of one who knows how to combine them.

—Nathaniel
Hawthorne

This sentence has five words. Here are five more words. Five-word sentences are fine. But several together become monotonous. Listen to what is happening. The writing is getting boring. The sound of it drones. It's like a stuck record. The ear demands some variety.

Now listen.

I vary the sentence length, and I created music. Music. The writing sings.

It has a pleasant rhythm, a lilt, a harmony.

I use short sentences.

And I use sentences of medium length.

And sometimes, when I am certain the reader is rested, I will engage him with a sentence of considerable length, a sentence that burns with energy and builds with all the impetus of a crescendo, the roll of the drums, the crash of the cymbals—sounds that say listen to this, it is important.

—Gary Provost

Teaching writing is one of the hardest jobs in the world. It requires patience, diplomacy, firmness and a strong belief that writing *can* be taught. I've had my doubts. Can everyone sing? Can everyone paint or dance? Why should writing be the one art everyone can learn? Those questions hover and haunt every time I step into a classroom.

—T. R. Joyce

Being a good writer is 3% talent and 97% not being distracted by the internet.

—Ashi Labouisse

Writing is mysterious; and it's supposed to be...any path that gets you there is a good path in the end. But one true thing among all these paths is the need to tap a deep vein of connection between our own uncontrollable interior preoccupations and what we're most concerned about in the world around us.

—Andrea Barrett

The dimensions of a work of art are seldom realized by the author until the work is accomplished. It is like a flowering dream. Ideas grow, budding silently, and there are a thousand illuminations coming day by day as the work progresses...The seed of the idea is developed by both labor and the unconscious, and the struggle that goes on between them.

—Caron McCullers

Every great and original writer must himself create the taste by which he is to be relished.

—William Wordsworth

You are lucky to be one of those people who wishes to build sand castles with words, who is willing to create a place where your imagination can wander. We build this place with the sand of memories; these castles are our memories and inventiveness made tangible. So part of us believes that when the tide starts coming in, we won't really have lost anything, because actually only a symbol of it was there in the sand. Another part of us thinks we'll figure out a way to divert the ocean. This is what separates artists from ordinary people: the belief, deep in our hearts, that if we build our castles well enough, somehow the ocean won't wash them away. I think this is a wonderful kind of person to be.

—Anne Lamott

Every man's work, whether it be literature, or music or pictures or architecture or anything else, is always a portrait of himself.

—Samuel Butler

Writing, I think, is not apart from living. Writing is a kind of double living. The writer experiences everything twice. Once in reality and once in that mirror which waits always before or behind.

—Catherine Drinker
Bowen

Every writer is on a quest for timelessness. We want our work to transcend generations, even centuries.

—Michael Connelly

To me, the greatest pleasure of writing is not what it's about, but the inner music that words make.

—Truman Capote

Finishing a book is just like you took a child out in the back yard and shot it.

—Truman Capote

That's not writing, that's typing.

—Truman Capote

Rhetoric is the art of ruling the minds of men.

—Plato

A few apt words trawled from their depths can sprinkle star dust on an otherwise pedestrian offering.

—Malcolm E. Brown

One forges one's style on the terrible anvil of daily deadlines.

—Emile Zola

A deadline is negative inspiration. Still, it's better than no inspiration at all.

—Rita Mae Brown

Influence is not imitation. It is more fertile and subtle than that, and less conscious. It comes about when we are driven to possess another poet, to absorb him as if he were a necessary food.

—May Sarton

The only reason for writing poetry is because you have to, because it is what gives you joy....So let me welcome you, dear poet, not into the company of the angels, but into the great company of those who work for joy alone, the poets.

—May Sarton

My shorthand answer is that I try to write the kind of book that I would like to read. If I can make it clear and interesting and compelling to me, then I hope maybe it will be for the reader.

—David McCullough

Xerography is bringing a reign of terror into the world of publishing, because it means that every reader can become both author and publisher.

—Marshall
McLuhan (1966)

An exclamation point is a punctuation mark used to indicate that the writer of a sentence is a twelve year-old girl.

—*TL;DR Wikipedia*

Why did I write? Because I found life unsatisfactory.

—Tennessee Williams

A good novel is an indivisible sum; every scene, sequence and passage of a good novel has to involve, contribute to and advance all three of its major attributes: theme, plot, characterization.

—Ayn Rand

Novel publishing:

- 1 - panic
- 2 - flail
- 3 - publish
- 4 - good reviews
- 5 - I meant to do that
- 6 - completely forget how to write
- 7 - panic.

—Myke Cole

Handwriting allows you to set aside typed page count and concentrate on what's important: words and story. Stephen King has reported writing *Dreamcatcher* with 'the world's finest word processor, a Waterman cartridge fountain pen.' By slowing down, writers may write more scenes that matter with less conscious effort at style. And once you start writing longhand, you'll be surprised how many words you can scribble.

—Michael Cahlin

Playwriting is less akin to being a novelist or poet than it is to authoring cookbooks. A script is a set of detailed instructions, which other people execute to make the final product. It's a 'recipe,' if you'll forgive the cloying metaphor, for a three-dimensional event. Its chef is the director, and the cast, design team and crew make up the ingredients. That's why most playwrights don't consider a new work truly 'finished' until it has weathered at least one full production. Martha Stewart wouldn't release a cake recipe without baking it first.

—Doug Wright

A short story is a different thing altogether—a short story is like a kiss in the dark from a stranger.

—Stephen King

Short fiction seems more targeted—hand grenades of ideas, if you will. When they work, they hit, they explode, and you never forget them.

—Paolo Bacigalupi

The greatest use of life is to spend it for something that will outlast it.

—William James

Whoever has the luck to be born a character can laugh even at death. Because a character will never die! A man will die, a writer, the instrument of creation: but what he has created will never die!

—Luigi Pirandello

Every well-written book is a light for me. When you write, you use other writers and their books as guides in the wilderness.

—Kate DiCamillo

I have this little litany of things they can do. And the first one, of course, is to write - every day, no excuses. It's so easy to make excuses. Even professional writers have days when they'd rather clean the toilet than do the writing.

—Octavia Butler

The best way to learn about writing is to study the work of other writers you admire.

—Jeffery Deaver

They didn't want it good, they wanted it Wednesday.

—Robert A. Heinlein

Fill your paper with the breathings of your heart.

—William
Wordsworth

The most important thing that I have learned, or that I'm trying to learn, is to give up perfectionism, because when you keep trying to make the story do all the things you want it do do, you keep failing, and you end up going around and around in circles. You end up confusing yourself and your talent, and you begin to view things as a failure, even though they're not failures.

—Akhil Sharma

The first million words are crap. After that, the quality starts to come.

—Ernest Hemingway

It's not important whether it makes us feel better, or whether it makes me feel like a better person. What's important is that in this story, or this poem, we allow our imagination to shape work that is powerful and accessible, so that others can understand this part of who we are.

—Bruce Weigl

I find that most people know what a story is until they sit down to write one.

—Flannery O'Connor

When I sit at my table to write, I never know what it's going to be until I'm under way. I trust in inspiration, which sometimes comes and sometimes doesn't. But I don't sit back waiting for it. I work every day.

—Alberto Moravia

Trying to write books with a subject matter or in a genre or style you're not familiar with is the best way to find the Big Block looming.

—Jeffery Deaver

Writing is in a strange way fun; it's a form of play, as well as involving the deepest, most serious human stuff—the making of art having something to do with knowing ourselves, which might help us survive, and help the earth survive.

—Sharon Olds

You write poetry when you can't see, when you want to write about a molecule of time. You write a story when you have something on your mind that you want people to listen to.

—Sandra Cisneros

Don't write about the things that you remember, but the things that you wish you could forget. Those are just huge in your heart. And that way you can get right to the seed of a story. That's usually where I begin. Some memory I wish I could forget. All you have to do is write from some very true place in your heart. You cut to the chase when you write about things you feel frightened to think about, the things that haunt you.

—Sandra Cisneros

An editor's strongest emotion is neither love nor hate but the desire to change someone's copy.

—Ken Wells

The Internet is like a beach with grains of sand. People won't pick up the same grain that you will. Put your finger on something that has changed since the last time it was written about.

—Barry Newman

Before I start writing, I always take down a book by E. B. White, and I read a few paragraphs to get in the mood. White has the sound, the attitude that I aspire to.

—Barry Newman

I'm a rude guest, I'm rude to friends, I drift off a lot, I just ignore people because all of a sudden I get caught up in an idea. My friends are used to it—Oh, Harlan's going off to la-la land.

—Harlan Coben

Nonwriters believe revision is something you do in an afternoon, manuscript and red pen in hand....Writers know better. They know that a jumbled draft can be even more terrifying than a blank page.

—Gabriela Pereira

Writing is hard work. A clear sentence is no accident. Very few sentences come out right the first time, or even the third time. Remember this in moments of despair. If you find that writing is hard, it's because it is hard.

—William Knowlton
Zinsser

Always think that in any area of the arts, you get maybe ten percent of people who are creative, original... and the rest are generally following on, copying.

—Hugh Hopper

A non-fiction writer pretty much has the shape of the figure in front of him or her and goes about refining it. A work of non-fiction is not as difficult to write as a work of fiction, but it's not as satisfying in the end.

—Chaim Potok

Underlying everything—the evocative flashes, the dogged working of language—is the writer's belief in the story as a system of knowledge. This belief is akin to the scientist's faith in the scientific method as a way to truth.

—E. L. Doctorow

Avoid using the word 'very' because it's lazy. A man is not very tired, he is exhausted. Don't use very sad, use morose. Language was invented for one reason, boys—to woo women—and, in that endeavor, laziness will not do.

—John Keating, *Dead
Poet's Society*

If you find yourself asking yourself (and your friends), 'Am I really a writer? Am I really an artist?' Chances are you are. The counterfeit innovator is wildly confident. The real one is scared to death.

—Steven Pressfield

Your fingerprints are all over our writing. You can write about characters and situations and settings that are entirely divorced from your own experience, but you will still write yourself into your fiction. The author is visible in the essential nature of a novel. This is something very simple and obvious, but it was difficult for me to accept. In fiction, you escape only to run into yourself, again and again.

—Katie Kitamura

Every hour seems pointless, wasted, if you don't dedicate your energies to discovering, flushing out, telling.

—Roberto Saviano

I never knew a writer yet who took the smallest pains with his style and was at the same time readable.

—Samuel Butler

No one ever committed suicide while reading a good book, but many have tried while trying to write one.

—Robert Byrne

If they don't read, if they don't love reading; if they don't find themselves compulsively reading, I don't think they're really a writer.

—Rita Dove

Accursed who brings to light of day the writings I have cast away.

—William Butler
Yeats

A ratio of failures is built into the process of writing. The wastebasket has evolved for a reason.

—Margaret Atwood

The author in his book must be like God in his universe, everywhere present and nowhere visible.

—Gustave Flaubert

The writer shares his medium with all who use the language. The words he uses are the same as those used in everyday discourse. He is, in fact, confined to the words and to the meanings of each that native speakers in his time have agreed upon. There is no literary vocabulary; there are no 'poetic' words. The writer simply makes ordinary words behave in extraordinary ways. He exploits their several literal meanings, their connotations, their image potential, their symbol values, their sounds, their rhythms. He extends vocabulary by creating new words....And the writer gives surprising, fresh contexts to familiar words....The writer turns to his account all the dimensions words have to offer.

—Geraldine Murphy

The artist never entirely knows. We guess. We may be wrong, but we take leap after leap in the dark.

—Agnes de Mille

If you are using dialogue—say it aloud as you write it. Only then will it have the sound of speech.

—John Steinbeck

As soon as you have an idea that changes some small part of the world, you are writing science fiction.

—Ray Bradbury

A major side effect of novel writing was that the power of creating characters; experimenting with their lives and controlling their destinies intoxicated me. I no longer felt the need to meet and socialize with actual friends because I had my fictitious, more stimulating and obedient friend-characters, with whom I was traveling, dreaming, laughing, crying, loving, hating and even taking revenge. We shared an intimate world of our own, a self-sufficient one.

—Ali Shakir

As a people who value the lessons of history, we must realize that our very survival depends primarily on our collective abilities to speak and write clearly and precisely and to be understood as we strive to understand others.

—Bill Honig

Writing is, indeed, one of the most complex intellectual and emotional processes a person engages in.

—Sue Rader Willett

Clear writing leads to clear thinking; clear thinking is the basis of clear writing. Perhaps more than any other form of communication, writing holds us responsible for our words and ultimately makes us more thoughtful human beings.

—Ernest Boyer

I don't start a novel or a play saying, 'I'll write about such and such.' I start with an idea and then find out what I'm writing about.

—William Inge

Have something to say, and say it as clearly as you can. That is the only secret of style.

—Matthew Arnold

Now the first merit which attracts in the pages of a good writer is the apt choice and contrast of the words employed.

—Robert Louis
Stevenson

Writing, like life itself, is a voyage of discovery.

—Henry Miller

Good writing is disciplined talking.

—James Boswell

If there were an art of writing, it would be nothing more or less than the art of feeling, the art of seeing, the art of hearing, the art of using all the senses.

—Remy de Gourmont

I scarcely ever read my published writings, but if by chance I come across a page, it always strikes me: 'All this must be rewritten; this is how I should have written it.'

—Leo Tolstoi

Editing is easy. All you have to do is cross out the wrong words.

—Mark Twain

Pruning writing is the same as pruning apple trees: The point is not so much to get rid of the dead branches (which are easy enough to spot) as it is to shape the tree to produce the best possible fruit.

—Bruce O. Boston

Rewriting is when playwriting really gets to be fun...In baseball you only get three swings and you're out. In rewriting, you get almost as many swings as you want and you know, sooner or later, you'll hit the ball.

—Neil Simon

Style is not a fashionable garment you put on; style is what you are; what you have to say as well as how you say it.

—Donald Murray

For the creative order, which is an extension of life, is not an elaboration of the established, but a movement beyond the established, or at the least a reorganization of it and often of elements not included in it.

—Brewster Ghiselin

Each time a person completes a novel, a research project or a composition, he/she discovers new, unresolved issues that have to be addressed. In creative work, a single product is just a temporary resting place in the continuing and demanding process.

—Vera John-Steiner

IMAGINATION—the seed of all genius.

—Dan L. Miller

Against the disease of writing one must take special precautions, since it is a dangerous and contagious disease.

—Peter Abelard

The truth is: I do not want to finish the book and let it go. It is like letting my life go. It will cease to be mine; it will go out into the world and become like a fire hydrant for any cur to piss on. It will begin its long journey from my will, my brain, my language, into the hearts of those who need it. But, in the interim, like a child, it may have to take a lot of abuse. Sometimes my books are messengers that people want to shoot. And then they linger on, despite the odds.

—Erica Jong

It's easy to become attached to certain elements of a world you've been building for years: a character, a set piece, a poetic prologue. And sometimes these elements aren't bad in and of themselves. They may be executed beautifully (i.e., the prose may be gorgeous) or they may represent some imaginative spark. But in the context of the larger work, they may be doing you a disservice. They may be clotting up the arteries of the plot, or worse, adding a second beating heart to the chest of the book, when one would do just fine. And in those cases, no matter how beautiful the prose is, no matter how unexpected or original the idea behind the passage is, those scenes should be cut for the benefit of the macro idea, which is the novel as a whole.

—Christopher
Robinson

As a beginning writer, you hear it over and over again. Rule number one: Write what you know....How, if I am supposed to write only what I know, is this possible? Easy. I have an imagination, possess a fair amount of empathy, have easy access to Google and like asking questions. If I were limited to writing what I know, I'd be in big trouble because the truth is, I don't know all that much.

—Charles Salzberg

Is writing hard? Hell no. You sit at the typewriter and lie like crazy.

—John Barden

I know very little until I start to research a subject, or ask questions, or put myself in another person's skin. That to me is what writing fiction is about. Making stuff up.

—Charles Salzberg

Bad sentences make bad books. Can I make this sentence less boring? More interesting? Prettier? More colorful? More true? That's why the Lord in his infinite wisdom gave us delete keys.

—Mary Karr

I have never given an aspiring writer the advice ‘write what you know.’ In fact, when my students try to write fiction based on their lives, it often comes out stilted and forced. It’s because they’re limiting themselves to what actually happened, what they really know. To write better, to write imaginatively, they need to be given permission to invent, to lie, to make things up. That’s the only way you’re going to get to the truth.

—Charles Salzberg

The final rewrite is a bit like doing surgery on yourself with no anesthesia. It hurts, but you do it because you want it to be the best story it can be.

—Cynthia Bond

At the end of every writing day, I put everything down, then I start the next day, going back about 10 pages or looking at what I wrote the day before, and making minor edits to reacquaint myself with the work. I always do that. And then I’ll do some minor polishing before I move on to the next section.

—Cynthia Bond

You can have all the talent, be wonderful at prose, amazing characters, great dialogue, descriptions; you can knock it out of the ballpark; but if you don’t develop ‘the talent of the room’—all of those other talents are worthless. And that talent is the ability to just go into a room alone and sit down and write. Without that talent, you can never finish anything.

—Cynthia Bond

I’m so aware of time running on that I’ve become quite versatile. Now I can write anywhere—in bed, a favorite nook in the public library; next to the sea seems especially productive. As soon as I get into the story world, it doesn’t seem to matter where I am.

—Wendy Robertson

Every chapter is, in a sense, a short story, and like a short story, it needs to pull the reader along and persuade him or her not to shut the book. You need a good opening line to capture your readers interest, just as you often need to close a chapter with a sense of what happens next.

—David C. Taylor

I tend to revise each day’s writing the day after, and then to revise each chapter before going on, and then, finally, to revise the entire book.

—David C. Taylor

Rejection is the norm. If you cannot accept rejection and still go on, it would be better to find another way to live.

—David C. Taylor

Writing is a way of organizing experience, or of organizing something imagined, of making something perfect and beautiful—even something as small as one sentence—in a world that can be at times chaotic, wretched, ugly and upsetting.

—Patricia Highsmith

I do most of my writing in coffee shops—there are too many distractions at home. I tend to sit for two-to three-hour stretches and write. I start by reading over the previous day's work, which I tweak a bit before moving on. I'll go home to eat lunch, do office work or household chores, maybe get in a little exercise. If my schedule allows, I'll do another coffee shop session in the afternoon before picking my son up from school.

—Brenda Scott
Royce

Every few days I'll upload my manuscript-in-progress to my Kindle, and use its text-to-speech tool to have the draft read to me while I'm driving, stuck in L.A. traffic. Hearing your work read aloud is really helpful—in catching typos, mulling over word choice or just listening to the flow and pacing of the text. At red lights, I jot notes on what's working and what's not, and start the next day by making those edits.

—Brenda Scott
Royce

If the urge to write should ever leave me, I want that day to be my last.

—Naguib Mahfouz

In writing and politicking, it's best not to think about it, just do it.

—Gore Vidal

Powerful verbs scrub my work clean. They manipulate a psychological thriller—the grim unease, the emotion, the page-flipping pace. I especially love 'pulse' and 'thrum.' Strong verbs allow me to write sparsely and abandon the rest to the imagination. That way, the reader and I are in the game together.

—Julia Heaberlin

Guard your writing time like a dragon's gold. My husband and I live in a one-bedroom apartment, and my studio doubles as our kitchen table. I made a tag that reads 'Stay away from me, and stay way from my desk'...to hang over the back of the chair so that my husband knows not to start a conversation. When that hour is done, I take off my headphones and give him a hug so he knows I'm back in the 'real world.'

—Libby Cudmore

Whenever your friends ask, ‘Where do you find the time?’ you’ll be able to smile and say, ‘I make the time.’

—Libby Cudmore

I don’t believe in inspiration. I believe that you sit at your desk, and you push your pencil around, and you feel lousy about yourself for a while, and eventually, you just start writing. Everyone I know who’s lucky in this business is lucky because they’re working really hard, and then good stuff happens.

—Dinty W. Moore

I am usually trying for a kind of prose that reads like poetry, a quality John Updike once said that he aspired to too. He wanted a reader to be able to choose any one page out of his novels and be able to read it as if it were a poem.

—Christine Sneed

Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man.

—Francis Bacon

When writing your first draft, being busy is key. It may feel frustrating at first, but having daily writing periods curtailed by chores, family and other distractions actually helps you get the thing done. This is partly because the hectic pace forces you to type with a fleet-fingered desperation. But it’s mostly because noveling in the midst of a chaotic life makes ‘book time’ a treat rather than an obligation. It’s a small psychological shift, but it makes all the difference in the world.

—Chris Baty

My passions drives me to the typewriter every day of my life, and they have driven me there since I was 12. So I never have to worry about schedules. Some new thing is always exploding in me, and it schedules me; I don’t schedule it. It says: Get to the typewriter right now and finish this.

—Ray Bradbury

Revising is part of writing. Few writers are so expert that they can produce what they are after on the first try. Quite often you will discover, on examining the completed work, that there are serious flaws in the arrangement of the material, calling for transpositions....Remember, it is no sign of weakness or defeat that your manuscript ends up in need of major surgery. This is a common occurrence in all writing, and among the best writers.

—William Strunk, Jr.
& E. B. White

It’s not the idea; it’s never the idea. It’s always what you do with it.

—Neil Gaiman

Clutter is the disease of American writing. We are a society strangling in unnecessary words, circular constructions, pompous frills and meaningless jargon...But the secret of good writing is to strip every sentence to its cleanest components.

—William K. Zinsser

I learned that you should feel when writing, not like Lord Byron on a mountain top, but like child stringing beads in kindergarten, - happy, absorbed and quietly putting one bead on after another.

—Brenda Ueland

All fictions are structures of fantasy and craft erected around certain acts, people or circumstances that stand out in the writer's memory and stimulate his imagination.

—Mario Vargas Llosa

The intrigue for the reader turns from what will happen to how it will happen, which I find richer.

—John Irving

I will not write about anyplace in the world unless I've been there to personally research it.

—Sidney Sheldon

Artists to my mind are the real architects of change, and not the political legislators who implement change after the fact.

—William S.
Burroughs

I have a bad tendency to get rapidly bored with my own material, so rewriting is hard for me. I mean, I already know the story and would rather read something new.

—Alan Dean Foster

My first book took five years to write and I made \$1,000 on it. The second took three years and I made \$3,000. All this time I was a housewife being supported by a husband. I was very lucky.

—Judith Rossner

If all printers were determined not to print anything till they were sure it would offend nobody, there would be very little printed.

—Benjamin Franklin

Writing: the pleasure of articulating interior worlds sensed but not seen.

—Pamela Jane

There is no mistaking the dismay on the face of a writer who has just heard that his brain child is a deformed idiot.

—L. Sprague de
Camp

The secret to being a writer is that you have to write. It's not enough to think about writing or to study literature or plan a future life as an author. You really have to lock yourself away, alone, and get to work.

—Augusten
Burroughs

You would go mad if you began to speculate about the impact your novel might have while you were still writing it.

—Jonathan Coe

The job of the novelist is to invent: to embroider, to color, to embellish, to entertain, to make things up. The art of what I do lies not in research or even recollection but primarily in invention.

—Donna Tartt

The short story is a sprint, and the novel is a long-haul marathon composed of numerous internal sprints. One is not necessarily better than the other, but you're more likely to fail with a novel. Novels are more dangerous. You commit yourself to the idea that you might see two, three or four years disappear down the rabbit hole. With a collection of stories, there will always be a way to pick yourself up and dust yourself off.

—Colum McCann

I tend to work in the morning when I have relatively more energy, and I try to stay in my pajamas as long as possible because once I get dressed, I feel sort of empowered, and I'm more likely to go to the grocery store or the gym. I know this makes me sound like a sad, sad person, but it's the only thing that works for me.

—Katherine Heiny

There is, beyond a certain point, no correlation between the time spent on something and how well it turns out. I learned that good writing is what happens when you stop thinking about the writing itself and think straightforwardly about what it is you're trying to say, that it's a question of mechanics, not magic.

—Emma Brockes

My new novel is about a guy who procrastinates. I'm starting it tomorrow.

—Wayne E. Pollard

Style is not something applied. It is something that permeates. It is of the nature of that in which it is found, whether the poem, the manner of a god, the bearing of a man. It is not a dress.

—Wallace Stevens

The best work anyone ever writes is the work that is on the verge of embarrassing them. Always.

—Arthur Miller

As against having beautiful workshops, studios, etc., one writes best in a cellar on a rainy day.

—Van Wyck Brooks

This desk of mine is one at which a man may die, but from which he cannot resign.

—Dwight D.
Eisenhower

Be still when you have nothing to say; when genuine passion moves you, say what you've got to say, and say it hot.

—D. H. Lawrence

Good taste is the enemy of creativity

—Pablo Picasso

The truest writers are those who see language not as a linguistic process but as a living element.

—Derek Walcott

I didn't know anything about fatherhood or middle age, but I wrote poems about them anyway. And as I revised, I considered a possible twist to that old writer's rule, to write what you know. Instead, I landed on: Write what you're learning.

—Michael Henry

One of the things I've done as a writer is to learn more words. I do that by reading widely and in all disciplines. I read art criticism. I read science. I read psychology. As I have done that over a lifetime, I know more and more words. One of my anxieties when I first started writing was that my language seemed too plain to address subjects that were complicated. As I have been able to learn more words, it's easier to paint a scene that might seduce the reader into watching that scene, and then more words for the speaker to speak so that the psychology becomes more nuanced.

—Alicia Anstead

Almost any story is almost certainly some kind of lie.

—Orson Welles

She hasn't written a line of poetry since college, but the lessons she learned from that period—the economy of words, the rhythm of a sentence, the power of choosing a single word—are infused in everything she has written since. The feeling she gets from the sound of a certain word is a powerful compass.

—Aubrey Everett on
Winnie
Holzman

A writer's location can greatly affect the final product, and each one has preferences and process. Picture Holzman in her shed-turned-backyard writing retreat. It's a small, comfortable space that her husband...created. No phone, just a computer and her imagination....'What I tend to do these days is a combo platter. I get to a point where I get a little stir crazy, and I don't like to be only in one place. Sometimes I write sitting or lying on my bed. That tends to be a thing I do. A lot...' Or she will visit the freelance writer's trustworthy retreat—the coffee shop...'I'm around people who—hopefully—aren't going to talk to me. They are busy doing their thing. I like to have a quiet buzz around me that doesn't involve me. I like music. Sometimes I'll get obsessed with certain music that I'll play during a project. There isn't any one way.'

—Aubrey Everett on
Winnie
Holzman

I'm not really interested to write about a subject that's deep and complex and intense without using comedy to some extent. Comedy is a huge, integral part of our lives. And it's also something that makes us human. It's too big to leave out. Comedy is not dessert. It's not like, oh, let's have a little comedy.

— Winnie Holzman

And I've always worked on the principle that if it interests me enough to write about it, then it must interest a lot of other people.

—Morris West

Enduring comedy is grounded in both surprise and recognition, and that recognition requires that comedy arise from the real world.

—Frank Lidz

Advice to writers: Sometimes you just have to stop writing. Even before you begin.

—Stanislaw J. Lec

Being a writer in a library is rather like being a eunuch in a harem.

—John Braine

The best time to plan a book is while you're doing the dishes.

—Agatha Christie

The greatest use of a life is to spend it on something that will outlast it.

—William James

There is no way that writers can be tamed and rendered civilized or even cured. The only solution known to science is to provide the patient with an isolation room, where he can endure the acute stages in private and where food can be poked in to him with a stick.

—Robert A. Heinlein

Writing only leads to more writing.

—Sidonie Gabrielle
Colette

I have a pattern of falling into routines that seem to decline in their productivity over time. As a result, I have to revise my routines to maintain productivity. Changing my routines might mean writing at different times of day, shifting from morning to afternoon writing, or shifting the locations where I write. Of course, if you have a routine for writing that works, don't fix what ain't broke. But you may still want to experiment. Perhaps you're not as productive as you think you are, or not as productive as you are capable of being.

—Nate Kreuter

Writing is an inherently social activity—we write for others—that we most often undertake in solitude. This is one of writing's great contradictions.

—Nate Kreuter

Personally, I find different writing environments suited to different stages of my writing process, particularly when it comes to scholarly writing. I like to do initial drafting amongst the bustle and energy of a coffee shop, and need the solitude and quiet of my home office to undertake revisions and hone my ideas and prose until they are presentable.

—Nate Kreuter

I even got rid of my typewriter. It was a nice one, but I hate to type. When I started writing I found that I was thinking more about my typing than what I was going to say, so I wrote it long hand.

—Beverly Cleary

I would work in the shower if I had plastic paper.

—Umberto Eco

He [Jesse Stewart] went back to the hills and taught school and plowed fields and wrote in between. As he guided the mule between rows, he composed poetry and conjured plots for short stories. When he rested his mule at the end of the furrow, he jotted his lines on tree leaves. Later, he transferred his words to paper. They eventually found their way to publishing houses and from there into books and magazines. He wrote for children. He wrote for adults. But most of all, he wrote for himself.

—Dennis L. Peterson

That is what the title of artist means: one who perceives more than his fellows, and who records more than he has seen.

—Edward Gordon
Craig

Every writer is a kind of spy, ghosting through life in the service of an alien power. He lurks, he snoops, he eavesdrops, he jots his jottings, he thinks his treacherous thoughts.

—James Parker

People say that profanity is a crutch for those who don't have an extensive enough vocabulary, but I prefer to say that people who don't use profanity are missing out on a lot of amazing words. Consider the 'f' word. It's a verb, an exclamation, a way of commiserating or yelling in anger or expressing fear. It's one of the most dynamic words in our language, and I take full fucking advantage of it.

—Jenny Lawson

If you're waiting to make stuff because you lack the perfect pen or paper or subject or block of time...get over it. We all make crap every day. If we didn't we'd die. Or at least be really cranky.

—Danny Gregory

Perfection seems like the goal. It's impressive to see the pressure perfectionists put on themselves. It seems as if they work on a higher order. But maybe they are just frozen—focused myopically on perfectionism rather than the goal of the project. Perfection often causes paraplegia because we forget that it's not perfection we need. It's a solution that moves us forward.

—Danny Gregory

Perfection is hard to achieve and always impermanent. The exact right solution for a given time will always wear out its perfection. Otherwise we wouldn't have evolution—empires would not crumble, champions would not fall. The universe is always in flux, so waiting endlessly for perfection just means you'll miss the boat.

—Danny Gregory

If you're a plotter, your approach to writing a novel is similar to a military campaign: You set up the logistics and supply lines in advance, and by the time your fingers actually touch the keyboard, you have the entire battle mapped out, blow-by-blow. Pantsers, on the other hand, just start writing. They strap on a pirate costume, shout, 'Avast!' and swing into the story with wild abandon.

—Jeff Somers

When I select a topic, it's usually a commitment of two to three years of my life.

—Tracy Kidder

When Alexander the Great visited Diogenes and asked whether he could do anything for the famed teacher, Diogenes replied 'Only stand out of my light.' Perhaps some day we shall know how to heighten creativity. Until then, one of the best things we can do for creative men and women is to stand out of their light.

—John W. Gardner

When you write, you lay out a line of words.... Soon you find yourself deep in new territory. Is it a dead end, or have you located the real subject? You will know tomorrow or this time next year.

—Annie Dillard

One wants a room with no view, so imagination can meet memory in the dark.

—Annie Dillard

It is noble work, and beats, from any angle, selling shoes.

—Annie Dillard

Though Shakespeare never, as far as we know, dreamed up a poem, he apparently did compose with great speed and fluency, and did little revision. Dryden, too, came to have more and more readiness so that, as he says, the thoughts outran the pen. The French poet Bonnard records that when he composed, all the words seemed to crowd in at the same time so that he had the impression of having a thousand voices. But one part of the same poem may be composed in almost a flash and another part may require long and tedious effort. A. E. Housman...was accustomed to compose on his afternoon walk, when he was a little drowsy from lunch and beer and his mind was relaxed and free for the movement of association. Under these circumstances, sometimes stanzas, or even whole poems, would come almost in a flash, sometimes merely the germs of poems which had to be developed later.

—Cleanth Brooks and
Robert Penn
Warren

None of us—not one person in this entire business—became successful without help.

—Ray Bradbury

I won't deny I have worried quite a number of my poems into existence. But my sneaking preference remains for the ones I carried through like the stroke of a racquet, club, or headsman's ax. It is only under pressure from friends that I can consent to come out into the open and expose myself in a weakness so sacred and in the present trend of criticism so damaging. When I look into myself for the agony I am supposed to lay claim to as an artist it has to be over the poems that went wrong and came to grief without coming to an end; and they made me less miserable than I deserved when I discovered that though lost they were not entirely lost; I could and did quite freely quote lines and phrases of them from memory. I never wrote a poem for practice.

—Robert Frost

My word will be more or less taken for it that I played certain poems through without fumbling a sentence....With what pleasure I remember their tractability. They have been the experience I couldn't help returning for more of—I trust I may say without seeming to put on inspired airs.

—Robert Frost

Many fine people were out there living, people whose consciences permitted them to sleep at night despite their not having written a decent sentence that day, or ever.

—Annie Dillard

Get to work. Your work is to keep cranking the flywheel that turns the gears that spin the belt in the engine of belief that keeps you and your desk in midair.

—Annie Dillard

Hart Crane tried to evoke the creative process by drink and jazz music, which might hypnotically start trains of verbal association; and so Schiller is reported to have kept a rotting apple in his desk because he found the odor stimulating.

—Cleanth Brooks and
Robert Penn
Warren

There's no use just sitting down and waiting for an inspiration, though. You've got to play along. The main thing you've got to do is preserve your vitality. A couple of days of complete rest and solitude helps. Not seeing anybody. I even conserve my emotions. 'I'm not going to get excited about anybody or anything,' I say, 'until I get this gag worked out.' I go along that way, living a quiet and righteous life, and then I stay out late one night, and have a couple of drinks—perhaps all night—and the next morning the reserve pours out. But you've got to have the reserve. Dissipation is no use except as a release. You've been damming it up inside of you, and all of a sudden you say: 'Oh, here it is!' And then you go to work.

—Charlie Chaplin

[Writing]...that undistracted center of being where the will does not intrude and the sense of passing time is lost, or has no power over the imagination.

—Katherine Anne
Porter

One of the best accounts of the creative process, of the way in which the parts become related to each other and to an envisaged whole, occurs in a letter sometimes attributed to Mozart: ‘My ideas come as they will, I don’t know how, all in a stream. If I like them I keep them in my head, and people say that I often hum them over to myself. Well, if I can hold on to them, they begin to join on to one another, as if they were bits that a pastry cook should joint together in his pantry. And now my soul gets heated, and if nothing disturbs me the piece grows larger and brighter until however long it is, it is all finished at once in my mind, so that I can see it at a glance, as if it were a pretty picture or a pleasing person. Then I don’t hear the notes one after another, as they are hereafter to be played, but it is as if in my fancy they were all at once. And that is a revel (*das ist nun ein Schmaus*). While I’m inventing, it all seems to me like a fine vivid dream; but that hearing it all at once (when the invention is done), that’s the best. What I have once so heard I forget not again, and perhaps this is the best gift that God has granted me.’

—Cleanth Brooks and
Robert Penn
Warren

The writer has to force himself to work. He has to make his own hours and if he doesn’t go to his desk at all there is nobody to scold him.

—Roald Dahl

The more you do it, whatever you do, the better you become at it. And if you love it, you become even better.

—Sergio Aragonés

If I had to put a name to it, I would wish that all my books were entertainments. I think the first thing you’ve got to do is grab the reader by the ear, and make him sit down and listen. Make him laugh, make him feel. We all want to be entertained at a very high level.

—John le Carre

The world is but a canvas for our imagination.

—Henry David
Thoreau

I am a rewriter....I roll my eyes at it but I actually don’t consider myself the world’s best writer. I think I am a good rewriter, maybe a great rewriter.

—Lisa Gardner

One ought only to write when one leaves a piece of ones flesh in the ink-pot each time one dips one's pen.

—Leo Tolstoy

How many authors are there among writers? Author means originator.

—Friedrich Von
Schlegel

You ask me why I do not write something....I think one's feelings waste themselves in words, they ought all to be distilled into actions and into actions which bring results.

—Florence
Nightingale

My deep terror of letting anyone see my half-written article drafts is not irrational but adaptive. It perpetuates a myth that I'm a natural—the words just flow out, folks, as fast as I can type!—and hides the far more mundane truth: that the words come out fitfully and woodenly, gradually succumbing to a state of readability only after many seemingly fruitless sessions.

—Jerry Useem

Why write poetry? For the weird unemployment. For the painless headaches, that must be tapped to strike down along your writing arm at the accumulated moment. For the adjustments after, aligning facets in a verb before the trance leaves you.

—Les Murray

I chose to become a writer, which is a financially perilous profession, rather than do something more lucrative. I chose to live in New York rather than in a place with a lower cost of living. I chose to have two children. I chose to write long books that required years of work, even though my advances would be stretched to the breaking point and, it turned out, beyond. We all make those sorts of choices, and they obviously affect, even determine, our bottom line. But, without getting too metaphysical about it, these are the choices that define who we are. We don't make them with our financial well-being in mind, though maybe we should. We make them with our lives in mind. The alternative is to be another person.

—Neal Gabler

Anyone can write a book quickly: Just write a bad book.

—Neal Gabler

My art springs from my desire to have things in the world which would otherwise never be there.

—Carl Andre

To shift the structure of a sentence alters the meaning of that sentence, as definitely and inflexibly as the position of a camera alters the meaning of the object photographed...The arrangement of the words matters, and the arrangement you want can be found in the picture in your mind...The picture tells you how to arrange the words and the arrangement of the words tells you, or tells me, what's going on in the picture.

—Joan Didion

Didion feels that it is necessary to sleep in the same room as her book. In Didion's own words, 'That's one reason I go home to Sacramento to finish things. Somehow the book doesn't leave you when you're right next to it.'

—*The Paris Review*

Every morning for the next five years, he [John Cheever] would dress in his only suit and take the elevator to a maid's room in the basement, where he stripped to his boxer shorts and wrote until lunchtime.

—*Wikipedia*

The economy of a novelist is a little like that of a careful housewife who is unwilling to throw away anything that might perhaps serve its turn.

—Graham Greene

We are writers, and we never ask one another where we get our ideas; we know we don't know.

—Stephen King

Fiction writers, present company included, don't understand very much about what they do—not why it works when it's good, not why it doesn't when it's bad.

—Stephen King

There is no Idea Dump, no Story Central, no Island of the Buried Bestsellers; good story ideas seem to come quite literally from nowhere, sailing at you right out of the empty sky: two previously unrelated ideas come together and make something new under the sun. Your job isn't to find these ideas but to recognize them when they show up.

—Stephen King

Writing poems (or stories, or essays) had as much in common with sweeping the floor as with mythy moments of revelation.

—Stephen King

Life isn't a support-system for art. It's the other way around.

—Stephen King

Writing is a lonely job. Having someone who believes in you makes a lot of difference. They don't have to make speeches. Just believing is usually enough.

—Stephen King

I have spent a good many years since—too many, I think—being ashamed about what I write. I think I was forty before I realized that almost every writer of fiction and poetry who has ever published a line has been accused by someone of wasting his or her God-given talent. If you write (or paint or dance or sculpt or sing, I suppose), someone will try to make you feel lousy about it, that's all. I'm not editorializing, just trying to give you the facts as I see them.

—Stephen King

When you write a story, you're telling yourself the story. When you rewrite, your main job is taking out all the things that are not the story.

—John Gould

Good writing came spontaneously, in an uprush of feeling that had to be caught at once.

—Stephen King

Grammar is not just a pain in the ass; it's the pole you grab to get your thoughts up on their feet and walking.

—Stephen King

The idea that creative endeavor and mind-altering substances are entwined is one of the great pop-intellectual myths of our time. The four twentieth-century writers whose work is most responsible for it are probably Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Sherwood Anderson, and the poet Dylan Thomas. They are the writers who largely formed our vision of an existential English-speaking wasteland where people have been cut off from one another and live in an atmosphere of emotional strangulation and despair. These concepts are very familiar to most alcoholics; the common reaction to them is amusement. Substance-abusing writers are just substance abusers—common garden-variety drunks and druggies, in other words. Any claims that the drugs and alcohol are necessary to dull a finer sensibility are just the usual self-serving bullshit. I've heard alcoholic snowplow drivers make the same claim, that they drink to still the demons. It doesn't matter if you're James Jones, John Cheever, or a stew bum snoozing in Penn Station; for an addict, the right to the drink or drug of choice must be preserved at all costs. Hemingway and Fitzgerald didn't drink because they were creative, alienated, or morally weak. They drank because it's what alkie's are wired up to do. Creative people probably do run a greater risk of alcoholism and addiction than those in some other jobs, but so what? We all look pretty much the same when we're puking in the gutter.

—Stephen King

Stopping a piece of work just because it's hard, either emotionally or imaginatively, is a bad idea. Sometimes you have to go on when you don't feel like it, and sometimes you're doing good work when it feels like all you're managing is to shovel shit from a sitting position.

—Stephen King

I'm in another place, a basement place where there are lot of bright lights and clear images. This is a place I've built for myself over the years. It's a far-seeing place. I know it's a little strange, a little bit of a contradiction, that a far-seeing place should be a basement place, but that's how it is with me. If you construct your own far-seeing place, you might put it in a treetop or on the roof of the World Trade Center or on the edge of the Grand Canyon.

—Stephen King

You can approach the act of writing with nervousness, excitement, hopefulness, or even despair—the sense that you can never completely put on the page what's in your mind and heart. You can come to the act with your fists clenched and your eyes narrowed, ready to kick ass and take down names. You can come to it because you want a girl to marry you or because you want to change the world. Come to it any way but lightly. Let me say it again: you must not come lightly to the blank page. I'm not asking you to come reverently or unquestioningly; I'm not asking you to be politically correct or cast aside your sense of humor (please God you have one). This isn't a popularity contest, it's not the moral Olympics, and it's not church. But it's writing, damn it, not washing the car or putting on eyeliner.

—Stephen King

One of the really bad things you can do to your writing is to dress up the vocabulary, looking for long words because you're maybe a little bit ashamed of your short ones. This is like dressing up a household pet in evening clothes. The pet is embarrassed and the person who committed this act of premeditated cuteness should be even more embarrassed. Make yourself a solemn promise right now that you'll never use 'emolument' when you mean 'tip' and you'll never say John stopped long enough to perform an act of excretion when you mean John stopped long enough to take a shit.

—Stephen King

Remember that the first rule of vocabulary is use the first word that comes to your mind, if it is appropriate and colorful. If you hesitate and cogitate, you will come up with another word—of course you will, there's always another word—but it probably won't be as good as your first one, or as close to what you really mean.

—Stephen King

If you want to refurbish your grammar, go to your local used-book store and find a copy of *Warriner's English Grammar and Composition*—the same book most of us took home and dutifully covered with brown paper shopping-bags when we were sophomores and juniors in high school. You'll be relieved and delighted, I think, to find that almost all you need is summarized on the front and back endpapers of the book.

—Stephen King

Many writers are attracted to passive verbs....It's weak, it's circuitous, and it's frequently tortuous, as well. How about this: My first kiss will always be recalled by me as how my romance with Shayna was begun. Oh, man—who farted, right? A simpler way to express this idea—sweeter and more forceful, as well—might be this: My romance with Shayna began with our first kiss. I'll never forget it.

—Stephen King

I believe the road to hell is paved with adverbs, and I will shout it from the rooftops. To put it another way, they're like dandelions. If you have one on your lawn, it looks pretty and unique. If you fail to root it out, however, you find five the next day... fifty the day after that...and then, my brothers and sisters, your lawn is totally, completely, and profligately covered with dandelions. By then you see them for the weeds they really are, but by then it's —GASP!—too late.

—Stephen King

I'm convinced that fear is at the root of most bad writing. If one is writing for one's own pleasure, that fear may be mild—timidity is the word I've used here. If, however, one is working under deadline—a school paper, a newspaper article, the SAT writing sample—that fear may be intense. Dumbo got airborne with the help of a magic feather; you may feel the urge to grasp a passive verb or one of those nasty adverbs for the same reason. Just remember before you do that Dumbo didn't need the feather; the magic was in him.

—Stephen King

I do not have the reader in mind when I write. No true writer does that.

—Guillermo C.
Infante

I suppose I have written the fact that a thousand times in the heat of composition, revised it out maybe five hundred times in the cool aftermath. To be batting only .500 this late in the season, to fail half the time to connect with this fat pitch, saddens me.

—E. B. White

It is possible to overuse the well-turned fragment...but frags can also work beautifully to streamline narration, create clear images, and create tension as well as to vary the prose-line. A series of grammatically proper sentences can stiffen that line, make it less pliable. Purists hate to hear that and will deny it to their dying breath, but it's true. Language does not always have to wear a tie and lace-up shoes. The object of fiction isn't grammatical correctness but to make the reader welcome and then tell a story.

—Stephen King

Is there any rationale for building entire mansions of words? I think there is, and that the readers of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* and Charles Dicken's *Bleak House* understand it: sometimes even a monster is no monster. Sometimes it's beautiful and we fall in love with all that story, more than any film or TV program could ever hope to provide. Even after a thousand pages we don't want to leave the world the writer has made for us, or the make—believe people who live there.

—Stephen King

I can't lie and say there are no bad writers. Sorry, but there are lots of bad writers. Some are on-staff at your local newspaper, usually reviewing little-theater productions or pontificating about the local sports teams. Some have scribbled their way to homes in the Caribbean, leaving a trail of pulsing adverbs, wooden characters, and vile passive-voice constructions behind them. Others hold forth at open-mike poetry slams, wearing black turtlenecks and wrinkled khaki pants; they spout doggerel about 'my angry lesbian breasts' and 'the tilted alley where I cried my mother's name.'

—Stephen King

I don't read fiction to study the art of fiction, but simply because I like stories. Yet there is a learning process going on. Every book you pick up has its own lesson or lessons, and quite often the bad books have more to teach than the good ones.

—Stephen King

One learns most clearly what not to do by reading bad prose—one novel like *Asteroid Miners* (or *Valley of the Dolls*, *Flowers in the Attic*, and *The Bridges of Madison County*, to name just a few) is worth a semester at a good writing school, even with the superstar guest lecturers thrown in.

—Stephen King

There are some great stories about Joyce. My absolute favorite is that, as his vision failed, he took to wearing a milkman's uniform while writing. Supposedly he believed it caught the sunlight and reflected it down on his page.

—Stephen King

Almost everyone can remember losing his or her virginity, and most writers can remember the first book he/she put down thinking: I can do better than this. Hell, I am doing better than this! What could be more encouraging to the struggling writer than to realize his/her work is unquestionably better than that of someone who actually got paid for his/her stuff?

—Stephen King

Good writing...teaches the learning writer about style, graceful narration, plot development, the creation of believable characters, and truth-telling. A novel like *The Grapes of Wrath* may fill a new writer with feelings of despair and good old-fashioned jealousy—'I'll never be able to write anything that good, not if I live to be a thousand'—but such feelings can also serve as a spur, goading the writer to work harder and aim higher. Being swept away by a combination of great story and great writing—of being flattened, in fact—is part of every writer's necessary formation. You cannot hope to sweep someone else away by the force of your writing until it has been done to you.

—Stephen King

Talent renders the whole idea of rehearsal meaningless; when you find something at which you are talented, you do it (whatever it is) until your fingers bleed or your eyes are ready to fall out of your head. Even when no one is listening (or reading, or watching), every outing is a bravura performance, because you as the creator are happy. Perhaps even ecstatic.

—Stephen King

Constant reading will pull you into a place (a mind-set, if you like the phrase) where you can write eagerly and without self-consciousness. It also offers you a constantly growing knowledge of what has been done and what hasn't, what is trite and what is fresh, what works and what just lies there dying (or dead) on the page. The more you read, the less apt you are to make a fool of yourself with your pen or word processor.

—Stephen King

Anthony Trollope...wrote for two and a half hours each morning before leaving for work. This schedule was ironclad. If he was in mid-sentence when the two and a half hours expired, he left that sentence unfinished until the next morning. And if he happened to finish one of his six-hundred-page heavyweights with fifteen minutes of the session remaining, he wrote *The End*, set the manuscript aside, and began work on the next book.

—Stephen King

My schedule is pretty clear-cut. Mornings belong to whatever is new—the current composition. Afternoons are for naps and letters. Evenings are for reading, family, Red Sox games on TV, and any revisions that just cannot wait. Basically, mornings are my prime writing time.

—Stephen King

Once I start work on a project, I don't stop and I don't slow down unless I absolutely have to. If I don't write every day, the characters begin to stale off in my mind—they begin to seem like characters instead of real people. The tale's narrative cutting edge starts to rust and I begin to lose my hold on the story's plot and pace. Worst of all, the excitement of spinning something new begins to fade. The work starts to feel like work, and for most writers that is the smooch of death. Writing is at its best—always, always, always—when it is a kind of inspired play for the writer. I can write in cold blood if I have to, but I like it best when it's fresh and almost too hot to handle.

—Stephen King

When I'm not working, I'm not working at all, although during those periods of full stop I usually feel at loose-ends with myself and have trouble sleeping. For me, not working is the real work. When I'm writing, it's all the playground, and the worst three hours I ever spent there were still pretty damned good.

—Stephen King

You can read anywhere, almost, but when it comes to writing, library carrels, park benches, and rented flats should be courts of last resort—Truman Capote said he did his best work in motel rooms, but he is an exception; most of us do our best in a place of our own.

—Stephen King

Your writing room doesn't have to sport a Playboy Philosophy decor, and you don't need an Early American roll top desk in which to house your writing implements. I wrote my first two published novels, *Carrie* and *Salem's Lot*, in the laundry room of a doublewide trailer, pounding away on my wife's portable Olivetti typewriter and balancing a child's desk on my thighs; John Cheever reputedly wrote in the basement of his Park Avenue apartment building, near the furnace. The space can be humble (probably should be, as I think I have already suggested), and it really needs only one thing: a door which you are willing to shut. The closed door is your way of telling the world and yourself that you mean business; you have made a serious commitment to write and intend to walk the walk as well as talk the talk.

—Stephen King

I like to work longhand, actually; the only problem is that, once I get jazzed, I can't keep up with the lines forming in my head and I get frazzled.

—Stephen King

I work to loud music—hard-rock stuff like AC/DC, Guns 'n Roses, and Metallica have always been particular favorites—but for me the music is just another way of shutting the door. It surrounds me, keeps the mundane world out. When you write, you want to get rid of the world, do you not? Of course you do. When you're writing, you're creating your own worlds.

—Stephen King

Now let's talk about revising the work—how much and how many drafts? For me the answer has always been two drafts and a polish (with the advent of word-processing technology, my polishes have become closer to a third draft.

—Stephen King

Writing fiction, especially a long work of fiction, can be a difficult, lonely job; it's like crossing the Atlantic Ocean in a bathtub.

—Stephen King

Rewriting varies greatly from writer to writer. Kurt Vonnegut, for example, rewrote each page of his novels until he got them exactly the way he wanted them. The result was days when he might only manage a page or two of finished copy (and the wastebasket would be full of crumpled, rejected page seventy-ones and seventy-twos), but when the manuscript was finished, the book was finished, by gum. You could set it in type.

—Stephen King

All novels are really letters aimed at one person. As it happens, I believe this. I think that every novelist has single ideal reader; that at various points during the composition of a story, the writer is thinking, 'I wonder what he/she will think when he/she reads this part?

—Stephen King

Mostly when I think of pacing, I go back to Elmore Leonard, who explained it so perfectly by saying he just left out the boring parts. This suggests cutting to speed the pace, and that's what most of us end up having to do (kill your darlings, kill your darlings, even when it breaks your egocentric little scribbler's heart, kill your darlings).

—Stephen King

The most important things to remember about back story are that (a) everyone has a history and (b) most of it isn't very interesting. Stick to the parts that are, and don't get carried away with the rest. Long life stories are best received in bars, and only then an hour or so before closing time, and if you are buying.

—Stephen King

When you step away from the ‘write what you know’ rule, research becomes inevitable, and it can add a lot to your story. Just don’t end up with the tail wagging the dog; remember that you are writing a novel, not a research paper.

—Stephen King

There are thousands of talented writers at work in America, and only a few of them (I think the number might be as low as five percent) can support their families and themselves with their work.

—Stephen King

With the exception of Norman Rockwell and Robert Frost, America has never much revered her creative people; as a whole, we’re more interested in commemorative plates from the Franklin Mint and Internet greeting-cards. And if you don’t like it, it’s a case of tough titty said the kitty, ’cause that’s just the way things are. Americans are a lot more interested in TV quiz shows than in the short fiction of Raymond Carver.

—Stephen King

Do you do it for the money, honey? The answer is no. Don’t now and never did. Yes, I’ve made a great deal of dough from my fiction, but I never set a single word down on paper with the thought of being paid for it. I have done some work as favors for friends—logrolling is the slang term for it—but at the very worst, you’d have to call that a crude kind of barter. I have written because it fulfilled me. Maybe it paid off the mortgage on the house and got the kids through college, but those things were on the side—I did it for the buzz. I did it for the pure joy of the thing. And if you can do it for joy, you can do it forever.

—Stephen King

On some days that writing is a pretty grim slog. On others...I feel that buzz of happiness, that sense of having found the right words and put them in a line. It’s like lifting off in an airplane: you’re on the ground, on the ground, on the ground...and then you’re up, riding on a magical cushion of air and prince of all you survey. That makes me happy, because it’s what I was made to do.

—Stephen King

Writing isn’t about making money, getting famous, getting dates, getting laid, or making friends. In the end, it’s about enriching the lives of those who will read your work, and enriching your own life, as well.

—Stephen King

Writing is magic, as much the water of life as any other creative art.

—Stephen King

Time concerns him, that he may not waste it. No waking day is ever quite long enough. But eventually he learns whether he must hurry with his life and writing or not. He feels his own sense of time mysteriously regulating his days. He comes to trust that sense, for it will tell him when to wait, when to act, and it tells him that life will be as long as he requires for his work. At last he learns what all great artists know, each in his kind, to hold to a single ruthless purpose, and that purpose poetry.

—John Holmes

Infertile hours are not failure or defeat, but a part of the process of writing, a process that has, like green things growing, spaces of rest.

—John Holmes

For heaven's sake, publish nothing before you are thirty.

—Virginia Woolf

Nothing goes by luck in composition. It allows of no tricks. The best you can write will be the best you are. Every sentence is the result of a long probation. The author's character is read from title-page to end. Of this he never corrects the proofs.

—Henry David
Thoreau

What actually happens in a writer's mind when he gets through fiddling and fuming and sits down to tackle the job must always remain a secret between himself and his Demon. Then preliminary horrors and shufflings are a valid part of the human comedy. There are innumerable ways of postponing. Some sit on the floor and begin dusting the books on the lower shelves, where they usually find 'The Pentecost of Calamity' or 'The Cradle of the Deep' and re-read it entire. Others get into pajamas and trim their toe-nails, or lock themselves into an office building with a bottle of Bisquit Dubouce. Homer Croy has remarked that his form of trifling is tinkering with his typewriter. 'I have the best-cleaned typewriter in the world,' he says, rather ashamed.

—Christopher Morley

Critics have observed that considerable writers fall into two classes—(1) those who start with their heads full of great thoughts, and are from the first occupied rather with the matter than with the manner of expressing it. (2) Those who begin with the love of expression and intent to be artists in words, and come through expression to profound thought.

—A. Quiller-Couch

To write this book well I must believe that it is my only novel and the last book I shall write. I wish to pour all into it without reserve.

—André Gide

Three are four prime elements, as I look at it, in all writing, and a fifth which has to exist before good writing is possible. This fifth element is, of course, the soil from which writing grows—a soil of the mind enriched by observation, experience, and abstract knowledge, rendered fertile by cultivation, and subject to a will to work it. Nothing comes from nothing; and to talk about the practice of writing apart from something to write about is a fallacy which has ruined many otherwise excellent rhetorics. I assume a warm and vigorous soil in this brief discussion of methods, only warning the beginning writer that, until he knows and feels, the fewer words he puts on paper the better for everybody—and, as a writer, he can never know and feel enough.

—Henry S. Canby

Artists who do not love their art are more numerous, and more unhappy, than we think.

—Logan Pearsall
Smith

I feel assured I should write, for the mere yearning and fondness I have for the beautiful, even if my night's labors should be brunt every morning and no eye shine upon them.

—John Keats

Whoever absorbs a work of art into himself goes through the same process as the artist who produced it—only he reverses the order of the process and increases its speed.

—Friedrich Hebbel

Tchehov made a mistake in thinking that if he had more time he would have written more fully, described the rain, and the midwife and the doctor having tea. The truth is one can get only so much into a story; there is always a sacrifice. One has to leave out what one knows and longs to use. Why? I haven't any idea, but there it is. It's always a kind of race to get in as much as one can before it disappears.

—Katherine
Mansfield

Danger is a good teacher, and makes apt scholars. So are disgrace, defeat, exposure to immediate scorn and laughter. There is no opportunity in such cases for self-delusion, no idling time away, no being off your guard (or you must take the consequences)—neither is there any room for humor or caprice or prejudice. If the Indian Juggler were to play tricks in throwing up the three case-knives, he would cut off his fingers. I can make a very bad antithesis without cutting off my fingers. The tact of style is more ambiguous than that of double-edged instruments.

—William Hazlitt

When I am feeling well and in good humour, thoughts come in swarms and with marvelous ease. Once I catch my air, another comes soon to join it, according to the requirements of the whole composition. Then my mind kindles—the work grows—I keep hearing it and bring it out more and more clearly, and the composition ends by being completely executed in my mind, however long it may be.

—Mozart

I prefer working in a small room. We have a family joke about it: In a small room thoughts grow great; in a great room thoughts grow small.

—Lucien Price

My counsel is to force nothing and rather to trifle and sleep away all unproductive days and hours, than on such days to compose something that will afterwards give no pleasure.

—Goethe

To write weekly, to write daily, to write shortly, to write for busy people catching trains in the morning or for tired people coming home in the evening, is a heart-breaking task for men who know good writing from bad. They do it, but instinctively draw out of harm's way anything precious that might be damaged by contact with the public, or anything sharp that might irritate its skin.

—Virginia Woolf

People do not deserve to have good writing, they are so pleased with bad. In these sentences you show me, I can find no beauty, for I see death in every clause and every word. There is a fossil or a mummy character which pervades this book. I like gardens and nurseries. Give me initiative, spermatic, prophesying, man-making words.

—Ralph Waldo
Emerson

I thought and thought this morning but not to much avail. I can't think why, but my wit seems to be nearly deserting me when I want to get down to earth. I am all right—sky-high. And even in my brain, in my head, I can think and act and write wonders; but the moment I really try to put them down I fail miserably.

—Katherine
Mansfield

There is no harm in reading any number of unimportant books for pastime, but the significant books must be taken cautiously. You don't want them to get in the way of what may perhaps be growing and brooding in yourself, taking its own time.

—Christopher Morley

Style is the man. Style, too, is autobiography. If the author withholds his face, we can learn something about him from the mask behind which he has chosen to conceal himself.

—John Cournos

The more extensive your acquaintance is with the works of those who have excelled, the more extensive will be your powers of invention, and what may appear still more like a paradox, the more original will be your composition.

—Sir Joshua
Reynolds

In every human being there is the artist, and whatever his activity, he has an equal chance with any to express the result of his growth and his contact with life...I don't believe any real artist cares whether what he does is 'art' or not. Who, after all, knows what is art? I think the real artists are too busy with just being and growing and acting (on canvas or however) like themselves, to worry about the end. This end is what it will be. The object is intense living, fulfilment, the great happiness in creation.

—Robert Henri

Life has at last been perfectly formed and measured to man's requirements; and in art man knows himself truly the master of his existence. It is this sense of mastery which gives man that raised and delighted consciousness of self which art provokes.

—Lascelles
Abercrombie

Can you find some way of earning a decently liberal living quite apart from your writing? Are you aware that poverty is a dark room, into which no sane man will voluntarily go? Do you know that the lovely fable of the poet's attic is a lie invented by rich people, and that lack of books and of diversion and of freedom is stunting to the soul?

—Arthur Davison
Ficke

Understand that you can have in your writing no qualities which you do not honestly entertain in yourself. Understand that you cannot keep out of your writing the indication of the evil or shallowness you entertain in yourself. If you love to have a servant stand behind your chair at dinner, it will appear in your writing; if you possess a vile opinion of women, or if you begrudge anything, or doubt immortality, these will appear by what you leave unsaid more than by what you say. There is no trick or cunning by which you can have in your writing that which you do not possess in yourself.

—Walt Whitman

It's very hard to be a gentleman and a writer.

—W. Somerset
Maugham

I can no longer expect to be revisited by the continuous excitement under which in the early months of 1895 I wrote the greater part of my other book.

—A. E. Housman

The conversation of authors is not so good as might be imagined: but, such as it is (and with rare exceptions) it is better than any other. The proof of which is, that when you are used to it, you cannot put up with any other.

—William Hazlitt

Rousseau's children are now forgotten
And he might be forgotten, too,
If he had not sent them to an orphan asylum
To free himself for the writing of books.
But, oh, to be remembered
For deserting your children
For the sake of learning the violin
And not learn it.

—Edgar Lee Masters

All one's work might have been better done; but this is the sort of reflection a worker must put aside courageously if he doesn't want every one of his compositions to remain forever a private vision, an evanescent reverie.

—Joseph Conrad

Like all artists, Byron and Shelley wrote in order to console themselves for not living, and a man of action appeared to them as an enviable phenomenon.

—André Maurois

And here is the natural place to confess that any poet, dramatist, or novelist, who declares that he is indifferent whether or not people give him attention, is either an ass or a liar; anyhow, he is not natural.

—H. M. Tomlinson

The poor poet has not in these days, nor has he had for two hundred years, a dog's chance. Believe me—and I have spent a great part of the last ten years in watching some 320 Elementary Schools—we prate of democracy, but actually a poor child in England has little more hope than had the son of an Athenian slave to be emancipated into that intellectual freedom of which great writings are born.

—A. Quiller-Couch

It isn't the money that makes people start writing, and stick to it; it is the hope of publication. In its highest phase the writing mania proceeds the wish to break down, somehow, the awful barrier which exists between soul and soul, and share even bitterness, if there is neither knowledge nor joy to be shared; in its lower manifestations it may be merely exhibitionism, and yet, there too, is the wistful hope of being better understood.

—Don Marquis

There is always a point in the writing of a piece when I sit in a room literally papered with false starts and cannot put one word after another and imagine that I have suffered a small stroke, leaving me apparently undamaged but actually aphasic.

—Joan Didion

My changing everything into fiction is simply a means of concealing something from myself.

—Doris Lessing

The painting was the painter as the poem is the poet, that every choice one made alone—every word chosen or rejected, every brush stroke laid or not laid down—betrayed one's character. Style is character.

—Joan Didion

Perfectionism can also take the form of spending most of a week writing and rewriting and not writing a single paragraph.

—John Didion

Whenever I finish a novel, I feel like I've just exited another world, some far-off planet, as if I'm stealing my way out of Alice's rabbit hole and heaving myself onto dry land. I've spend hours, days, weeks with these characters; we part ways as old friends.

—Nicki Porter

Find the key emotion; this may be all you need to know to find your short story.

—F. Scott Fitzgerald

All writing has some advocacy in it. All the time. And the question becomes a way not to think of the rich tradition of writers writing about things, from Shakespeare to Whitman to Hayden to Baraka. Steinbeck. Faulkner. Jane Austen. Alice Walker. These writers were all political.

—Reginald Dwayne
Betts

The great thing about writing is that a library offers all that you need to become competent....this is how I became good—by reading people who I wanted to copy.

—Reginald Dwayne
Betts

A short story must have a single mood and every sentence must build towards it.

—Edgar Allan Poe

You think you can impose order on your life as a writer. And you can, if you live on another planet and have no one you love and don't need to work. But most of us have a life and work.

—Heidi Pitlor

I didn't know what the ending would be....I like to keep parts of the writing process a secret even from myself. Otherwise, I get bored.

—Signe Bergstrom

Even if I'm happy with the first draft (as happy as anyone can be with a first draft, usually it's just relief at having finished something), I usually rewrite the entire thing, even if I keep the majority of it the same. I print it out, I mark it up and re-type everything. It feels terribly inefficient most of the time, but I've found that I can't just jump into a piece and add a scene or change a character's action. I need to write my way up to it, and I find that most of the time any change has a ripple effect across the piece.

—Stephanie Danler

Charlotte's [Brontë] writing would have been even better, Woolf [Virginia] says, had she 'possessed say three hundred [pounds] a year.

—Judith Shulevitz

It is through creating, not possessing, that life is revealed.

—Vida D. Scudder

In Europe, people in the arts are considered part of the intelligentsia; they are considered part of the elite.

—Ron Silver

In Europe, a writer is supposed to improve up until he's about 75.

—Irwin Shaw

In the planning stage of a book, don't plan the ending. It has to be earned by all that will go before it.

—Rose Tremain

Always carry a note-book. And I mean always. The short-term memory only retains information for three minutes; unless it is committed to paper you can lose an idea for ever.

—Will Self

Don't panic. Midway through writing a novel, I have regularly experienced moments of bowel-curdling terror, as I contemplate the drivel on the screen before me and see beyond it, in quick succession, the derisive reviews, the friends' embarrassment, the failing career, the dwindling income, the repossessed house, the divorce . . . Working doggedly on through crises like these, however, has always got me there in the end. Leaving the desk for a while can help. Talking the problem through can help me recall what I was trying to achieve before I got stuck. Going for a long walk almost always gets me thinking about my manuscript in a slightly new way. And if all else fails, there's prayer. St Francis de Sales, the patron saint of writers, has often helped me out in a crisis. If you want to spread your net more widely, you could try appealing to Calliope, the muse of epic poetry, too.

—Sarah Waters

Fundamentally, all writing is about the same thing; it's about dying, about the brief flicker of time we have here, and the frustration that it creates.

—Mordecai Richler

I know what I have given you. I do not know what you have received.

—Antonio Porchia

Every single novel owes a debt to books that came before it. To paraphrase the words of the Bible, there is simply nothing new under the sun.

—Jeff Somers

I was stricken for the first time with writer's block. It was absolutely terrifying. Twelve previous novels, and then I hit a wall that seemed unscalable. I felt ashamed, mortified. It was then that I realized how writing defines me—if I can't write, then who am I? If I can't write, then how can I make a living?

—Jessica Strawser

There was no conduit from my brain to my keyboard, and it was as if the characters were speaking in whispers in a foreign tongue. In the end, I took myself to a library (I live in the countryside, so it was a bit of a trek) and I sat there...and sat there, and sat there. Eventually I found a word (it was 'when'); a little while later, I had another word. And that's how the first third of that novel grew—word after word. I thought about every single word.

—Jessica Strawier

The greatest difficulty is the actual writing. It is always easier to do something else. Dull, awful jobs like laundry, ironing and weeding suddenly feel like an urgent priority when you're looking at a blank page that needs to be filled with a couple of thousand words before you can sit back and breathe deeply....Writing is my joy, but not always; much of the time its my job, and I have to write whether I feel like it or not, whether inspiration strikes or not.

—Jessica Strawier

Hard writing makes easy reading.

—Wallace Stegner

Writing is the painting of the voice.

—Voltaire

In order to write about life, first you must live it!

—Ernest Hemingway

I am a galley slave to pen and ink.

—Honore' de Balzac

Your work will be rejected. Often, always, and forever. Good work. Quality work. Publishable work. Work you've born your soul into. You will be turned down not only for logic and for reason, but for the silliest of subjectivities: The editor's cat has just died, and your work is too sad. The agent is moving in a darker publishing direction; your work is too light. Your poems are too short. Your essays are too long. We've seen this before. We've never seen this before and wouldn't know how to market it. It's good, but it won't sell. It's good, but it's just not right for us.

—Nicki Porter

Even the most successful of careers have a long list of rejections under the tip of the glistening iceberg.

—Nicki Porter

The only way...to learn to write short stories is to write them, and then to try to discover what you have done.

—Flannery O'Connor

No one says a novel has to be one thing. It can be anything it wants to be, a vaudeville show, the six o'clock news, the mumblings of wild men saddled by demons.

—Ishmael Reed

Storytelling is how we—not just writers, everyone—practice our humanity, by trying to make sense of the world and our place in it.

—Julia Fierro

Don't use a big word when a singularly unloquacious and diminutive linguistic expression will satisfactorily accomplish the contemporary necessity.

—Unknown

I recognize terror as the finest emotion and so I will try to terrorize the reader. But if I find that I cannot terrify, I will try to horrify, and if I find that I cannot horrify, I'll go for the gross-out. I'm not proud.

—Stephen King

The art of writing is the art of discovering what you believe.

—Gustave Flaubert

A person is a fool to become a writer. His only compensation is absolute freedom. He has no master except his own soul, and that, I am sure, is why he does it.

—Roald Dahl

Good writing is supposed to evoke sensation in the reader—not the fact that it is raining, but the feeling of being rained upon.

—E. L. Doctorow

I write about murder because it's one of the great mysteries of the human heart: How can one human being deliberately take another one's life away?

—Tana French

The aesthetic motive is very feeble in a lot of writers, but even a pamphleteer or writer of textbooks will have pet words and phrases which appeal to him for non-utilitarian reasons; or he may feel strongly about typography, width of margins, etc. Above the level of a railway guide, no book is quite free from aesthetic considerations.

—George Orwell

Serious writers, I should say, are on the whole more vain and self-centered than journalists, though less interested in money.

—George Orwell

No book is genuinely free from political bias. The opinion that art should have nothing to do with politics is itself a political attitude.

—George Orwell

I write it because there is some lie that I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention, and my initial concern is to get a hearing.

—George Orwell

All writers are vain, selfish, and lazy, and at the very bottom of their motives there lies a mystery. Writing a book is a horrible, exhausting struggle, like a long bout of some painful illness. One would never undertake such a thing if one were not thriven on by some demon whom one can neither resist nor understand. For all one knows that demon is simply the same instinct that makes a baby squall of attention. And yet it is also true that one can write nothing readable unless one constantly struggles to efface one's own personality. Good prose is like a windowpane.

—George Orwell

As imagination bodies forth the forms of things unknown, the poet's pen turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothings a local habitation and a name.

—William Shakespeare

I know some very great writers, writers you love who write beautifully and have made a great deal of money, and not one of them sits down routinely feeling wildly enthusiastic and confident. Not one of them writes elegant first drafts. All right, one of them does, but we do not like her very much.

—Anne Lamott

I rewrote the ending to 'Farewell to Arms,' the last page of it, thirty nine times before I was satisfied.

—Ernest Hemingway

When my older brother was ten years old he was trying to write a report on birds which he'd had three months to write. The day before the report was due he was sitting at the kitchen table at the family's cabin surrounded by unopened books on birds, immobilized by the huge task ahead of him. He was close to tears when his father walked up, put his arm around his shoulder, and said, 'Bird by bird, buddy. Just take it bird by bird.'

—Anne Lamott

When you write, you lay out a line of words. The line of words is a miner's pick, a wood carver's gouge, a surgeon's probe. You wield it, and it digs a path you follow. Soon you find yourself deep in new territory. Is it a dead end, or have you located the real subject? You will know tomorrow, or this time next year.

—Annie Dillard

What I try to do is write. I may write for two weeks 'the cat sat on the mat, that is that, not a rat.' And it might be just the most boring and awful stuff. But I try. When I'm writing, I write. And then it's as if the muse is convinced that I'm serious and says, 'Okay. Okay. I'll come.'

—Maya Angelou

When I'm writing . . . I get up at about five . . . I get in my car and drive off to a hotel room: I can't write in my house, I take a hotel room and ask them to take everything off the walls so there's me, the Bible, Roget's Thesaurus and some good, dry cherry and I'm at work by 6:30. I write on the bed lying down—one elbow is darker than the other, really black from leaning on it—and I write in longhand on yellow pads. Once into it, all disbelief is suspended, it's beautiful.

—Maya Angelou

Self-doubt is part of the creative process. I hate to have it but I also realize it is part of the process. Otherwise you become complacent, which is cancerous for creativity.

—Chimamanda
Ngozi Adichie

Write what you know. Every guide for the aspiring author advises this. Because I live in a long settled rural place, I know certain things. I know the feel of a newborn lamb's damp, tight curled fleece and the sharp sound a well bucket chain makes as it scrapes on stone. But more than these material things, I know the feelings that flourish in small communities. And I know other kinds of emotional truths that I believe apply across the centuries.

—Geraldine Brooks

Five common traits of good writers:

- (1) They have something to say.
- (2) They read widely and have done so since childhood.
- (3) They possess what Isaac Asimov calls a 'capacity for clear thought,' able to go from point to point in an orderly sequence, an A to Z approach.
- (4) They're geniuses at putting their emotions into words.
- (5) They possess an insatiable curiosity, constantly asking Why and How.

—James J. Kilpatrick

What a story is, is devious. It pretends transparency, forthrightness. It engages with ordinary people, ordinary matters, recognizable stuff. But this is all a masquerade. What good stories deal with is the horror and incomprehensibility of time, the dark encroachment of old catastrophes.

—Joy Williams

They say great themes make great novels. That's so, of course, but what these young writers don't understand is that there is no greater theme than men and women.

—John O'Hara

Everybody does have a book in them, but in most cases that's where it should stay.
—Christopher Hitchens

The writer doesn't trust his enemies, of course, who are wrong about his writing, but he doesn't trust his friends, either, who he hopes are right. The writer trusts nothing he writes—it should be too reckless and alive for that, it should be beautiful and menacing and slightly out of his control. It should want to live itself somehow.
—Joy Williams

I'm trying to show the multiple variations of the entire life. I don't want to be like other authors and say that there are only a few story lines in literature. A story is like a human face. We have as many stories as human faces. You might have similar facial features, but they're all a little different.
—Svetlana Alexievich

Writing is selection. Just to start a piece of writing you have to choose one word and only one from more than a million in the language. Now keep going. What is your next word? Your next sentence, paragraph, section, chapter? Your next ball of fact. You select what goes in and you decide what stays out. At base you have only one criterion: If something interests you, it goes in —if not, it stays out. That's a crude way to assess things, but it's all you've got.
—John McPhee

To write or even speak English is not a science but an art. There are no reliable words. Whoever writes English is involved in a struggle that never lets up even for a sentence. He is struggling against vagueness, against obscurity, against the lure of the decorative adjective, against the encroachment of Latin and Greek, and, above all, against the wornout phrases and dead metaphors with which the language is cluttered up.
—George Orwell

Had I been blessed with even limited access to my own mind there would have been no reason to write.
—Joan Didion

Sheer egoism... Writers share this characteristic with scientists, artists, politicians, lawyers, soldiers, successful businessmen—in short, with the whole top crust of humanity.
—George Orwell

Writers do not merely reflect and interpret life, they inform and shape life.
—E. B. White

The test of a writer is whether you want to read him again years after he should by the rules be dated.

—Raymond Chandler

The only environment the artist needs is whatever peace, whatever solitude, and whatever pleasure he can get at not too high a cost.

— William Faulkner

The poet's, the writer's, duty is ... to help man endure by lifting his heart.

— William Faulkner

For a person whose sole burning ambition is to write—like myself—college is useless beyond the Sophomore year.

—William Styron

Writers serve as the memory of a people. They chew over our public past.

—Annie Dillard

It's a feeling of happiness that knocks me clean out of adjectives. I think sometimes that the best reason for writing novels is to experience those four and a half hours after you write the final word.

—Zadie Smith

By using stale metaphors, similes and idioms, you save much mental effort, at the cost of leaving your meaning vague, not only for your reader but for yourself.

— George Orwell

In any art you're allowed to steal anything if you can make it better.

—Ernest Hemingway

Somerset Maugham gravely informed the students in a drama course at London University: 'A sure formula for success is to write first a tragedy in five acts. Put it away in a drawer for six months, then change it into a comedy in three acts. Forget it for another year. Then reduce it to a curtain raiser. That done, rush right out and marry a rich American.

—Bennett Cerf

The true writer, the born writer, will scribble words on scraps of litter, the back of a bus ticket, on the wall of a cell.

—David Nicholls

Each thing you add to your story is a drop of paint falling into clear water; it spreads through and colors everything.

—Lisa Cron

She thought a writer should work harder writing a book than she did reading it.
—Jeffrey Eugenides

I hope you will go out and let stories, that is life, happen to you, and that you will work with these stories from your life—not someone else’s life—water them with your blood and tears and your laughter till they bloom, till you yourself burst into bloom. That is the work. The only work.

—Clarissa Pinkola Estés

Writing a book is a blood sport. If it doesn’t hurt when you’re done, you’re probably doing something wrong.

—Kevis Hendrickson

Writing is like a lump of coal. Put it under enough pressure and polish it enough and you might just end up with a diamond. Otherwise, you can burn it to keep warm.

—A. J. Dalton

Birds keep writing beautiful songs even if they have no audience.

—Matshona Dhliwayo

All forms of art are parallel expressions. Writing is not unlike painting or other artistic endeavors. Each artistic endeavor is an expression of the mystery of the world. The job of the artist is to deepen that mystery, express reverence for the mystery of life, and explore the enigmatic aspects of human nature.

—Kilroy J. Oldster

A writer seizes every opportunity to wonder.

—Lailah Gifty Akita

The best writers I’ve read possess oodles of self-doubt, yet claw their way up with each work and remain humble. Boastful ones, not so much.

—Don Roff

The reader tries to uncover the skeleton that the book conceals. The author starts with the skeleton and tries to cover it up. His aim is to conceal the skeleton artistically or, in other words, to put flesh on the bare bones. If he is a good writer, he does not bury a puny skeleton under a mass of fat; on the other hand, neither should the flesh be too thin, so that the bones show through. If the flesh is thick enough, and if the flabbiness is avoided, the joints will be detectable and the motion of the parts will reveal the articulation.

—Mortimer J. Adler

True authors don't write for fame or to make a name or money, they write to make an impact.

—Bernard Kelvin Clive

One of the hardest things for a writer to do is delete words.

—Alessandra Torre

Up in that room I decided that I would write one story about each thing that I knew about. I was trying to do this all the time I was writing, and it was good and severe discipline.

—Ernest Hemingway

Only after a writer lets literature shape her can she perhaps shape literature. In working-class France, when an apprentice got hurt, or when he got tired, the experienced workers said, 'It is the trade entering his body.' The art must enter the body, too.

—Annie Dillard

Another segment of society that has constructed a language of its own is business. People in business say that toner cartridges are in short supply, that they have updated the next shipment of these cartridges, and that they will finalize their recommendations at the next meeting of the board. They are speaking a language familiar and dear to them. Its portentous nouns and verbs invest ordinary events with high adventure; executives walk among toner cartridges, caparisoned like knights. We should tolerate them--every person of spirit wants to ride a white horse.

—William Strunk Jr.

A love of writing is far greater than any word count.

—Molly Looby

It's easy to write a sentence, paragraph, or book. What's difficult is writing the best sentence, paragraph, or book, you can write.

—Mokokoma
Mokhonoana

Mostly writing requires massive dedication, a whole lot of time spent alone, way too much sitting, countless hours spent thinking hard, and unending and occasionally painful dedication to forming ideas and laboring over the production of sentences, paragraphs, scenes, dialogue, punctuation, and all the elements that go into writing a novel, a play, a screenplay, or a poem. When we're not writing, we're thinking, plotting, imagining, or editing, which can be far more tedious than cranking out first drafts.

—Susan Reynolds

Not knowing stuff—like how your story ends before you start writing—is the seed of a lot of writer’s block.

—Dan Alatorre

There is no such thing as an ‘unemployed writer’, only an unemployed mind.

—Kevin Cowdall

Writer's Block: making authors miserable since the Stone Age.

—Max Hawthorne

Writing is talking, except you get the chance to edit what you just said.

—Bangambiki
Habyarimana

Writing is like knitting. Stitch after stitch, word by word, and before you know it you have a book ... or a jumper!

—Fusty Luggs

I practiced writing in every possible way that I could. I wrote a pastiche of other people. Just as a pianist runs his scales for ten years before he gives his concert: because when he gives that concert, he can’t be thinking of his fingering or of his hands, he has to be thinking of his interpretation. He’s thinking of what he’s trying to communicate.

—Katherine Anne Porter

You can’t be beautiful and a writer, because to be a writer you have to be the one doing the looking; if you’re beautiful people will be looking at you.

—Niall Williams

My early attempts writing plays, which are very poetic, did not use the language that I work in now. I didn’t recognize the poetry in everyday language of black America. I thought I had to change it to create art.

—August Wilson

Fiction is a careful combination of observation, inspiration, and imagination.

—Luke Taylor

When a person sets out to learn from others and not to teach others he becomes a true writer.

—Carla H. Krueger

Someone asked me, ‘How do you write a book?’ I said, ‘I live with a pen in one hand.’

—Carla H. Krueger

The only difference between writers and people who don't write is that writers aren't afraid to display their demons.

—Carla H. Krueger

Writing is the neck muscle allowing us to see the important stuff in our periphery.

—Rob Bignell

My ideas are a shapeless mass that my writing molds into beauty.

—Rob Bignell

The only prophecy the artist can make with confidence is that he and his message will be misunderstood by a world that values all the wrong things.

—Chloe Thurlow

I've never heard a writer feel that way about a device with a screen. Oh sure, they're functional, practical. We would be lost without them. But just as we need to feel our feet on the earth, smell and taste the world around us, the pen scratching against the page, sensory and slow, is the difference between looking at a high-definition picture of a flower and holding that very same flower in your palm, feeling the brush of its petals, the color of its stamen rubbing off on your fingers.

—Dani Shapiro

Rejection is the run in the pantyhose of life.

—C. E. McLean

Writing is an adventure. There is no way to know where it will take you, and what you will find. You could find success. You could find fans. Or, best of all, you could find yourself.

—M. Kirin

Art is a journey of excellence not a goal of perfection.

—Jacqueline Patricks

I'm an author. We don't want to lead. We don't need to follow. We stay home and make stuff up and write it down and send it out into the world, and get inside people's heads. Perhaps we change the world and perhaps we don't. We never know. We just make stuff up.

—Neil Gaiman

Because as any writer will tell you, an IDEA for a book is like falling in love, it's all wild emotion and headlong rush, but the ACTUAL ACT of writing a book is like building a relationship: it is joyous, slow, fragile, frustrating, exhilarating, painstaking, exhausting, worth it.

—Ben H. Winters

...my writing is a wild mustang - more thunderous than a lightning storm -and all my skill which I call art, is devoted to simply staying on...

—John Geddes

I tell everyone who asks me about writing...almost everyone has an idea for a book, and some even have a great ending, but it's that 290 or so pages in between that are tough!

—Brooklyn Hudson

Every first draft is perfect, because all a first draft has to do is exist.

—Jane Smiley

Over and over I feel as if my characters know who they are and what happens to them and where they have been and where they will go and what they are capable of doing but they need me to write it down for them because their handwriting is so bad.

—Anne Lamott

If there is magic in story writing, and I am convinced there is, no one has ever been able to reduce it to a recipe that can be passed from one person to another. The formula seems to lie solely in the aching urge of the writer to convey something he feels important to the reader. If the writer has that urge, he may sometimes, but by no means always, find the way to do it. You must perceive the excellence that makes a good story good or the errors that make a bad story. For a bad story is only an ineffective story.

—John Steinbeck

If it sounds like writing, I rewrite it. Or, if proper usage gets in the way, it may have to go. I can't allow what we learned in English composition to disrupt the sound and rhythm of the narrative.

—Elmore Leonard

One of the dumbest things you were ever taught was to write what you know, because what you know is usually dull. Remember when you first wanted to be a writer: Eight or 10 years old, reading about thin-lipped heroes flying over mysterious viny jungles toward untold wonders? That's what you wanted to write about, about what you didn't know. So. What mysterious time and place don't we know?

—Ken Kesey

Writerly advice: Don't get it right, get it written.

—Mandy Hubbard

This is how you do it: you sit down at the keyboard and you put one word after another until it's done. It's that easy, and that hard.

—Neil Gaiman

Writing is not like dancing or modeling; it's not something where—if you missed it by age 19—you're finished. It's never too late. Your writing will only get better as you get older and wiser. If you write something beautiful and important, and the right person somehow discovers it, they will clear room for you on the bookshelves of the world—at any age. At least try.

—Elizabeth Gilbert

Problem, purpose, conflict, goal. Use them. Think about them while you are in the planning phase of your novel; keep these elements at the back of your mind to guide you while you write. When you have written a scene, make sure they are all there, or that if one or another is missing, it is intentional and the effect is what you want.

—Phyllis A. Whitney

The beautiful unruliness of literature is what makes it so much fun to wander through: you read Jane Austen and you say, oh, that is IT. And then you turn around and read Sterne, and you say, Man, that is IT. And then you wander across a century or so, and you run into Kafka, or Calvino, or Cortazar, and you say, well that is IT. And then you stroll through what Updike called the grottos of Ulysses, and after that you consort with Baldwin or Welty or Spencer, or Morrison, or Bellow or Fitzgerald and then back to W. Shakespeare, Esq; the champ, and all the time you feel the excitement of being in the presence of IT. And when you yourself spend the good time writing, you are not different in kind than any of these people, you are part of that miracle of human invention. So get to work. Get on with IT, no matter how difficult IT is. Every single gesture, every single stumble, every single uninspired-feeling hour, is worth IT.

—Kathy Fish

If you can't stand your own company alone in a room for long hours, or, when it gets tough, the feeling of being in a locked cell, or, when it gets tougher still, the vague feeling of being buried alive--then don't be a writer.

—Graham Swift

Writing is a muscle. Smaller than a hamstring and slightly bigger than a bicep, and it needs to be exercised to get stronger. Think of your words as reps, your paragraphs as sets, your pages as daily workouts. Think of your laptop as a machine like the one at the gym where you open and close your inner thighs in front of everyone, exposing both your insecurities and your genitals. Because that is what writing is all about.

—Colin Nissan

You can't run a 5K without training first. Don't try to write 10,000 words in 2 days. Find a schedule that works for you.

—Unknown

If a writer starts worrying about what he or she has left out or forgotten, they might not be able to write even a single line.

—Baby Halder

I honestly think in order to be a writer, you have to learn to be reverent. If not, why are you writing? Why are you here? Let's think of reverence as awe, as presence in and openness to the world. The alternative is that we stultify, we shut down. Think of those times when you've read prose or poetry that is presented in such a way that you have a fleeting sense of being startled by beauty or insight, by a glimpse into someone's soul. All of a sudden everything seems to fit together or at least to have some meaning for a moment. This is our goal as writers, I think; to help others have this sense of -- please forgive me -- wonder, of seeing things anew, things that can catch us off guard, that break in on our small, bordered worlds.

—Anne Lamott

Keep working. Keep trying. Keep believing. You still might not make it, but at least you gave it your best shot. If you don't have calluses on your soul, this isn't for you. Take up knitting instead.

—David Eddings

Prefer the familiar word to the far-fetched. Prefer the concrete word to the abstract. Prefer the single word to the circumlocution. Prefer the short word to the long. Prefer the Saxon word to the Romance.

—Henry Fowler

An author needs a lot more than one person to succumb to his literary seductive charms, but, like Saul, he must realize that he doesn't have to--and indeed cannot--capture the hearts of every possible reader out there. No matter who the writer, his ideal intended audience is only a small faction of all the living readers. Name the most widely read authors you can think of--from Shakespeare, Austen, and Dickens to Robert Waller, Stephen King, and J. K. Rowling--and the immense majority of book-buyers out there actively decline to read them.

—Thomas McCormack

Upon the one thing every writer absolutely must have, and that is intellectual curiosity.

—Philip Athans

Make them laugh, make them cry, make them wait.

—Charles Dickens

...a writer should not so much write as embroider on paper; the work should be painstaking, laborious.

—Anton Chekhov

I disagree with the advice of ‘write about what you know.’ Write about what you need to know, in an effort to understand.

—Donald Windham

Let us not neglect the forbidden. Let us not sophisticate ourselves out of the cheap thrill and chill of it: the story told for perversity’s sake, and all the better for that; the image created because an artist gets tired of reasons sometimes, and wants to dredge up some picture he’s been haunted by, and parade it like a new tattoo. I go with it, readily.

—Clive Barker

Writers often torture themselves trying to get the words right. Sometimes you must lower your expectations and just finish it.

—Don Roff

Concentrate on sharpening your memory and peeling your sensibility. Cut every page you write by at least one third. Stop constructing those piffling little similes of yours. Work out what it is you want to say. Then say it in the most direct and vigorous way you can. Eat meat. Drink blook. Give up your social life and don’t think you can have friends. Rise in the quiet hours of the night and prick your fingertips and use the blood for ink; that will cure you of persiflage!

—Hilary Mantel

Saepe stilum vertas, iterum quae digna legi sint scripturas. (Turn the stylus [to erase] often if you would write something worthy of being reread.)

—Horace

It is only when you open your veins and bleed onto the page a little that you establish contact with your reader. If you do not believe in the characters or the story you are doing at that moment with all your mind, strength, and will, if you don't feel joy and excitement while writing it, then you're wasting good white paper, even if it sells, because there are other ways in which a writer can bring in the rent money besides writing bad or phony stories.

—Paul Gallico

In quickness is truth. The more swiftly you write, the more honest you are. In hesitation is thought. In delay comes the effort for a style, instead of leaping upon truth which is the only style worth deadfalling or tiger-trapping.

—Ray Bradbury

So they spread the paintings on the lawn, and the boy explained each of them. ‘This is the school, and this is the playground, and these are my friends.’ He stared at the paintings for a long time and then shook his head in discouragement. ‘In my mind, they were a whole lot better.’

Isn’t that the truth? Every morning, I go to my desk and reread yesterday’s pages, only to be discouraged that the prose isn’t as good as it seemed during the excitement of composition. In my mind, it was a whole lot better.

Don’t give in to doubt. Never be discouraged if your first draft isn’t what you thought it would be. Given skill and a story that compels you, muster your determination and make what’s on the page closer to what you have in your mind.

—David Morrell,

Know something about the world, and by this I mean the world outside of books. This might require joining the Marines, or working on an oil rig or as a hash slinger at a truck stop in Kentucky. Know what it smells like out there. If everything you write smells like a library, then your prospective audience will be limited to those who like the smell of libraries.

—Douglas Wilson

READ, damn it. Fill your brain to the bursting point with the good stuff, starting with writers that you truly enjoy, and then work your way backward and outward, reading those writers who inspired the writers you love best. That was my path as far as Weird/Horror Fiction, starting with Lovecraft, and then working my way backward/outward on the Weird Fiction spiderweb. And don’t limit your reading. Read it all, especially non-fiction and various news outlets. You’d be surprised by how many of my story ideas were born while listening to NPR, perusing a blog, or paging through Vanity Fair.

Once you have your fuel squared away, just write what you love, in whatever style and genre. You’ll never have fun being someone you’re not, so be yourself. When a singer opens their mouth, what comes out is what comes out.

Also, don’t be afraid to fail, and don’t be afraid to walk away. Writing isn’t for everyone, and that’s totally fine. One doesn’t need to be a writer to enjoy being a reader and overall fan of genre or wider fiction.

—T. E. Grau

What lasts in the reader’s mind is not the phrase but the effect the phrase created: laughter, tears, pain, joy. If the phrase is not affecting the reader, what’s it doing there? Make it do its job or cut it without mercy or remorse.

—Isaac Asimov

My advice to writers is this:

Walk, talk, breathe, laugh, cry, fall, rise, fail, succeed, run, jump, love, hate, hide, seek, learn, work, play, feel, LIVE.

Then write it down.

—S. Alex Martin

If you are serious, and you want to make a living as an author, then you need to hustle. Period. If you can't make that quality, then you need to concentrate on your craft and practice more.

One other thing, quality comes with practice. If you are prolific, then you become a better writer because you are writing. The more you do anything the better at it you will become. So in a way, quantity does add to quality.

—Larry Correia

First drafts don't have to be perfect. They just have to be written.

—Unknown

Theoretically there's no reason one should get [writer's block], if one understands that writing, after all, is only writing, neither something one ought to feel deeply guilty about nor something one ought to be inordinately proud of.

—John Gardner

Question marks are shaped like hooks for a reason: they will hook the reader and drag them deeper into the story.

—Chuck Wendig

All writing is difficult. The most you can hope for is a day when it goes reasonably easily. Plumbers don't get plumber's block, and doctors don't get doctor's block; why should writers be the only profession that gives a special name to the difficulty of working, and then expects sympathy for it?

—Philip Pullman

Write what you know, and what do you know better than your own secrets?

—Raymond Carver

Build your novel one word at a time. Remember that minutes = novels.

—Mercedes M. Yardley

Don't wait. Writers are the only artists I know of who expect to get somewhere by waiting. Everyone knows you have to dance to be a dancer, you have to sing to be a singer, you have to act to be an actor, but far too many people seem to believe that

you. don't have to write to be a writer. So, instead of writing, they wait. Isaac Asimov said it beautifully in just six words: 'It's the writing that teaches you.' Writing is what teaches you. Writing is what leads to 'inspiration.' Writing is what generates ideas. Nothing else-and nothing less. Don't meditate, don't do yoga, don't do drugs. Just write.

—Daniel Quinn

Never try to keep it professional, keep it smutty, write with bodily fluids on sandpaper, and damn the men with clipboards in white suits, the literary bean-counters, the prose police.

—Peter Selgin

Step back and scrutinize your work, to delve deep into the meaning behind the words, it will get both easier in some ways and harder in others. Either way, you need to practice every day. You will probably get faster with time, because you learn to do this instinctively, and the writing may flow better on some days more than others, but it doesn't get easier. And if you aren't writing everyday, you are doing yourself and your craft a disservice. Writing is a habit. Get into the habit.

—Darynda Jones

We should be told: Write fast, write close to the bone, write for ten hours straight until you're not thinking in words anymore, but in colors, in smells, in waves of memory. Right what you care about. Don't write one more word you don't care about. Don't waste any more of your life on what does not matter to you. Write only what matters to you—those scenes, those dialogues. Get messy. Before you get neat, get very, very messy. Write until you are more alive than you have ever been before.

—Bonnie Friedman

Thankfully existing only in SMALL pockets within our discipline, is 'intellectual' snobbery. It's a hushed but ugly truth that people are made to feel not worthy to be among a certain set – didn't attend the right school or don't have the requisite abbreviations to follow their name. I know what that feels like. Good thing I'm pig-headed, have a bigger vision and committed to my craft, or I would've succumbed to it long ago. That is why when I meet an emerging writer who's serious about developing their craft, I try to encourage them as much as I can. I say IGNORE the high-brow cliques and prove your mettle by growing, accepting balanced feedback and most of all, creating work that will stand the test of time. Period.

—Sandra Sealy

I don't get writer's block because I don't believe in it. I believe you sit in front of the computer and force your fingers to get something on the screen.

—Janet Evanovich

Daily life is always extraordinary when rendered precisely. We can unlock our lives with a pencil tip.

—Bonnie Friedman

If you were waiting for a sign that you're meant to be a writer...

THIS IS IT.

—M. Kirin

Stop beating yourself up over all the days you didn't work on your story. Focus on what you can do today.

Sit down, and write.

—M. Kirin

If the passage absolutely demands cursing, be moderate. A little of it goes a long way. I've seen beginning writers pepper curse words through sentence after sentence.

'If you don't -blanking- get your -blanking-blank-blank- in to this house this -blanking- minute, I'm going to -blank- your -blank- and nail it to the -blanking- door.'

Two things happen when I read this junk: I get bored and I get angry. I didn't pick up your book to read garbage. If this is as clever as you can be, I don't want to read your prose. In life if you met someone who spoke like this, you'd want to flee. Then why put this stuff on the page?

As near as I can determine, this abomination occurs because a writer is corrupted by the awful -blanking- dialog that movies inflict on us these days. It's also a sign of insecurity. The writer wonders if the dialog is strong enough and decides a lot of -blanking-blank- will do the trick.

Someone might object that this kind of dialog is realistic in certain situations--intense scenes involving policemen or soldiers for example. I can only reply that in my research I spend considerable time with policemen and soldiers. Few of them curse any more than a normal person would. This garbage isn't realistic. It merely draws attention to itself and holds back the story. Use it sparingly.

—David Morrell

You think you have no 'talent'? Write anyway. Lots of people with 'talent' don't actually act on it. As long as you write, you will learn, you will improve, and you will be better than anyone claiming to have 'talent.'

—M. Kirin

There is a muse, but he's not going to come fluttering down into your writing room and scatter creative fairy-dust all over your typewriter or computer station. He lives in the ground. He's a basement guy. You have to descend to his level, and once you get down there you have to furnish an apartment for him to live in. You have to do all the grunt labor, in other words, while the muse sits and smokes cigars and admires his bowling trophies and pretends to ignore you.

—Stephen King

For every idea that's been done to DEATH, there's a child being BORN who hasn't read it yet. Don't kill your dragons.

—J. N. Race

When it comes to writing, clarity trumps all rules.

—C. E. McLean

Make time to write every day. The writing muscle is like any other muscle; the more you exercise it, the stronger it becomes.

—Judy Penz Sheluk

Even great, best selling writers produce works that fall flat from expectations. This writing thing isn't easy and everything you produce won't be a best seller, but you must write anyway. You have to write because you love it, because it fuels you, because you can feel the stories living inside you, nudging you, prodding you, itching to get out and the only thing worse than writing it and failing is not writing it. As the late Maya Angelou once said, 'There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.'

Even if your work doesn't resonate with others, it is still worth writing. And that in itself, is what's important.

—Nancy Arroyo Ruffin

Live first, write second.

—Miranda Paul

You have to be in your middle thirties before you have anything worth saying.

—Peter Bowen

The only way you'll find out if you 'have it in you' is to get to work and see if you do. The only way to override your 'limitations, insecurities, jealousies, and ineptitude' is to produce. You have limitations. You are in some way inept. This is true of every writer, and it's especially true of writers who are twenty-six. You will feel insecure and jealous. How much power you give those feelings is entirely up to you.

—Cheryl Strayed

Why is it that women are the only ones who will write perfect men into fiction? It's strange. If a man portrayed his fictional men as archangels, the feminists would throw back their heads and howl, 'UNFAIR!' but we women will create our own Mr. Darcy's and Mr. Knightley's and defy anyone who would point out their unrealistic points. The men aren't the ones crazy about *Pride and Prejudice*. Obviously they don't find perfect men realistic and honest enough to bother reading about. We don't write perfect women characters, do we? No. Our women all have bad tempers, or resentful hearts, or scabby pasts, or hidden fears--things that make them real. It's because we're easy on ourselves and aren't trying to boast perfection because we know we don't measure up. Then why do we hold men to a different standard?..... I'd caution all writers to make sure that your male 'hero' in your story has his own flaws. You don't want a one-dimensional character. You don't want a perfect man that will drive away other men from reading the book.

Look to the men in your life. The men around you. Look to your brothers and fathers and pastors and neighbors. Your uncles and the guy down the street. Goodness--look to Taylor the Latte Boy if you must, but let's cast aside the Perfect-Man syndrome.

—Rachel Heffington

...and above all, you should not think of writing as a way of earning your living. If you do, your work will smell of your poverty. It will be colored by your weakness and be as thin as your hunger. There are other trades which you can take up: make boots, not books.

—Marquis de Sade

If we are artists- hell, whether or not we're artists- it is our job, our responsibility, perhaps even our sacred calling, to take whatever life has handed us and make something new, something that wouldn't have existed if not for the fire, the genetic mutation, the sick baby, the accident.

—Dani Shapiro

Aspiring authors, get this through your head. Cover art serves one purpose, and one purpose only, to get potential customers interested long enough to pick up the book to read the back cover blurb. In the internet age that means the thumb nail image needs to be interesting enough to click on. That's what covers are for.

—Larry Correia

Ignore people who say you can't do it, even if this person is yourself.

—Martha Reed

Folding the laundry, completing another project at work, or watching television for the next hour doesn't build your writing muscles. It only leaves them flabby.

—Rob Bignell

Aspiring novelists should be taught that the old adage, 'Write about what you know,' isn't limited to what you have personally experienced. Vicarious experience is also a great part of what you know. Read a lot of history and it becomes part of your store of knowledge, part of what you're prepared to write about. The same goes for stories and memories that other people share with you.

—James Carlos Blake

There is nothing more valuable in the writing process than a friend to hold you accountable to your own potential.

—J. R. Young

When I reach for my pen, nothing is out of reach.

—Rob Bignell

On writing, my advice is the same to all. If you want to be a writer, write. Write and write and write. If you stop, start again. Save everything that you write. If you feel blocked, write through it until you feel your creative juices flowing again. Write. Writing is what makes a writer, nothing more and nothing less. — Ignore critics. Critics are a dime a dozen. Anybody can be a critic. Writers are priceless. — Go where the pleasure is in your writing. Go where the pain is. Write the book you would like to read. Write the book you have been trying to find but have not found. But write. And remember, there are no rules for our profession. Ignore rules. Ignore what I say here if it doesn't help you. Do it your own way. — Every writer knows fear and discouragement. Just write. — The world is crying for new writing. It is crying for fresh and original voices and new characters and new stories. If you won't write the classics of tomorrow, well, we will not have any. Good luck.

—Anne Rice

Motivated authors sacrifice TV time, sleep, hobbies, and even family time.

—Gudjon Bergmann

You will do well not to write for money, not because you won't get rich doing it, but because writing fueled by that sort of motivation becomes dull and lifeless and mediocre.

—Joyce Rachelle

Don't stop writing until someone pries the pen from your cold, dead hands.

—James J. Tritten

There is no such thing as lack of time, only unclear priorities and lack of motivation. It is better to abandon a project than to work on it half-heartedly for a protracted period of time.

—Gudjon Bergmann

In fact, 'talent' is as common as mud; what's rare is the motivation to sit down and actually do something with one's talent, the discipline to do it regularly, and the persistence to stick with it until it's finished.

—Patricia C. Wrede

Getting started on writing a book isn't as hard as it sounds. You don't need a plan and an outline. In fact, all you need are two things: time and one idea.

—Natasha Lester

Writing as a creative art flourishes only when there are no rules. Rules stifle you from entering the silent and forbidden spaces where the core of the story is waiting to be revealed.

—Gloria D. Gonsalves

If you have nothing good to say about someone, write a book about them.

—Carmen Fox

What you don't write is often more important than what you do.

—Ernest Hemingway

Only God gets it right the first time and only a slob says, 'Oh well, let it go, that's what copyeditors are for.'

—Stephen King

I think the first duty of all art, including fiction of any kind, is to entertain. That is to say, to hold interest. No matter how worthy the message of something, if it's dull, you're just not communicating.

—Poul Anderson

Keep being bold on the page, and in life, and people cannot ignore you forever.

—Don Roff

People are afraid to write books because they fear people will read them and find them worthless. Write as if nobody is going to read and throw your work into the public dustbin. Somebody may find it and consider it treasure.

—Bangambiki
Habyarimana

There are many advices on writing. The best I know is stop reading them and start writing.

—Bangambiki
Habyarimana

The secret to good writing is to use small words for big ideas, not to use big words for small ideas.

—Oliver Markus

Max sent Scottie some literary advice, the same dictum he gave every college student who called on him. He stressed the importance of a liberal arts education but urged her to avoid all courses in writing. ‘Everyone has to find her own way of writing,’ he wrote Scottie, ‘and the source of finding it is largely out of literature.’

—A. Scott Berg

The feeling that the work is magnificent, and the feeling that it is abominable, are both mosquitoes to be repelled, ignored, or killed, but not indulged.

—Annie Dillard

You can read in the space of a coffin, and you can write in the space of a toolshed meant for mowers and spades.

—Annie Dillard

There may be a Nurse Ratched-like listing of things that must be done right this moment: foods that must come out of the freezer, appointments that must be canceled or made, hairs that must be tweezed. But you hold an imaginary gun to your head and make yourself stay at the desk.

—Anne Lamott

If you have received a letter inviting you to speak at the dedication of a new cat hospital, and you hate cats, your reply, declining the invitation, does not necessarily have to cover the full range of your emotions. You must make it clear that you will not attend, but you do not have to let fly at the cats. The writer of the letter asked a civil question; attack cats, then, only if you can do so with good humor, good taste, and in such a way that your answer will be courteous as well as responsive. Since you are out of sympathy with cats, you may quite properly give this as a reason for not appearing at the dedicatory ceremonies of a cat hospital. But bear in mind that your opinion of cats was not sought, only your services as a speaker. Try to keep things straight.

—William Strunk Jr.

The more time you can put between you and your manuscript, the more fresh your eyes become and the more mistakes you’ll catch. Let a chapter rest for a day, you’ll see ways to improve it. Let your completed book rest a month or more and you’ll see stuff that’s long or that you want to skip. Read it out loud to get rid of awkward phrases and listen to your critique partners if they are good.

—Dan Alatorre

Pound it out, get it done, write every day. No excuses. Kerouac said you can't wait for inspiration, you have to go after it with a club. Damn straight. You'll sleep a lot better getting your word count in than another quick Twitter check or keeping up to date on the Kardashians.

—Dan Alatorre

Writing—like any art—is so damned personal that there really isn't a right way to do it. You do what works for you; what matters is getting the words on the paper. Sure, if you hear advice, and it works, then excellent. But, if it doesn't, you have to realize that perhaps nothing is wrong with you. You don't jive with the advice.

—Mur Lafferty

Why the tag of 'aspiring' writer be the wishful cliché? It's like a bumper sticker. Say it! I am a Writer. Period. We may all have a target and gradation toward successes, a personal illusion/perception. The quality or perseverance in one's craft is your act. Flaws? Sure. Yet, you are a Writer, not a wannabe. Let go of the tags. Just write!

—J. T. Sanz

I made a decision long ago not to make any apologies. Romance rocks, and even though my books don't actually fall into the romance genre, I tout them as very much being about the romance. It's fun. We're all obsessed with it. And it's human nature. Remember, NO APOLOGIES! Write what's in your heart!

—Darynda Jones

ALWAYS hook a reader. If a detail is unnecessary, it doesn't belong in your work, long or short! Make everything intriguing. If you have to describe a desk, make it awesome.

—Darynda Jones

You take a universal concept, something that has been done a million times (because everything has been done a million times), and add a fresh twist to it. Something no one saw coming. But mostly fresh writing! Keep it clean, simple, and compelling.

—Darynda Jones

I take the rawest, realest moments in anyone's life and I open them up and lay them bare. The innocence of a five year old child, the awkwardness of a teenager's first sexual encounter, the heartbreak of longing for a relationship you can't have, confronting the possibility of the death of your newborn child, whatever it is, you open your soul and put it out there and dare the world to read it, ready to have them stomp on you and laugh, but ready to do it again the next day. You have to put yourself out there as a writer, you can't play it safe. Great writing isn't safe.

—Dan Alatorre

Don't be afraid to get off the internet, the answers aren't all there. You may have to ask a cop about the kickback from a shotgun, or how sweaty they get in summer wearing body armor. Or what color blood is in the moonlight, or the vibrations through a serrated knife's handle you feel in your fingers when you are hacking through somebody's neck and hit cartilage.

—Dan Alatorre

Writing is new, relatively speaking. Story telling is ancient. Tell your story first putting aside all other worries. Leave fretting over homonyms, semicolons, and Oxford commas to editors and friends you can be bribe with baking.

—Ada Maria Soto

I would write:

'The soft melting hunk of butter trickled in gold down the stringy grooves of the split yam.'

Or:

'The child's clumsy fingers fumbled in sleep, feeling vainly for the wish of its dream.'

'The old man huddled in the dark doorway, his bony face lit by the burning yellow in the windows of distant skyscrapers.'

My purpose was to capture a physical state or movement that carried a strong subjective impression, an accomplishment which seemed supremely worth struggling for. If I could fasten the mind of the reader upon words so firmly that he would forget words and be conscious only of his response, I felt that I would be in sight of knowing how to write narrative.

—Richard Wright

Here's my advice: you hold in your heart everything you need to know to write anything your story needs written. Dig deep and go where the pain and fear and joy are, and put it out there. The minute you shy away from pure honesty in your writing, you become a liar and people will smell it. People are suckers for the truth and they know it when they see it. Open your soul and they will stop and watch.

—Dan Alatorre

You are going to feel like hell if you never write the stuff that is tugging on the sleeves in your heart—your stories, visions, memories, songs: your truth, your version of things, in your voice. That is really all you have to offer us, and it's why you were born.

—Anne Lamott

...what makes the story so tired is the failure of the writer to reach for anything but the nearest cliché. 'Shouldered his way,' 'only to be met,' 'crashing into his face,' 'waging a lonely war,' 'corruption that is rife,' 'sending shock waves,' 'New York's finest,'—these dreary phrases constitute writing at its most banal. We know just what to expect. No surprise awaits us in the form of an unusual word, an oblique look. We are in the hands of a hack, and we know it right away, We stop reading.

—William Zinsser

Beware, then, of the long word that's no better than the short word: 'assistance' (help), 'numerous' (many), 'facilitate' (ease), 'Individual' (man or woman), 'remainder' (rest), 'initial' (first), 'implement' (do), 'sufficient' (enough), 'attempt' (try), 'referred to as' (called), and hundreds more. Beware of all the slippery new fad words: paradigm and parameter, prioritize and potentialize. They are all weeds that will smother what you write. Don't dialogue with someone you can talk to. Don't interface with anybody.

—William Zinsser

Never use the passive voice. Do not say, 'It will get done.' Say, 'I'll do it,' and then stick to a solid, unwavering deadline

—Gina Barreca

Toni Morrison said, 'The function of freedom is to free someone else,' and if you are no longer wracked or in bondage to a person or a way of life, tell your story. Risk freeing someone else. Not everyone will be glad that you did. Members of your family and other critics may wish you had kept your secrets. Oh, well, what are you going to do? Get it all down. Let it pour out of you and onto the page. Write an incredibly shitty, self-indulgent, whiny, mewling first draft. Then take out as many of the excesses as you can.

—Anne Lamott

Keystrokes are hammer taps. Get words on paper. Don't worry about connections, character or plot. Work for an hour. Promise yourself an hour. Do nothing else but move your fingers. Make coarse shapes. Follow any emotion that pops up but never impose emotion, never fake it, and don't make up your mind or your heart ahead of time. Understand you don't know what you're doing. That's why you're here. Rough it out. Anything goes. You can decide later what any piece of text looks like, what it might mean. Don't stop. Don't question. Don't quit. Don't stop to read what you wrote. Move your fingers. Your mind will have no other option but to keep up. Remember that writer's block is merely the cold marble waiting for the chisel to heat up.

—Bob Thurber

Don't have every dialog go in a straight line to solve the problem. Let your characters argue, be sarcastic, disagree or joke around.

—Dan Alatorre

When writing, I uncage KAT: Keep Adding Tension. Even if I don't know where the story's going, petting the KAT keeps it purring.

—Don Roff

Most writers sow adjectives almost unconsciously into the soil of their prose to make it more lush and pretty, and the sentences become longer and longer as they fill up with stately elms and frisky kittens and hard-bitten detectives and sleepy lagoons. This is adjective-by-habit—a habit you should get rid of. Not every oak has to be gnarled. The adjective that exists solely as a decoration is a self-indulgence for the writer and a burden for the reader.

—William Zinsser

Set fire to cities and nations, to hearts and minds, to the very core of every human spirit. Make sure your words seep into the skin of the reader, leaving trace minerals that sustain the ailing human shell. Make them pay attention. Set fire to the soul. Anything less is an abomination to creation.

—Susan Marie

Nouns and verbs are the guts of the language. Beware of covering up with adjectives and adverbs.

— A. B. Guthrie Jr.

People say to write about what you know. I'm here to tell you, no one wants to read that, cos you don't know anything. So write about something you don't know. And don't be scared, ever.

—Toni Morrison

Let the writer take up surgery or bricklaying if he is interested in technique. There is no mechanical way to get the writing done, no shortcut. The young writer would be a fool to follow a theory. Teach yourself by your own mistakes; people learn only by error. The good artist believes that nobody is good enough to give him advice. He has supreme vanity. No matter how much he admires the old writer, he wants to beat him.

—William Faulkner

Let grammar, punctuation, and spelling into your life! Even the most energetic and wonderful mess has to be turned into sentences.

—Terry Pratchett

10 STEPS TO BECOMING A BETTER WRITER

Write.
Write more.
Write even more.
Write even more than that.
Write when you don't want to.
Write when you do.
Write when you have something to say.
Write when you don't.
Write every day.
Keep writing.

—Brian Clark

No one wants to read poetry. You have to make it impossible for them to put the poem down—impossible for them to stop reading it, word after word. You have to keep them from closing the book.

—Muriel Rukeyser

COMMANDMENTS

1. Work on one thing at a time until finished.
2. Start no more new books, add no more new material to 'Black Spring.'
3. Don't be nervous. Work calmly, joyously, recklessly on whatever is in hand.
4. Work according to Program and not according to mood. Stop at the appointed time!
5. When you can't create you can work.
6. Cement a little every day, rather than add new fertilizers.
7. Keep human! See people, go places, drink if you feel like it.
8. Don't be a draught-horse! Work with pleasure only.
9. Discard the Program when you feel like it—but go back to it next day. Concentrate. Narrow down. Exclude.
10. Forget the books you want to write. Think only of the book you are writing.
11. Write first and always. Painting, music, friends, cinema, all these come afterwards.

—Henry Miller

The one thing that you have that nobody else has is you. Your voice, your mind, your story, your vision. So write and draw and build and play and dance and live as only you can.

—Neil Gaiman

Never sit down and start writing. Always have a complete plan for what you are going to write before you start.

Always know the ending of your story. If you know the ending, you can always figure out how to get there.

Never use WAS as a verb. Too boring. Never use PUT or GOT. Too ugly.

When you finish writing, go back and cross out all adverbs.

No hugging. No crying.

—R. L. Stine

The only people who have time to write are in prison. The rest of us make time.

—Vanessa Martir

My top three pieces of writing advice? Stop whining and write. Stop fucking around and write. Stop making excuses and write.

—Nora Roberts

For the love of your writing and your sanity, stop taking the advice from the know-it-alls as gospel.

—*positivewriter.com*

What lasts in the reader's mind is not the phrase but the effect the phrase created: laughter tears, pain, joy. If the phrase is not affecting the reader, what's it doing there? Make it do its job or cut it without mercy or remorse.

—Isaac Asimov

One of the few things I know about writing is this: Spend it all, shoot it, play it, lose it, all, right away, every time. Do not hoard what seems good for a later place in the book, or for another book, give it, give it all, give it now.

—Annie Dillard

Start telling the stories that only you can tell, because there'll always be better writers than you and there'll always be smarter writers than you. There will always be people who are much better at doing this or doing that, but you are the only you.

—Niel Gaiman

Once a novel gets going and I know it is viable, I don't then worry about plot or themes. These things will come in almost automatically because the characters are now pulling the story.

—Chinua Achebe

Write with nouns and verbs, not with adjectives and adverbs. The adjective hasn't been built that can pull a weak or inaccurate noun out of a tight place.

—William Strunk, Jr.
& E. B. White

Reality is only for people with no imagination.

—Gavin Freeman

Writing is something you do alone. It's a profession for introverts who want to tell you a story but don't want to make eye contact while doing it.

—John Green

Write with an imaginary machete strapped to your thigh. This is not wishy-washy, polite, drinking-tea-with-your-pinkie-sticking-out stuff. It's who you want to be, your most powerful self. Write your books. Finish them. Then make them better. Find the way. No one will make this dream come true for you BUT YOU.

—Laini Taylor

Here is a lesson in creative writing. First rule: Do not use semicolons. They are transvestite hermaphrodites representing absolutely nothing. All they do is show you've been to college.

—Kurt Vonnegut

Almost all good writing begins with terrible first efforts. You need to start somewhere. Start by getting something – anything – down on paper.

—Anne Lamott

RULES FOR WRITING FIRST DRAFTS

Barricade the door. It must be just you, the ink, and the paper.

Work in a physical and mental condition that makes you want to write. Get there by all means possible.

Write yourself silly.

Allow our imagination to go to weird places. Nothing is off limits. You can clean up your mess later.

Break every writing rule know to man.

It's okay if it reads like a letter from a lunatic.

Steal stylistically from other writers, as all great writers do.

Keep your bottom in your chair until you are done.

Once you've finished a first draft, leave it alone for days—if not weeks.

Celebrate.

—Demian Farnworth

As for your use of language: Remember that two great masters of language, William Shakespeare and James Joyce, wrote sentences which were almost childlike when their subjects were most profound. 'To be or not to be?' asks Shakespeare's Hamlet. The longest word is three letters long.

—Kurt Vonnegut

Work on a computer that is disconnected from the internet.

—Zadie Smith

Read it aloud to yourself because that's the only way to be sure the rhythms of the sentences are OK (prose rhythms are too complex and subtle to be thought out—they can be got right only by ear).

—Diana Athill

When people tell you something's wrong or doesn't work for them, they are almost always right. When they tell you exactly what they think is wrong and how to fix it, they are almost always wrong.

—Neil Gaiman

The main rule of writing is that if you do it with enough assurance and confidence, you're allowed to do whatever you like. (That may be a rule for life as well as for writing. But it's definitely true for writing.) So write your story as it needs to be written. Write it honestly, and tell it as best you can. I'm not sure that there are any other rules. Not ones that matter.

—Neil Gaiman

The nearest I have to a rule is a Post-it on the wall in front of my desk saying '*Faire et se taire*' (Flaubert), which I translate for myself as 'Shut up and get on with it.'

—Helen Simpson

Even the great writers of our time have tried and failed and failed some more. Vladimir Nabokov received a harsh rejection letter from Knopf upon submitting *Lolita*, which would later go on to sell fifty million copies. Sylvia Plath's first rejection letter for *The Bell Jar* read, 'There certainly isn't enough genuine talent for us to take notice.' Gertrude Stein received a cruel rejection letter that mocked her style. Marcel Proust's *Swann's Way* earned him a sprawling rejection letter regarding the reasons he should simply give up writing all together. Tim Burton's first illustrated book, *The Giant Zlig*, got the thumbs down from Walt Disney Productions, and even Jack Kerouac's perennial *On the Road* received a particularly blunt rejection letter that simply read, 'I don't dig this one at all.' So even if you're an utterly fantastic writer who will be remembered for decades forthcoming, you'll still most likely receive a large dollop of criticism, rejection, and perhaps even mockery before you get there.

—Cody Delistraty

Never use jargon words like reconceptualize, demassification, attitudinally, judgmentally. They are hallmarks of a pretentious ass.

—David Ogilvy

Find a subject you care about and which you in your heart feel others should care about. It is this genuine caring, and not your games with language, which will be the most compelling and seductive element in your style.

—Kurt Vonnegut

EIGHT RULES FOR WRITING A SHORT STORY:

1. Use the time of a total stranger in such a way that he or she will not feel the time was wasted.
2. Give the reader at least one character he or she can root for.
3. Every character should want something, even if it is only a glass of water.
4. Every sentence must do one of two things: reveal character or advance the action.
5. Start as close to the end as possible.
6. Be a Sadist. No matter how sweet and innocent your leading characters, make awful things happen to them in order that the reader may see what they are made of.
7. Write to please just one person. If you open a window and make love to the world, so to speak, your story will get pneumonia.
8. Give your readers as much information as possible as soon as possible. To hell with suspense. Readers should have such complete understanding of what is going on, where and why, that they could finish the story themselves, should cockroaches eat the last few pages.

—Kurt Vonnegut

The secret of writing is to get started, and in order to get started you need to break the complex, overwhelming task of writing into small manageable tasks. Then you simply get going with the first task.

—Anne Lamott

The first draft is the child's draft, where you let it all pour out and then let it romp all over the place, knowing that no one is going to see it and that you can shape it later. You just let this childlike part of you channel whatever voices and visions come through and onto the page. If one of the characters wants to say, 'Well, so what, Mr. Poopy Pants?', you let her. No one is going to see it. If the kid wants to get into really sentimental, weepy, emotional territory, you let him. Just get it all down on paper, because there may be something great in those six crazy pages that you would never have gotten to by more rational, grownup means. There may be something in the very last line of the very last paragraph on page six that you just love, that is so beautiful or wild that you now know what you're supposed to be writing about, more or less, or in what direction you might go—but there was no way to get to this without first getting through the first five and a half pages.

—Anne Lamott

Becoming a writer is about becoming conscious. When you're conscious and writing from a place of insight and simplicity and real caring about the truth, you have the ability to throw the lights on for your reader. He or she will recognize his or her life and truth in what you say, in the pictures you have painted, and this decreases the terrible sense of isolation that we have all had too much of.

—Anne Lamott

This is our goal as writers, I think; to help others have this sense of— please forgive me—wonder, of seeing things anew, things that can catch us off guard, that break in on our small, bordered worlds. When this happens, everything feels more spacious. Try walking around with a child who's going, 'Wow, wow! Look at that dirty dog! Look at that burned down house! Look at that red sky!' And the child points and you look, and you see, and you start going, 'Wow! Look at that huge crazy hedge! Look at that teeny little baby! Look at the scary dark cloud!' I think this is how we are supposed to be in the world—present and in awe.

—Anne Lamott

A work in progress quickly becomes feral. It reverts to a wild state overnight. . . it is a lion growing in strength. You must visit it every day and reassert your mastery over it. If you skip a day, you are, quite rightly, afraid to open the door to its room. You enter its room with bravura, holding a chair at the thing and shouting, 'Simba!'

—Annie Dillard

My own best advice to young writers is: follow your curiosity and passion. What fascinates you will probably fascinate others. But, even if it doesn't, you will have devoted your life to what you love. An important corollary is that it's no use trying to write like someone else. Discover what's uniquely yours.

—Diane Ackerman

A writer must know his or her ABC. Apply Bottom to Chair!

—Ann Hite Kemp

Don't write stage directions. If it is not apparent what the character is trying to accomplish by saying the line, telling us how the character said it, or whether or not she moved to the couch isn't going to aid the case. We might understand better what the character means but we aren't particularly going to care.

—David Mamet

You never want to judge or condemn your characters on the page. Instead you want to reveal what they do in direct light and allow readers to come to their own conclusion. Literature isn't about presenting a moral condemnation —rather exploring the complex feelings of human life.

—Annie DeWitt

The secret of good writing is to strip every sentence to its cleanest components. Every word that serves no function, every long word that could be a short word, every adverb that carries the same meaning that's already in the verb, every passive construction that leaves the reader unsure of who is doing what—these are the thousand and one adulterants that weaken the strength of a sentence. And they usually occur in proportion to the education and rank.

—William Zinsser

Look back upstream. If you have come to your planned ending and it doesn't seem to be working, run your eye up the page and the page before that. You may see that your best ending is somewhere in there, that you were finished before you thought you were.

—John McPhee

'Don't be pretentious' is my first advice to young writers. This is the big problem — just because you're getting an MFA doesn't mean you have to write for the Academy. Be true to your personality. Don't temper your personality down with words. Don't build defensive fortresses around yourself with words — words are your friends.

—Gary Shteyngart

When in doubt, make trouble for your character. Don't let her stand on the edge of the pool, dipping her toe. Come up behind her and give her a good hard shove. That's my advice to you now. Make trouble for your character. In life we try to avoid trouble. We chew on our choices endlessly. We go to shrinks, we talk to our friends. In fiction, this is deadly. Protagonists need to screw up, act impulsively, have enemies, get into TROUBLE.

—Jane Fitch

It's not that you get a cliché and then wiggle it about or use synonyms. You don't take an ordinary decorative paragraph and give it style. What you're trying to do is be faithful to your perceptions and transmit them as faithfully as you can. I say these sentences until they sound right. There's no objective reason why they're right. They just sound right to me.

—Martin Amis

I have learned, as has many another better writer, to summon inspiration to my call as soon as I begin my day's stint, and not to hang around waiting for it. Inspiration is merely a pretty phrase for work. And it can be cultivated by anyone who has the patience to try. Inspiration which will not come at its possessor's summons is like a dog that cannot be trained to obey. The sooner the both are gotten rid of, the better.

—Albert Payson
Terhune

A page of Addison or of Irving will teach more of style than a whole manual of rules, whilst a story of Poe's will impress upon the mind a more vivid notion of powerful and correct description and narration than will ten dry chapters of a bulky textbook.

—H. P. Lovecraft

No art ever came out of not risking your neck.

— Eudora Welty

My belief of book writing is much the same as my belief as to shoemaking. The man who will work the hardest at it, and will work with the most honest purpose, will work the best.

—Anthony Trollope

Writing is hard for every last one of us... Coal mining is harder. Do you think miners stand around all day talking about how hard it is to mine for coal? They do not. They simply dig.

—Cheryl Strayed

Never use a verb other than 'said' to carry dialogue. The line of dialogue belongs to the character; the verb is the writer sticking his nose in. But 'said' is far less intrusive than 'grumbled,' 'gaped,' 'cautioned,' 'lied.' I once noticed Mary McCarthy ending a line of dialogue with 'she asseverated' and had to stop reading and go to the dictionary.

—Elmore Leonard

Never use an adverb to modify the verb 'said' ... he admonished gravely. To use an adverb this way (or almost any way) is a mortal sin. The writer is now exposing himself in earnest, using a word that distracts and can interrupt the rhythm of the exchange. I have a character in one of my books tell how she used to write historical romances 'full of rape and adverbs.'

—Elmore Leonard

Keep your exclamation points under control. You are allowed no more than two or three per 100,000 words of prose. If you have the knack of playing with exclamers the way Tom Wolfe does, you can throw them in by the handful.

—Elmore Leonard

Avoid detailed descriptions of characters....In Ernest Hemingway's 'Hills Like White Elephants,' what do the 'American and the girl with him' look like? 'She had taken off her hat and put it on the table.' That's the only reference to a physical description in the story.

—Elmore Leonard

The cutting of the gem has to be finished before you can see whether it shines.
— Leonard Cohen

Don't go into great detail describing places and things, unless you're Margaret Atwood and can paint scenes with language. You don't want descriptions that bring the action, the flow of the story, to a standstill.
—Elmore Leonard

Try to leave out the part that readers tend to skip. Think of what you skip reading a novel: thick paragraphs of prose you can see have too many words in them.
—Elmore Leonard

You most likely need a thesaurus, a rudimentary grammar book, and a grip on reality. This latter means: there's no free lunch. Writing is work. It's also gambling. You don't get a pension plan. Other people can help you a bit, but essentially you're on your own. Nobody is making you do this: you chose it, so don't whine.
—Margaret Atwood

You can never read your own book with the innocent anticipation that comes with that first delicious page of a new book, because you wrote the thing. You've been backstage. You've seen how the rabbits were smuggled into the hat. Therefore ask a reading friend or two to look at it before you give it to anyone in the publishing business. This friend should not be someone with whom you have a romantic relationship, unless you want to break up.
—Margaret Atwood

Don't sit down in the middle of the woods. If you're lost in the plot or blocked, retrace your steps to where you went wrong. Then take the other road. And/or change the person. Change the tense. Change the opening page.
—Margaret Atwood

Do not place a photograph of your favourite author on your desk, especially if the author is one of the famous ones who committed suicide.
—Roddy Doyle

Do give the work a name as quickly as possible. Own it, and see it. Dickens knew Bleak House was going to be called Bleak House before he started writing it. The rest must have been easy.
—Roddy Doyle

Do keep a thesaurus, but in the shed at the back of the garden or behind the fridge, somewhere that demands travel or effort. Chances are the words that come into your head will do fine, e.g. 'horse', 'ran', 'said'.
—Roddy Doyle

Finish the day's writing when you still want to continue.

—Helen Dunmore

Reread, rewrite, reread, rewrite. If it still doesn't work, throw it away. It's a nice feeling, and you don't want to be cluttered with the corpses of poems and stories which have everything in them except the life they need.

—Helen Dunmore

Don't write in public places. In the early 1990s I went to live in Paris. The usual writerly reasons: back then, if you were caught writing in a pub in England, you could get your head kicked in, whereas in Paris, dans les cafés . . . Since then I've developed an aversion to writing in public. I now think it should be done only in private, like any other lavatorial activity.

—Geoff Dyer

Have regrets. They are fuel. On the page they flare into desire.

—Geoff Dyer

Remember, if you sit at your desk for 15 or 20 years, every day, not counting weekends, it changes you. It just does. It may not improve your temper, but it fixes something else. It makes you more free.

—Anne Enright

A story needs rhythm. Read it aloud to yourself. If it doesn't spin a bit of magic, it's missing something.

—Esther Freud

Editing is everything. Cut until you can cut no more. What is left often springs into life.

—Esther Freud

Find your best time of the day for writing and write. Don't let anything else interfere. Afterwards it won't matter to you that the kitchen is a mess.

—Esther Freud

Increase your word power. Words are the raw material of our craft. The greater your vocabulary the more effective your writing. We who write in English are fortunate to have the richest and most versatile language in the world. Respect it.

—P. D. James

Write what you need to write, not what is currently popular or what you think will sell.

—P. D. James

You don't know the limits of your own abilities. Successful or not, if you keep pushing beyond yourself, you will enrich your own life – and maybe even please a few strangers.

—A. L. Kennedy

Defend your work. Organisations, institutions and individuals will often think they know best about your work – especially if they are paying you. When you genuinely believe their decisions would damage your work – walk away. Run away. The money doesn't matter that much.

—A. L. Kennedy

Write. No amount of self-inflicted misery, altered states, black pullovers or being publicly obnoxious will ever add up to your being a writer. Writers write. On you go.

—A. L. Kennedy

5 TECHNIQUES FOR GOOD CRAFTSMANSHIP

1. Proceed slowly and take care.
2. To ensure that you proceed slowly, write by hand.
3. Write slowly and by hand only about subjects that interest you.
4. Develop craftsmanship through years of wide reading.
5. Rewrite and edit until you achieve the most felicitous phrase/sentence/paragraph/page/story/chapter.

—Annie Proulx

5 ESSENTIALS FOR A BETTER STORY

1. Employ an unreliable narrator, preferably one who doesn't know he is insane and has no recollection of such events as digging into a grave to rip out the teeth of his recently departed lover.
2. Include a beautiful woman with raven locks and porcelain skin, preferably quite young, and let her die tragically of some unknown ailment.
3. Use grandiloquent words, such as heretofore, forthwith, and never more. A little Latin will also enhance the text.
4. Do not shy away from such grotesqueries as inebriation, imprisonment, insanity, and men costumed as orangutans being burned to death.
5. When in doubt, bury someone alive.

—Gotham Writers'
Workshop Mock
Edgar Allan Poe

GEORGE ORWELL: 6 QUESTIONS/6 RULES

A scrupulous writer, in every sentence that he writes, will ask himself at least four questions, thus:

What am I trying to say?
What words will express it?
What image or idiom will make it clearer?
Is this image fresh enough to have an effect?

And he will probably ask himself two more:

Could I put it more shortly?
Have I said anything that is avoidably ugly?

One can often be in doubt about the effect of a word or a phrase, and one needs rules that one can rely on when instinct fails. I think the following rules will cover most cases:

Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.

Never use a long word where a short one will do.

If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.

Never use the passive where you can use the active.

Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.

Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

—George Orwell

When the English language gets in my way, I walk over it.

—William A. Sunday

Among all kinds of Writing, there is none in which Authors are more apt to miscarry than in Works of Humour, as there is none in which they are more ambitious to excel.

—Joseph Addison

Nine-tenths of the value of a sense of humor in writing is not in the things it makes one write but in the things it keeps one from writing. It is especially valuable in this respect in serious writing, and no one without a sense of humor should ever write seriously. For without knowing what is funny, one is constantly in danger of being funny without knowing it.

—Robert Benchley

6 WRITING TIPS FROM JOHN STEINBECK

1. Abandon the idea that you are ever going to finish. Lose track of the 400 pages and write just one page for each day, it helps. Then when it gets finished, you are always surprised.
2. Write freely and as rapidly as possible and throw the whole thing on paper. Never correct or rewrite until the whole thing is down. Rewrite in process is usually found to be an excuse for not going on. It also interferes with flow and rhythm which can only come from a kind of unconscious association with the material.
3. Forget your generalized audience. In the first place, the nameless, faceless audience will scare you to death and in the second place, unlike the theater, it doesn't exist. In writing, your audience is one single reader. I have found that sometimes it helps to pick out one person—a real person you know, or an imagined person and write to that one.
4. If a scene or a section gets the better of you and you still think you want it—by pass it and go on. When you have finished the whole you can come back to it and then you may find that the reason it gave trouble is because it didn't be long there.
5. Beware of a scene that becomes too dear to you, dearer than the rest. It will usually be found that it is out of drawing.
6. If you are using dialogue—say it aloud as you write it. Only then will it have the sound of speech.

--John Steinbeck

Wit is a lean creature with sharp inquiring nose, whereas humor has a kindly eye and a comfortable girth. Wit, if it be necessary, uses malice to score a point—like a cat it is quick to jump—but humor keeps the peace in an easy chair. Wit has a better voice in a solo, but humor comes into the chorus best. Wit is as sharp as a stroke of lightning, whereas humor is diffuse like sunlight. Wit keeps the season's fashions and is precise in the phrases and judgments of the day, but humor is concerned with homely eternal things. Wit wears silk, but humor in homely-spun endures the wind. Wit sets a snare, whereas humor goes off whistling without a victim in its mind. Wit is sharper company at the table, but humor serves better in mischance and in the rain. When it tumbles wit is sour, but humor goes uncomplaining without its dinner. Humor laughs at another's jest and holds its sides, while wit sits wrapped in study for a lively answer.

—Charles S. Brooks

Perfectionism is simply putting a limit on your future. When you have an idea of perfect in your mind, you open the door to constantly comparing what you have now with what you want. That type of self criticism is significantly deterring.

--John Eliot

Leave out the boring parts.

—Elmore Leonard

The shed was, Dahl [Roald] said not wholly originally, a kind of womb: 'It's small and tight and dark and the curtains are always drawn...you go up here and you disappear and get lost.' Here, at the top of his garden, hunched in an old winged armchair, in a sleeping bag when it was cold, his feet on a box, a wooden writing board covered in green billiard cloth balanced across the chair arms; here, surrounded by personal relics, totems, fetishes (his father's sliver paper knife, a heavy ball made out of the wrappings of chocolate bars when he was a clerk at Shell Oil, bits of bone from his much-operated-on spine, a cuneiform tablet picked up in Babylon during World War II, a picture of his first child, Olivia, who died when she was 7: a poster for Wolper Pictures, makers of the first Willy Wonka film, naming the company's star authors: DAHL, NABOKOV, PLIMPTIN, SCHLESINGER, STYRON, UPDIKE—here was where he worked.

—Jeremy Treglown

Perfectionism can also take the form of spending most of a week writing and rewriting and not writing a single paragraph.

—Joan Didion

A man is not idle because he is absorbed in thought. There is a visible labor and there is an invisible labor.

--Victor Hugo

I'm all in favor of keeping dangerous weapons out of the hands of fools. Let's start with typewriters.

--Solomon Short

Writers are a little below clowns and a little above trained seals.

—John Steinbeck

Many a trip continues long after movement in time and space have ceased.

—John Steinbeck

The discipline of the written word punishes both stupidity and dishonesty.

—John Steinbeck

The writer must believe that what he is doing is the most important thing in the world. And he must hold to this illusion even when he knows it is not true.

—John Steinbeck

I am impelled, not to squeak like a grateful and apologetic mouse, but to roar like a lion out of pride in my profession.

—John Steinbeck

I hold that a writer who does not passionately believe in the perfectibility of man has no dedication nor any membership in literature.

—John Steinbeck

In utter loneliness a writer tries to explain the inexplicable.

—John Steinbeck

The written word remains. The spoken word takes wing and cannot be recalled.

—Unknown

Every day books are published that contain no real artfulness in the lines, books made up of clichés and limp prose, stupid stories offering nothing but high concept and plot—or supra-literary books that shut out even a serious reader in the name of assertions about the right of an author to be dull for a good cause. (No matter how serious a book is, if it is not entertaining, it is a failure.)

--Richard Bausch

What I know about writing I know from having read the work of the great writers. If you really want to learn how to write, do that. Read Shakespeare, and all the others whose work has withstood time and circumstance and changing fashions and the assaults of the ignorant and the bigoted; read those writers and don't spend a lot of time analyzing them. Digest them, swallow them all, one after another and try to sound like them for a time. Learn to be as faithful to the art and craft as they all were, and follow their example. That is, wide reading and hard work. One doesn't write out of some intellectual plan or strategy; one writes from a kind of beautiful necessity born of the reading of thousands of good stories poems plays...One is deeply involved in literature, and thinks more of writing than of being a writer.

--Richard Bausch

Nothing is as important as good writing, because in literature, the walls between people and cultures are broken down, and the things that plague us most—suspicion and fear of the other, and the tendency to see whole groups of people as objects, as monoliths of one cultural stereotype or another—are defeated.

--Richard Bausch

Fiction writing, and the reading of it, and book buying, have always been the activities of a tiny minority of people, even in the most-literate societies.

--Paul Theroux

Japan, Germany, and India seem to me to have serious writers, readers, and book buyers, but the Netherlands has struck me as the most robust literary culture in the world.

--Paul Theroux

Writing is like carrying a fetus.

—Edna O'Brien

I think that most writers who wait until they're inspired to write are just waiting for the fear to subside.

—Barry Mann

The difference between literature and journalism is that journalism is unreadable and literature is not read.

—Oscar Wilde

Joe Cumming, the Atlanta bureau chief, was a wordsmith, and I greatly admired him. He told me years later of the writer's block he suffered trying to 'write to space' an obit on the legendary columnist Ralph McGill. As the scrunched-up pieces of discarded copy mounted around Joe's feet, he remembered looking up at the rafters and thinking he could just hang himself and end it all, but then the first responders would arrive and think, 'The poor guy couldn't even write a lead.' That made him laugh and freed him to write, a valuable lesson about the creative process.

--Eleanor Clift

A writer who can't write in a grammarly manner better shut up shop.

--Artemus Ward

Words form the thread on which we string our experiences.

--Aldous Huxley

The chief merit of language is clearness, and we know that nothing detracts so much from this as do unfamiliar terms.

—Galen

As every writer knows, there's no such thing as 'only a word.' Words have the power to make us laugh, cry, shriek in outrage. They can persuade or seduce. In your search for the 'just right' word or phrase or expression, you may strike your readers with the effect of lightening.

--Eileen Rose-Busby

About adjectives: all fine prose is based on the verbs carrying the sentences. They make sentences move. Probably the finest technical poem in English is Keats's *Eve of Saint Agnes*. A line like:

The hare limped trembling through the frozen grass,

is so alive that you race through it, scarcely noticing it, yet it has colored the whole poem with its movement—the limping, trembling, and freezing is going on before your eyes.

--F. Scott Fitzgerald

A cliché is a bright new original thought with tenure.

--Robert Orben

The great enemy of clear language is insincerity.

--George Orwell

Somehow very early I got the idea that language was some kind of private, secretive means of travel, a way of living beyond your own life.

--Jayne Anne Phillips

Strict grammatical form must always be subordinated to meaning. Nonetheless, language is a convention from which one strays too far at his peril.

--Robert Elegant

Concern for the comma ought to include its use before the and in a series. Careful writers know that its omission tends to pair the last two elements in a series, whereas they should be separated to preserve the parallelism of all the elements that compose the series. Some years ago *Time*, that exemplar of slick and sardonic prose, described a woman editor who 'talks fast, enjoys displaying her many jewels, smokes and likes Scotch whiskey.' What shall the instructor's marginal comment be in a case like this? 'How do you smoke Scotch whiskey?' Or 'If you have found a way to smoke it, how can you possibly like it?' or 'Watch your commas!'

--H. Alan Wycherley

Few of us fully realize our tremendous good fortune in having what is called English as our mother tongue. It is a language of extraordinary flexibility and richness...constantly fed and replenished by other languages...English possesses its historical richness and suppleness because the writers who have used it have always written in the language spoken by the people.

--Edward Fenton

Nothing in language is immutably fixed: the best writers are constantly changing it. Absolute government by dictionary would mean the arrest of this healthy process of change and growth.

--C. E. Montague

When 'whom' is correct, use some other formulation.

--William Safire

Words should be an intense pleasure just as leather should be to a shoemaker.

--Evelyn Waugh

Usage is the only test. I prefer a phrase that is easy and unaffected to a phrase that is grammatical.

--W. Somerset Maugham

A huge vocabulary is not always an advantage. Simple language...can be more effective than complex language, which can lead to stiltedness or suggest dishonesty or faulty education.

--John Gardner

HACKNEYED PHRASES....The purpose with which these phrases are introduced is for the most part that of giving a fillip to a passage that might be humdrum without them...but their true use when they come into the writer's mind is as danger signals; he should take warning that when they suggest themselves it is because what he is writing is bad stuff, or it would not need such help; let him see to the substance of his cake instead of decorating with sugarplums.

--Francis George Fowler

The test of your command of language is whether you can describe a spiral staircase or a bathing beauty without using your hands.

--Unknown

An artificial stretching of vocabulary is not to be urged....Nor may students exult when they have found a hard word to express their thoughts. For, in the first place, hard words make hard reading. Beneath their weight a sentence staggers like a man with a bag of coal. It is usually a pattern of easy words that gives a sentence grace, and any octosyllabic explosion blows the thought quite off its track. But secondly, and of more importance, hard words have mostly been coined for a special use and their meaning is narrow and scientific. They stiffen a paragraph to a formula. They smell unpleasantly of the laboratory and the schoolroom.

--Charles S. Brooks

When the English language gets in my way, I walk over it.

—William A. Sunday

Grammar made me more trouble than any other study. Somehow I never could learn grammar, and it always made me angry when I tried. My parents and teachers told me that I could never write or speak unless I learned grammar, and so I tried and tried, but even now I can hardly tell an adverb from an adjective, and I do not know that I care. When a little boy, I used to think that if I really had anything to tell I could make myself understood; and I think so still. The longer I live the surer I am that the chief trouble of writers and speakers is the lack of interesting thoughts, and not of proper words.

--Clarence Darrow

If I don't write to empty my mind, I go mad. As to that regular, uninterrupted love of writing. I do not understand it. I feel it as a torture, which I must get rid of, but never as a pleasure. On the contrary, I think composition a great pain.

—Lord Byron

Americans make an inordinate fuss about correct grammar, while Englishmen believe that correct English is what good writers write.

--Bertrand Russell

I don't know the rules of grammar... If you're trying to persuade people to do something, or buy something, it seems to me you should use their language, the language they use every day, the language in which they think. We try to write in the vernacular.

—David Ogilvy

One of the things I've done as a writer is to learn more words. I do that by reading widely and in all disciplines. I read art criticism. I read science. I read psychology. As I have done that over a lifetime, I know more and more words. One of my anxieties when I first started writing was that my language seemed too plain to address subjects that were complicated. As I have been able to learn more words, it's easier to paint a scene that might seduce the reader into watching that scene, and then more words for the speaker to speak so that the psychology becomes more nuanced.

—Alicia Anstead

Increase your word power. Words are the raw material of our craft. The greater your vocabulary the more effective your writing. We who write in English are fortunate to have the richest and most versatile language in the world. Respect it.

—P. D. James

Writers of every caliber exist in any genre. Let's lay down the labels and celebrate who we are: a group of humans insane enough to spend each day battling rejection, writer's block, unwieldy sentences, and dwindling readerships, each of us grappling with the page long into the night.

—Nicki Porter

We writers are clever. We take the 26 letters of the alphabet and spin them into fascinating tales that run the gamut from science fiction to romance and everything in between. If we do it well, we grab readers with such force they go without sleep, are late to work, and miss subway stops to keep turning those pages.

—Beverly Jenkins

Robert McKee...talks about something called ‘the negation of the negation.’ What this means is that you always want your characters to be in peril, but you want to make it as bad as you can.

So if you have something bad like, say, you’re getting married and your partner doesn’t show up. Well, that’s bad. But the negation of the negation would be: OK, you’re getting married. Not only does your partner not show up, but your partner runs away with your mom.

And then you think, ‘Well, what’s worse than that?’ And what’s worse than that would be, ‘Your partner runs away with your mom, and they both get in a car accident and your mom survives, but your partner doesn’t.’

So you always try to think in terms of what would be worse, what would be harder for these characters....As a writer, you go into those dark places, and I think that’s what keeps the pages turning.

—Caroline Leavitt

Never, ever, ever give up, because you never know what’s going to happen. And don’t listen to what people tell you. When I was in high school, my English teacher told me that I was a horrible writer, that I would never be a writer. In college, I took a class with a professor who the time was a famous writer. He told me at the end of the class that my work was garbage, and I would never make it, and I should think about being a nursery school teacher instead. I didn’t listen. I didn’t listen! I was devastated, but I kept writing and writing and two years later, I published my first novel. I sent a copy of it along with the New York Times review to the professor with a note saying ‘You were wrong!’

—Caroline Leavitt

There’s no mystery to it. I make time. I think when you really want to do something, you find the time to do that something. I also have a very understudying family—they don’t mind that I write for five hours a day during holidays or that I’m up until 5 in the morning writing on weekends (and sleeping in, missing the basketball runs) or that I often say when disturbed, ‘What? I’m in the middle of a sentence.’

—Amulya Malladi

The first four months of writing the book, my mental image is scratching with my hands through granite. My other image is pushing a train up the mountain, and it's icy, and I'm in bare feet.

—Mary Higgins Clark

I think everyone should sit down and write a book. It's a lot like therapy but a lot less expensive.

—Norma McCorvey

Teaching writing is one of the hardest jobs in the world. It requires patience, diplomacy, firmness and a strong belief that writing can be taught. I've had my doubts. Can everyone sing? Can everyone paint or dance? Why should writing be the one art everyone can learn? Those questions hover and haunt every time I step into a classroom.

—T. R. Joyce

Human life itself may be almost pure chaos, but the work of the artist is to take these handfuls of confusion and disparate things, things that seem to be irreconcilable, and put them together in a frame to give them some kind of shape and meaning.

—Katherine Anne Porter

There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.

—Maya Angelou

Writers are like everyone else; they are just better at articulating the things that happen to everybody.

—Kate Bolick

Writing on the computer promotes process over product and favors the whole over the execution of the part. As the writer grows accustomed to moving words, sentences, and paragraphs around—to opening his lines to insertions—his sense of linkage and necessity is affected. Less thought may be given to the ideal of inevitable expression. The expectation is no longer that there should be a single best way to say something; the writer accepts variability and is more inclined to view the work as a version. The Flaubertian tyranny of *le mot juste* is eclipsed, and with it, gradually, the idea of the author as a sovereign maker.

—Sven Birkerts

I don't think anyone starts doing creative work because they're serving humanity. They want to get laid; they want to get money; they want to get attention.

—Richard Gere

A font is a style of typeface carefully chosen to make your English teacher think a paper is five pages long.

—*TL;DR Wikipedia*

Professor: What inspired you to write this essay?

Me: The due date.

—*theChive*

That's what it was to be young—to be enthusiastic rather than envious about the good work other people could do.

—Kurt Vonnegut

To have the sense of creative activity is the great happiness and the great proof of being alive.

—Matthew Arnold

While it is essential that young children learn to form their letters and make individual words, those rudimentary skills should give way to the organization and expression of ideas just as soon as the child is ready. Writing should be part of the teaching strategy in every subject, not just 'language arts.' By the time they reach the upper elementary grades, children should be asked to compose essays about science projects and write biographical sketches of historical figures. They should even be asked to write about how they solve mathematical problems, and to put the solutions to word problems into full sentences. By the end of eighth grade, children should be writing more extended compositions, including some that call upon them to draw information from several sources. They should write and write and write some more, until it becomes second nature to put pencil—or printer—to paper and produce something coherent and expressive.

—William J. Bennett

I'm not suggesting that the play is without fault; all of my plays are imperfect, I'm rather happy to say-it leaves me something to do.

—Edward Albee

The arts are called liberal, because they enable those who practise them to live in freedom.

--Tirso de Molina

The curriculum of the school should give the student access to the important cultural tools available through which intelligence can be expanded. Among the most important of these tools are the arts.

--Elliot Eisner

To improve the teaching of writing, particularly in the context of academic tasks, is also to improve the quality of thinking of school children.

—Judith A. Langer and
Arthur N.
Applebee

Writing is the most complex of all human activities.

—Hilda Taba

I admire anybody who has the guts to write anything at all.

—E. B. White

Words are sacred. They deserve respect. If you get the right ones, in the right order, you can nudge the world a little.

—Tom Stoppard

I don't think the creative writing industry has helped American poetry.

—Robert Morgan

A man is not idle because he is absorbed in thought.
There is a visible labour and there is an invisible labour.

--Victor Hugo

The secret isolated joy of the thinker, who knows that, a hundred years after he is dead and forgotten, men who never heard of him will be moving to the measure of his thought.

--Oliver Wendell
Holmes, Jr.

Those who dream by day are cognizant of many things that escape those who dream only at night.

--Edgar Allan Poe

I have never found a companion that was so companionable as solitude. We are for the most part more lonely when we go abroad among men than when we stay in our chambers. A man thinking or working is always alone, let him be where he will.

—Henry David Thoreau

Was it only by dreaming or writing that I could find out what I thought?

—Joan Didion

The skill of writing is to create a context in which other people can think.

—Edwin Schlossberg

I expect that any day now, I will have said all I have to say; I'll have used up all my characters, and then I'll be free to get on with my real life.

—Anne Tyler

Teaching writing is difficult, and I suppose that many teachers emphasize form over content because grammar is closer to arithmetic and easier to mark right or wrong. Content ought to be the first consideration of any teacher of writing.

--Andy Rooney

I always tell my students, 'If you walk around with your eyes and ears open, you can't possibly live long enough to write all the novels you'll encounter.'

—Jill McCorkle

Writing is something that you don't know how to do. You sit down and it's something that happens, or it may not happen. So, how can you teach anybody how to write? It's beyond me, because you yourself don't even know if you're going to be able to. I'm always worried, well, you know, every time I go upstairs with my wine bottle. Sometimes I'll sit at that typewriter for fifteen minutes, you know. I don't go up there to write. The typewriter's up there. If it doesn't start moving, I say, well this could be the night that I hit the dust.

—Charles Bukowski

The understanding of art depends finally upon one's willingness to extend one's humanity and one's knowledge of human life.

—Ralph Ellison

I knew I'd start writing for a living straight out of college. I imagined I'd wake each day—never before 7 a.m., mind you—and pad out to my home office in my silken pajamas. Perhaps a motivational songbird would flutter in and land on my shoulder; perhaps a pair of well-meaning mice would fetch my coffee. The words would pour from my fingers, settling just so on the page with nary a need for revision. I'd finish by noon, and my editors would fall at my feet: Such prose! they'd cry. Such wit! Such wisdom! Why, of course we'll send a writer of your caliber to Mallorca! To Crete! Tokyo! George Clooney's dressing room! Never-ever would I hear a harsh word about my work. Never-ever would I have a client go AWOL. Never-ever would I deign to eat chicken from a can in the leaner months.

—Nicki Porter

Freelancing did teach me some of the most important lessons of my professional career: How to dig deep into the work that matters amidst heaps of laundry, bills, and that nagging rainy-day feeling that sidles up and whispers: Wouldn't you rather be curled up with a book? (Children have neighbors asking if they can stop chores and come out to play; writers have books.)

—Nicki Porter

When writers die they become books, which is, after all, not too bad an incarnation.

—Jorge Luis Borges

I will never forget the first time an editor said my piece gave her chills. I couldn't move. To think I had strung my words together just so, lined them up in such a way to travel up off the page, in through her retina and down into the deep, endless recesses of her occipital lobe, spinning and shaping into a meaning so evocative and strong and startling it sparks, catches fire, raises the hair on her arms. All this because I managed to string 26 little characters together in a clever pattern.

—Nicki Porter

Fresh, strong fiction grows out of both skill with sentences and a deep understanding of how people act. It's not about description (although it's essential to let your reader know where we are), it's not about symbolism (take that word and bury it along with nuclear waste), and not about backstory. It's about what people do to each other, often in rage, despair, jealousy, betrayal, and other toxic emotions.

—Anne Bernays

You can calculate the worth of a man by the number of his enemies, and the importance of a work of art by the harm that is spoken of it.

—Gustave Flaubert

Inspiration is a guest that does not willingly visit the lazy.

—Pyotr Ilyich
Tchaikovsky

If the desire to write is not accompanied by actual writing, then the desire must be not to write.

—Hugh Prather

People disappear when they die. Their voice, their laughter, the warmth of their breath. Their flesh. Eventually their bones. All living memory of them ceases. This is both dreadful and natural. Yet for some there is an exception to this annihilation. For in the books they write they continue to exist. We can rediscover them. Their humor, their tone of voice, their moods. Through the written word they can anger you or make you happy. They can comfort you. They can perplex you. They can alter you. All this, even though they are dead. Like flies in amber, like corpses frozen in the ice, that which according to the laws of nature should pass away is, by the miracle of ink on paper, preserved. It is a kind of magic.

—Diane Setterfield

I'm trying in all my stories to get the feeling of the actual life across—not to just depict life—or criticize it—but to actually make it alive. So that when you have read something by me you actually experience the thing. You can't do this without putting in the bad and the ugly as well as what is beautiful. Because if it is all beautiful you can't believe in it. Things aren't that way.

—Ernest Hemingway

I write to find strength.
I write to become the person that hides inside me.
I write to light the way through the darkness for others.
I write to be seen and heard.
I write to be near those I love.
I write by accident, promptings, purposefully and anywhere there is paper.
I write because my heart speaks a different language that someone needs to hear.
I write past the embarrassment of exposure.
I write because hypocrisy doesn't need answers, rather it needs questions to heal.
I write myself out of nightmares.
I write because I am nostalgic, romantic and demand happy endings.
I write to remember.
I write knowing conversations don't always take place.
I write because speaking can't be reread.
I write to sooth a mind that races.
I write because you can play on the page like a child left alone in the sand.
I write because my emotions belong to the moon; high tide, low tide.
I write knowing I will fall on my words, but no one will say it was for very long.
I write because I want to paint the world the way I see love should be.
I write to provide a legacy.
I write to make sense out of senselessness.
I write knowing I will be killed by my own words, stabbed by critics, crucified by
both misunderstanding and understanding.
I write for the haters, the lovers, the lonely, the brokenhearted and the dreamers.
I write because one day someone will tell me that my emotions were not a waste of
time.
I write because God loves stories.
I write because one day I will be gone, but what I believed and felt will live on.
—Shannon L. Alder

Lolita is famous, not I. I am an obscure, doubly obscure, novelist with an unpronounceable name.

—Vladimir Nabokov

Great writers, I discovered, were not to be bowed down before and worshipped, but embraced and befriended. Their names resounded through history not because they had massive brows and thought deep incomprehensible thoughts, but because they opened windows in the mind, they put their arms round you and showed you things you always knew but never dared to believe. Even if their names were terrifyingly foreign and intellectual sounding, Dostoevsky, Baudelaire or Cavafy, they turned out to be charming and wonderful and quite unalarming after all.

—Stephen Fry

How the excitement comes upon me to tell it all! In the quest of writing, the heart can speed up with anticipation—as it does, indeed, during the chase itself of whales. I can swear it, having done both, and I will tell YOU though other writers may not. My heart is beating fast; I am in pursuit; I want my victory—that you should see and hear and above all feel the reality behind these words. For they are but a mask. Not the mask that conceals, not a mask that I would have you strike through as mere appearance, or, worse, deceitful appearance. Words need not be that kind of mask, but a mask such as the ancient Greek actors wore, a mask that expresses rather than conceals the inner drama.

(But do you know me? Una? You have shipped long with me in the boat that is this book. Let me assure you and tell you that I know you, even something of your pain and joy, for you are much like me. The contract of writing and reading requires that we know each other. Did you know that I try on your mask from time to time? I become a reader, too, reading over what I have just written. If I am your shipbuilder and captain, from time to time I am also your comrade. Feel me now, standing beside you, just behind your shoulder?)

—Sena Jeter Naslund

I hope I don't write TOO many books! When I look at authors who have written too many books, I wonder to myself 'When did they live?' I certainly want to write BECAUSE I live! I know I don't want to write in order to live! My writing is an overflow of the wine glass of my life, not a basin in which I wash out my ideals and expectations.

—C. JoyBell C.

I have read a lot and written a lot, and, although I would not plagiarize the writing of others, if I unintentionally insert in my writing a phrase or unique word I'd absorbed in my reading, I call it not plagiarism but inadvertent inclusion.

—Dan L. Miller

The internet is killing the art of writing. The big 'publish' button begs you to publish even before you go back and make one single edit, and as if this was not enough, you have instant readers who praise your writing skills!

—Bangambiki
Habyarimana

Every story leaves some small impact on the reader. Perhaps it's as small as a turn of phrase you unconsciously file away, a new word you hadn't heard before. But something, some thread of it sneaks its way into your cranial blueprint and fiddles with the math a bit. You may look the same, act the same, seem the same, but some microscopic part of your makeup is different. And the more you read the more nuggets you file away; the more gold in your stores, the richer your writing will be.

—Nicki Porter

Today almost everybody is a writer, the enormous publish button on blogs and websites begs you everywhere to click on it! And bam you are a writer. To hell with agents and publishing houses and rejection letters. Immortality for you is on the click of a mouse! We are advancing at the speed of light! You can become an author at 140 characters. To hell with long winding sentences and long hours of scratching the head, the immortals of today instantly get a 'like' and they instantly enter the pantheon! They sit side by side with Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, St. Paul, Buddha, Martin Luther, Rousseau, Bangambiki...

—Bangambiki
Habyarimana

Give someone a book, they'll read for a day. Teach someone how to write a book, they'll experience a lifetime of paralyzing self doubt.

—Lauren DeStefano

You think writing a book is hard? Wait until you give it to someone to read.

—Ken Stark

Books to authors are kind of like children to parents. They tend to come along one at a time, and you try to give each one the best you know how. But there comes a time with both books and children when you have to send them out to the world. From that point on, you become a spectator.

--Alex Haley

Artistic temperament is the disease that afflicts amateurs.

—Gilbert K. Chesterton

Drama is based on the Mistake. I think someone is my friend when he really is my enemy, that I am free to marry a woman when in fact she is my mother, that this person is a chambermaid when it is a young nobleman in disguise, that this well-dressed young man is rich when he is really a penniless adventurer, or that if I do this such and such a result will follow when in fact it results in something very different. All good drama has two movements, first the making of the mistake, then the discovery that it was a mistake.

—W. H. Auden

Write what you know. That should leave you with a lot of free time.

—Howard Nemerov

Anyone who says writing is easy isn't doing it right.

—Amy Joy

Playing with words is its own reward.

--Richard Monaco

I want to be able to do anything with words: handle slashing, flaming descriptions like Wells, and use the paradox with the clarity of Samuel Butler, the breadth of Bernard Shaw and the wit of Oscar Wilde. I want to do the wide sultry heavens of Conrad, the rolled-gold sundowns and crazy-quilt skies of Hitchens and Kipling as well as the pastel dawns and twilights of Chesterton. All that is by way of example. As a matter of fact I am a professed literary thief, hot after the best methods of every writer in my generation.

—F. Scott Fitzgerald

The only real reward a poet can hope for, most of the time, is in doing the best possible job on each poem, since it may never be read anyway.

--Richard Monaco

There's something special about people who are interested in the printed word. They are a species all their own—learned, kind, knowledgeable and human.

--Nathan Pine

I'm fascinated by writers, sisterhood, and women ahead of their time—so if I could spend time with one historical family, it would be the Brontës. I'd thank Anne, Emily, and Charlotte for insisting on their right to creativity before the world gave them permission. And I'd assure them that we women now regularly use our own names on our books.

—Glennon Doyle Melton

Publishing a volume of verse is like dropping a rose petal down the Grand Canyon and waiting for the echo.

--Don Marquis

Poets...loathe and avoid the cliché— 'no problem, that's the way the ball bounces, let's face it, get with it, that's what you think, you can say that again, as a matter of fact, no kidding, let me put it this way.' They choose the muscular metaphor above the weaker simile: something is, not something is like. 'Up from India glances the silver sail of dawn,' which is Housman. 'The smell of liver and bacon sidled into the street with onions on its breath,' which is Dylan Thomas.

--David McCord

The urge to write poetry is like having an itch. When the itch becomes annoying enough, you scratch it.

--Robert Penn Warren

Li Po wrote poems on rice paper and floated them down rivers until they sank out of sight. Contemporary poets publish their poems in little magazines. The results are much the same.

--Louis Phillips

As things are, and as fundamentally they must always be, poetry is not a career, but a mug's game. No honest poet can ever feel quite sure of the permanent value of what he has written: he may have wasted his time and messed up his life for nothing.

--T. S. Eliot

A person sets out to write a poem for a variety of reasons: to win the heart of his beloved; to express his attitude toward the reality surrounding him, be it a landscape or a state; to capture his state of mind at a given instant; to leave—as he thinks at that moment—a trace on the earth. But regardless of the reasons for which he takes up the pen, and regardless of the effect produced by what emerges from under that pen on his audience—however great or small it may be—the immediate consequences of this enterprise is the sensation of coming into direct contact with language, or more precisely, the sensation of immediately falling into dependence on it, on everything that has already been uttered, written and accomplished in it.

--Joseph Brodsky

If a poet has any obligation toward society, it is to write well. Being in the minority, he has no other choice. Failing this duty, he sinks into oblivion.

--Joseph Brodsky

What stimulates me to write a poem is that I have got something inside me that I want to get rid of—it is almost a kind of defecation.

--T. S. Eliot

Is there a joy except gardening that asks so much, and gives so much? I know of no other except, perhaps, the writing of a poem. They are much alike, even in the amount of waste that has to be accepted for the sake of the rare, chancy joy when all goes well.

--May Saxton

Once in awhile you have a thought, and you rhyme it.

--Howard Nemerov

You know...that a blank wall is an appalling thing to look at. The wall of a museum—a canvas—a piece of film—or a guy sitting in front of a typewriter. Then, you start out to do something—that vague thing called creation. The beginning strikes awe within you.

--Edward Steichen

My books are my tools, and the greater their variety and perfection the greater the help to my literary work.

--Tryon Edwards

Great geniuses have the shortest biographies. Their cousins can tell you nothing about them. They lived in their writings, and so their house and street life was trivial and commonplace.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

I do not suppose that anyone not a poet can realize the agony of creating a poem. Every nerve, even every muscle, seems strained to the breaking point. The poem will not be denied, to refuse to write it would be a great torture. It tears its way out of the brain, splintering and breaking its passage, and leaves that organ in the state of a jellyfish when the task is done. And yet to have no poem to write is the worst state of all.

—Amy Lowell

Verses amount to so little when one begins to write them young. One ought to wait and gather sense and sweetness a whole life long, and a long life is possible, and then, quite at the end, one might perhaps be able to write ten good lines. For verses are not, as people imagine, simple feelings (we have these soon enough); they are experiences. In order to write a single verse, one must see many cities, and men and things; one must know animals and the flight of birds, and the gestures that the little flowers make when they open out in the morning. One must be able to return in thought to roads in unknown regions, to unexpected encounters, and to partings that had been long foreseen; to days of childhood that are still indistinct, and to parents whom one had to hurt when they sought to give some pleasure which one did not understand (it would have been a pleasure to someone else); to childhood's illnesses that so strangely begin with such a number of profound and grave transformations, to days spent in rooms withdrawn and quiet, and to mornings by the sea, to the sea itself, to oceans, to nights of travel that rushed along loftily and flew with all the stars—and still it is not enough to be able to think of all this. There must be memories of many nights of love, each one unlike the others, of the screams of women in labour, and of some in childbed, light and blanched and sleeping, shutting themselves in. But one must also have been beside the dying, must have sat beside the dead in a room with open windows and with fitful noises. One must be able to forget them when they are many and one must have the immense patience to wait until they come again. For it is the memories themselves that matter. Only when they have turned to blood within us, to glance and gestured, nameless and no longer to be distinguished from ourselves—only then can it happen that in a most rare hour the first word of a poem arises in their midst and goes forth from them.

—Rainer Maria Rilke

Writers may be lonely, but they are never lonely alone. They stalk the boudoir and the board room, the nursery and the classroom, looking for the useful detail, the emotionally powerful moment. They come to the page with treasures gleaned from marriage, from illness, from childhood—their own and their children's.

--Anne Roiphe

I have a spelling checker,
It came with my PC.
It plainly marks four my revue
Mistakes I cannot sea.
I've run this poem write through it,
I'm shore your pleas too no
It's letter perfect in it's weigh,
My checker tolled me sew!

--New York Times

A word processor is only a fancy combination of a pencil, an eraser, and a scissors
with a pot of paste; it's the mind with its creativity that does the real work.

--Dan L. Miller

My aim is to put down on paper what I see and what I feel in the best and simplest
way.

—Ernest Hemingway

All art is a kind of confession, more or less oblique. All artists, if they are to survive,
are forced, at last, to tell the whole story; to vomit the anguish up.

--James Baldwin

It is wise to learn; it is God-like to create.

--John Saxe

Art is a jealous mistress, and if a man has a genius for painting, poetry, music,
architecture or philosophy, he makes a bad husband and an ill provider.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

I don't think creative people generally do what they do to make money. They may
get a process going by which money is made, and they realize it's a good idea to keep
that going, but I think that if they passed a law tomorrow that no creative person
can ever again make any money on his poems, his paintings, his songs, his sculp-
tures, I don't believe you'd see any fewer poems in the world. I think the number of
paintings would still continue to flow because people do that because they're able to.
The discover this ability in themselves and derive great pleasure from it.

--Steve Allen

An artist lives more passionately, more deeply, with more seeking for life and truth
and beauty than any man in the world.

--Charlie Chaplin

Everything great in the world comes from neurotics. They alone have founded our religions and composed our masterpieces. Never will the world know all it owes to them nor all they have suffered to enrich us. We enjoy lovely music, beautiful paintings, a thousand intellectual delicacies, but we have no idea of their cost, to those who invented them, in sleepless nights, tears, spasmodic laughter, rashes, asthma, epilepsies, and the fear of death, which is worse than all the rest.

--Marcel Proust

All men dream but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find that it was vanity, but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act their dreams with open eyes to make it possible.

--T. E. Lawrence

A bus station is where a bus stops. A train station is where a train stops. On my desk, I have a work station...

--William Faulkner

...the challenge of finding that perfect word—and many times, there is that one perfect word—which too often eludes us writers until 3 in the morning, when we sit up like a sprung jackknife and claw in the dark for paper and a pen.

—Connie Schultz

Very often a desire to write is a desire to live more honestly through language. If more students now seek to become writers, it may be a sign that our manner of life is dishonest, that it offers too few opportunities for self-expression, and that, for some people, there is too great a disjuncture between how things seem and how they actually are.

—Rachel Cusk

If I cannot overwhelm with my quality, I will overwhelm with my quantity.

—Emile Zola

There's a bizarre prejudice that exists in the New York publishing establishment that any work outside the tri-state area is being done by trained chimpanzees, that geography screens out sensibility. There's an idea that all Los Angeles writing is about the movie industry, that it's vulgar, shallow and banal.

—Kate Braverman

Writers are only rarely likeable. They bring nothing to the party, leave their game at the typewriter.

—Joan Didion

I hate first drafts, and it never gets easier. People always wonder what kind of superhero power they'd like to have. I wanted the ability for someone to just open up my brain and take out the entire first draft and lay it down in front of me so I can just focus on the second, third and fourth drafts.

—Judy Blume

In his book *10 Rules of Writing*, Elmore Leonard offered a rule about exclamation points. He stated, 'You are allowed no more than two or three per 100,000 words of prose.' Leonard was prolific. He wrote more than 40 novels in his career, totaling 3.4 million words. If he had followed his own advice, he would have used only 102 exclamation points in his entire career. In practice, he used 1,651. That's 16 times as many as he recommended! But before you start thinking that Leonard was a secret exclamation-point fanatic, consider the chart below:

Author		Number of ! per 100,000 Words
Elmore Leonard	45 Novels	49
Ernest Hemingway	10 Novels	59
Toni Morrison	10 Novels	111
Salman Rushdie	9 Novels	204
Virginia Woolf	9 Novels	258
E. L. James	3 Novels	278
F. Scott Fitzgerald	4 Novels	356
Jane Austen	6 Novels	449
Tom Wolfe	4 Novels	929
James Joyce	3 Novels	1,105

—Ben Blatt

No poems can please for long or live that are written by water drinkers.

—Horace

No one, ever, wrote anything as well even after one drink as he would have done with out it.

—Ring Lardner

The mind of a writer can be a truly terrifying thing. Isolated, neurotic, caffeine-addled, crippled by procrastination, consumed by feelings of panic, self-loathing, and soul-crushing inadequacy. And that's on a good day.

—Robert De Niro

A conclusion is the place where you got tired of thinking.

—Stephen Wright

All writers are insecure, the male ones especially. It's well known. Why else would they spend so much time on make-believe? They're only happy in their imaginary worlds, because that's where they're in charge—where they're God.

—Philip Sington

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, melancholia, the panic and fear which is inherent in a human situation.

—Graham Greene

There's a marvelous peace in not publishing. Publishing is a terrible invasion of my privacy.

—J. D. Salinger

Fury jams the gullet and spreads poison, but, as soon as I start to write, dissipates, flows out into the figure of the letters.

—Sylvia Plath

Art does NOT come from the mind. It does not come from your rational, analytical faculties. It does not come from ideas. It does not come from theories. It does not come from philosophies. You don't write a book in order to express a theme or make symbols. That's NOT the process. Art comes from the place where you dream. It comes from your unconscious. It comes from your white-hot center. It comes from the compost heap.

—Robert Olen Butler

Five exclamation marks, the sure sign of an insane mind.

—Terry Pratchett

Typefaces are to the written word what different dialects are to different languages.

—Steven Heller

People want recognition of their work to help them believe in themselves.

--Dorothy Miller
Richardson

When I read something saying I've not done anything as good as 'Catch-22' I'm tempted to reply, 'Who has?'

—Joseph Heller

I have an idea that the only thing which makes it possible to regard this world we live in without disgust is the beauty which now and then men create out of the chaos. The pictures they paint, the music they compose, the books they write, and

the lives they lead. Of all these the richest in beauty is the beautiful life. That is the perfect work of art.

—W. Somerset Maugham

We are cups, constantly and quietly being filled. The trick is, knowing how to tip ourselves over and let the beautiful stuff out.

—Ray Bradbury

Massive waste is simply part of the writing journey. A lot goes down the drain.

—Lauren Rosa

No one ever found wisdom without also being a fool. Writers, alas, have to be fools in public, while the rest of the human race can cover its tracks.

—Erica Jong

Creativity involves breaking out of established patterns in order to look at things in a different way.

—Edward de Bono

The crown of literature is poetry. It is its end and aim. It is the sublimest activity of the human mind. It is the achievement of beauty and delicacy. The writer of prose can only step aside when the poet passes.

—W. Somerset Maugham

Artist—musicians, painters, writers, poets, always seem to have had the most accurate perception of what is really going on around them, not the official version or the popular perception of contemporary life.

—Billy Joel

By 75, creativity, originality, and productivity are pretty much gone for the vast, vast majority of us. Einstein famously said, ‘A person who has not made his great contribution to science before the age of 30 will never do so.’

—Ezekiel J. Emanuel

Einstein famously said, ‘A person who has not made his great contribution to science before the age of 30 will never do so.’ He was extreme in his assessment. And wrong. Dean Keith Simonton, at the University of California at Davis, a luminary among researchers on age and creativity, synthesized numerous studies to demonstrate a typical age-creativity curve: creativity rises rapidly as a career commences, peaks about 20 years into the career, at about age 40 or 45, and then enters a slow, age-related decline.

—Ezekiel J. Emanuel

The writing career is not a romantic one. The writer's life may be colorful, but his work itself is rather drab.

—Mary Roberts Rinehart

A writer is a world trapped inside a person.

— Victor Hugo

Writing is a delicious agony.

—Gwendolyn Brooks

Writers block occurs when a writer has nothing to say. Unfortunately not all writers experience it.

--Ron Brackin

Every creative action disturbs the universe.

—E. L. Konigsburg

Writing is about taking everyday observations, things which people see almost every day of their lives, and yet bringing it to their attention for the very first time.

--Jamie L. Harding

What is hell to a writer? Hell is being too busy to find the time to write or being unable to find the inspiration. Hell is suddenly finding the words but being away from your notebook or typewriter. Hell is when the verses slip away through your fingers and they never return again.

—R. M. Engelhardt

Writers are not just writers, they are creators of worlds, sculptors of the mind, they are architects of language.

--Jamie L. Harding

I decided to write short stories because they got rejected quicker.

—Caroline B. Cooney

If I were told that I could write a novel in which I should set forth the apparently correct attitudes toward all social questions, I would not devote even two hours of work to such a novel, but if I were told that what I write shall be read in twenty years by children of today, in that they will weep and smile over it and will fall in love with life, I would devote all my life and all my strength to it.

—Leo Tolstoy

Everyone who tells a story tells it differently, just to remind us that everybody sees it differently.

--Jeanette Winterson

Probably I, like a lot of people, became a writer in imitation of or in homage to the books I enjoyed. When you're so captivated by something, you think, could I do that? Hmm, let me try.

—Curtis Sittenfeld

The arts are a highway into the soul of the people.

--Arthur Miller

I don't have many friends, not the living, breathing sort at any rate. And I don't mean that in a sad and lonely way; I'm just not the type of person who accumulates friends or enjoys crowds. I'm good with words, but not the spoken kind; I've often thought what a marvelous thing it would be if I could only conduct relationships on paper. And I suppose, in a sense, that's what I do, for I've hundreds of the other sort, the friends contained within bindings, pages after glorious pages of ink, stories that unfold the same way every time but never lose their joy, that take me by the hand and lead me through doorways into worlds of great terror and rapturous delight. Exciting, worthy, reliable companions—full of wise counsel, some of them—but sadly ill-equipped to offer the use of a spare bedroom for a month or two.

—Kate Morton

Originality in literature is only a new coat of paint on an old house.

—Austin O'Malley

Revision is the spiritual practice of transformation—of seeing text, and therefore the world, with new eyes. Done well, revision returns us to our original love.

—Elizabeth Jarrett
Andrew

Writers are readers inspired to emulation.

—Saul Bellow

Writers are generally seen as balky, obstacles to the forward flow of the project. They take time. They want money. They are typically the first element on a picture, the people whose job it is to invent a world sufficiently compelling to interest actors and directors, and, as the first element, they are often unwilling to recognize the necessity for keeping the front money down, for cutting their fees in order to get a project going. 'Everyone,' they are told, is taking a cut ('everyone' in this instance generally means every one of the writers), yet they insist on 'irresponsible' fees. A director who gets several million dollars a picture will often complain, quite bitterly, about being 'held up' by the demands of his writers. 'You're haggling over pennies,' a director once complained to me.

—Joan Didion

Writing in English is the most ingenious torture ever devised for sins committed in previous lives.

—James Joyce

The material came bubbling up inside like a geyser or an oil gusher. It streamed up of its own accord, down my arm and out of my fountain pen in a torrent of six thousand words a day.

—C. S. Forester

When F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel, *The Beautiful and the Damned*, was published, everybody asked his wife Zelda how closely the heroin was modeled after her own career. 'It seems to me,' replied Mrs. Fitzgerald after some thought, 'that on one page I recognized a portion of an old diary of mine which disappeared shortly after my marriage, and also scraps of letters which sound to me vaguely familiar. In fact, Mr. Fitzgerald—I believe that is how he spells his name—seems to believe that plagiarism begins at home.'

—Bennett Cerf

A satirist is a man who discovers unpleasant things about himself and then says them about other people.

—Peter McArthur

Writing is an extreme privilege but it's also a gift. It's a gift to yourself and it's a gift of giving a story to someone.

—Amy Tan

For most digital-age writers, writing is rewriting. We grope, cut, block, paste, and twitch, panning for gold onscreen by deleting bucketloads of crap. Our analog ancestors had to polish every line mentally before hammering it out mechanically. Rewrites cost them months, meters of ink ribbon, and pints of Tippex. Poor sods.

--David Mitchell

At the end of a miserable day, instead of grieving my virtual nothing, I can always look at my loaded wastepaper basket and tell myself that if I failed, at least I took a few trees down with me.

--David Sedaris

Writing a novel is a terrible experience, during which the hair often falls out and the teeth decay. I'm always irritated by people who imply that writing fiction is an escape from reality. It is a plunge into reality and it's very shocking to the system.

--Flannery O'Connor

Style is the substance of the subject called unceasingly to the surface.

—Victor Hugo

Nothing needs to happen to a writer's life after they are 20. By then they've experienced more than enough to last their creative life.

—Flannery O'Connor

Technology allows more people to tell more stories in more ways. Storytelling knows no boundaries. I believe print and web can work beautifully together.

--Donna Talarico

People have no idea what a hard job it is for two writers to be friends. Sooner or later you have to talk about each other's work.

—Anatole Broyard

You could write the best book in the world but if nobody knows about it, it is nothing.

--Brandon Reece Taylor

The older I get, the more acutely I am aware that the vast majority of what is written remains unread.

—Novelist Jhumpa
Lahiri

Every single writer I met likened writing for television to one thing--laying track for an incoming speeding train. The story is the track and you gotta keep laying it down because of the train. That train is production. You keep writing, you keep laying track down, no matter what, because the train of production is coming toward you—no matter what. Every eight days, the crew needs to be prepared to prepare a new episode—find locations, build sets, design costumes, find props, plan shots. And every eight days after that, the crew needs to film a new episode. Every eight days. Eight days to prep. Eight days to shoot. Eight days, eight days, eight days, eight days. Which means every eight days, that crew needs a brand-new script. And my job is to damn well provide them with one. Every. Eight. Days. That train of production is a'coming. Every eight days that crew on that soundstage better have something to shoot. Because the worst thing you can do is halt or derail production and cost the studio hundreds of thousands of dollars while everyone waits. That is how you go from being a TV writer to being a failed TV writer.

--Shonda Rhimes

Publication is a self-invasion of privacy.

—Marshall McLuhan

Write in such a way as that you can be readily understood by both the young and the old, by men as well as women, even by children.

—Ho Chi Minh

An author departs, he does not die.

—Dinah Maria Mulock

I was driven to go into book writing by the very nature of journalism and blogging. Both are ephemeral. Journalists and bloggers can have humongous egos. But in the end, what they write is really a passing show. I wanted something more lasting—a record of sorts, something people can look back to and relish again like hot, home-brewed coffee.

--Barista Uno

The story unfolded quickly as I typed, in a way I was becoming familiar with. There was something about putting the truth on paper, bringing facts into the light of day where everyone could look at them, that made my fingers move faster—it was becoming one of my favorite sensations on earth.

--Gwenda Bond

Style and voice are different. Style is standard conventions of writing; voice is the distinct way an individual puts words together. All good writers have a near-uniform understanding of style, but a voice all their own.

--Naveed Saleh

Reading usually precedes writing. And the impulse to write is almost always fired by reading. Reading, the love of reading, is what makes you dream of becoming a writer.

--Susan Sontag

Like every other author, I have looked upon it as my right to arrange my facts to suit my purpose, which was to entertain.

—Somerset Maugham

Writing the last page of the first draft is the most enjoyable moment in writing. It's one of the most enjoyable moments in life, period.

—Nicholas Sparks

If I had a son who wanted to write, I should wring his neck—out of sheer paternal affection.

—Voltaire

Hunter S. Thompson once transcribed *The Great Gatsby* just so he could experience what it felt like to write a masterpiece.

—Don Vaughan

I am a better person through the people I write.

—Chantal Meek

Writing gives you the illusion of control, and then you realize it's just an illusion, that people are going to bring their own stuff into it.

—David Sedaris

The real experience of writing a book or a story, if you think of it, is made up of thousands of tiny intuitive leaps. That moment when an image pops into your head and converts into language. You adjust that and boom, you typed it, and it's good or it's bad. That's an almost indescribable thing.

—George Saunders

This is not an option, this writing thing. It is a way of being. It is the air that is breathed—parts of our lives that we inhale, take what we need, and exhale those bits and pieces back into a blanket of new life. It cannot be understood by those not marked by the curse of ink.

—Chantal Meek

I am 40 years old, well past the age of being young and trendy—but the last time I checked, writing doesn't have an expiration date.

—Pete Croatto

Writing is like walking in a deserted street. Out of the dust in the street you make a mud pie.

—John le Carre

Writing is like jazz. It can be learned, but it can't be taught.

—Paul Desmond

Although [state] high school standards and courses tend to emphasize literature, most of the reading students will encounter in college or on the job is informational in nature (e.g., textbooks, manuals, articles, briefs and essays)...Most of the writing students will do in college and work is to inform and persuade, often requiring students to use evidence to support a position. Research also is cited as an important skill for college and work. State standards tend to give these types of writing short shrift, emphasizing narrative writing instead.

—*Achieve, Inc.*

There is no time for despair, no place for self-pity, no need for silence, no room for fear. We speak, we write, we do language. That is how civilizations heal.

—Toni Morrison

As writers, it is our job not only to imagine, but to witness.

—Dani Shapiro

If you submit much, at some point you've gotten a rejection that said your piece was not quite right for a particular publication. I have gotten many of these, and here's how I used to read those letters: 'We hate you. We hate you so much. We can't believe you had the gall to submit to us. We'd have responded to your submission sooner, but we were too busy laughing our heads off.' Then I became the editor of a small Jewish newspaper, and I started to receive queries and completed articles that were way outside the purview of what we publish, necessitating that I reject them. At no point did I hate the person who submitted the inappropriate piece, nor did I spend any time laughing my head off, because I am not 9.

—Dani Shapiro

The idea is to write it so that people hear it and it slides through the brain and goes straight to the heart.

—Maya Angelou

Writing is frustration—it's daily frustration, not to mention humiliation. It's just like baseball: you fail two-thirds of the time.

—Philip Roth

Authors from whom others steal should not complain, but rejoice. Where there is no game there are no poachers.

—Marie von
Ebner-Eschenbach

Reality can be beaten with enough imagination.

—Unknown

When I am dead,
I hope it may be said:
His sins were scarlet,
but his books were read.

—Hilaire Belloc

Writing is not necessarily something to be ashamed of, but do it in private and wash your hands afterwards.

—Robert A. Heinlein

Once the disease of reading has laid hold upon the system it weakens it so that it falls an easy prey to that other scourge which dwells in the ink pot and festers in the quill. The wretch takes to writing.

--Virginia Woolf

Everything in writing begins with language. Language begins with listening.

—Jeanette Winterson

Reading Stephen King's book, *On Writing*, was like being cornered and forced to have a long, drawn out mental enema.

—Mary Garden

People who keep journals have life twice.

—Jessamyn West

In ancient times, the recipe for writing ink was bare bones—literally. It included charred bones to tint the mixture. Gum from the acacia tree was an ingredient in ancient Egypt and Chinese inks. It binds together the other ingredients and helps the ink adhere to paper, bark or silk. Other ingredients included charcoal or soot taken from the residue of burned lamp oil (called lamp black) and varnish made by melting animal skins and bones. Ink from India, called India ink, was formed into a stick that was mixed with water and applied with a stylus or pen.

In the Middle Ages, two more ingredients were added. One was tannic acid, found inside a tree gall—a bump in tree bark caused by parasites. The other was iron salts, which can still be found in inks today. Colors used for lettering ranged from blue-black to green. Charge seashells made a prized purple ink used exclusively by Roman emperors. Brown came from cuttlefish ink; red from crushed bugs called cochineal; white and red were made from lead.

—J. Hope Babowice

Art is not a handicraft, it is the transmission of feeling the artist has experienced.

—Leo Tolstoy

Some nights you go to bed thinking you've written some brilliant stuff, and you wake up the next morning and you realize it is just pure bullshit. When the book came out, I got a copy and cut off the real cover. I put on another binding myself, drew a new cover and put the title: *Transcendent Bullshit*.

—Tom Wolfe

This is the truth every author must learn to accept: writers write not just to tell stories, not just to entertain and enlighten and inspire, and certainly not just to earn a living—we write to learn who we are. You are not your books, or your awards, or your rejection letters, or your fan mail, or your website. You are what interests you most, what pulls your attention like a magnet, what wakes you up with a jolt of excitement, the ideas that crave expression. Nothing is more unique to you than what's going on internally, within the confines of your own mind. That fantastic intersection of curiosity and imagination is who you were when you first dreamed of telling stories for a living, and who you will be when you've published your 10th bestseller. It's all you'll ever be.

—William Kenower

Commas in the *New Yorker* fall with the precision of knives in a circus act, outlining the victim.

—E. B. White

Ending a novel is almost like putting a child to sleep—it can't be done abruptly.

—Colm Toibin

There are head books, heart books, and pocket books. One you write just for the money. One you write because it's something you've always wanted to write—it's important to your soul to write. And one you write because it's interesting—it's something you simply want to explore.

—Jane Yolen

Even if I knew for certain that I would never have anything published again, and would never make another cent from it, I would still keep on writing.

—Brenda Ueland

It was one of those evenings when men feel that truth, goodness and beauty are one. In the morning, when they commit their discovery to paper, when others read it written there, it looks wholly ridiculous.

—Aldous Huxley

Maybe you're one of those people who writes poems, but rarely reads them. Let me put this as delicately as I can: If you don't read, your writing is going to suck.

--Kim Addonizio

We writers—and especially writers for children, but all writers—have an obligation to our readers: it's the obligation to write true things, especially important when we are creating tales of people who do not exist in places that never were—to understand that truth is not in what happens but what it tells us about who we are. Fiction is the lie that tells the truth, after all. We have an obligation not to bore our readers, but to make them need to turn the pages. One of the best cures for a reluctant reader, after all, is a tale they cannot stop themselves from reading. And while we must tell our readers true things and give them weapons and give them armor and pass on whatever wisdom we have gleaned from our short stay on this green world, we have an obligation not to preach, not to lecture, not to force predigested morals and messages down our readers' throats like adult birds feeding their babies pre-masticated maggots; and we have an obligation never, ever, under any circumstances, to write anything for children that we would not want to read ourselves. We have an obligation to understand and to acknowledge that as writers for children we are doing important work, because if we mess it up and write dull books that turn children away from reading and from books, we've lessened our own future and diminished theirs.

—Neil Gaiman

I am most alive and most fulfilled sitting alone in a room, hoping that those words forming on paper in the Smith Corona will be the first perfect play ever written in a single draft.

--Neil Simon

I don't want to restrict the life of a play to a particular production. The original actors might leave after the first six months, and I want the play to last 30 or 40 years. You write for the character, not the actor on the stage.

--Neil Simon

I know that I have reached the pinnacle of rewards. There's no more money anyone can pay me that I need. There are no awards they can give me that I haven't won. I have no reason to write another play except that I am alive and I like to do it.

—Neil Simon

An artist carries on throughout his life a mysterious, uninterrupted conversation with his public.

—Maurice Chevalier

I had learned already never to empty the well of my writing, but always to stop when there was still something there in the deep part of the well, and let it refill at night from the springs that fed it.

—Ernest Hemingway

Kids who hate reading inevitably end up being terrible writers.

—Wataru Watari

Writers, by their very nature, live a thousand lives and die a thousand times. They experience loss each time a character dies. They revel in exquisite pain and fear the writer's block that comes with finding happiness. In all my time, I've never met an author who didn't have a tortured soul or a personal demon.

—Larry Ray Palmer

Sometimes,
when inspiration runs dry,
I drink classical music
until my words spill out.

—Kamand Kojouri

The creative urge is the demon that will not accept anything second rate.

—Agnes de Mille

Writing is the spectrum through which the chaos of life can be seen, studied and understood.

—Stewart Stafford

If you only write when inspired, you may be a fairly decent poet, but you'll never be a novelist.

—Neil Gaiman

Writers are archeologists of themselves.

—Vicki Grove

I write in order to comprehend.

—Anna Kamienska

How we always long to become something more than just one being, more than a solitary brain inside an isolated organism.

—Nicolai Houm

Writing is the most fun you can have by yourself.

—Terry Pratchett

I'll be writing as long as I can hold a pen in my curled, crimped arthritic hands and then I'll dictate it, if it comes to that. They'll have to pry my pen out of my cold, dead fingers—and even then, I'll fight 'em for it. Guaranteed.

—Wanda Lea Brayton

I can't write, it's all a fantasy: a kind of circling obsession.

—Philip Larkin

Ideas must work through the brains and arms of men, or they are no better than dreams.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

The empty page is a white flag of...surrender.

—Ilya Kaminsky

How could poetry and literature have arisen from something as plebian as the cuneiform equivalent of grocery-store bar codes? I prefer the version in which Prometheus brought writing to man from the gods. But then I remind myself that... we should not be too fastidious about where great ideas come from. Ultimately, they all come from a wrinkled organ that at its healthiest has the color and consistency of toothpaste, and in the end only withers and dies.

—Alice Weaver Flaherty

What art offers is space—a certain breathing room for the spirit.

—John Updike

The most difficult and complicated part of the writing process is the beginning.

—A. B. Yehoshua

When you write with a pencil, you are, in a very real sense, drawing. You're laying down the two-dimensional images of words. You can write little or big; with light pressure or heavy; you can print carefully or race along in whatever version of cursive is yours....You don't have to baby a pencil. You can leave it lying around, you can even lose it without too much grief. You can write with in a canoe or on a mountain ledge, or upside-down while lying in bed. No worries about ink, mechanisms, batteries.

—Elizabeth Sims

Miniature microphones and voice-to-text software literally enable us to write as fast as we can talk. The next phase is nearly upon us, where a machine will write my novels for me—and no double publish them, collect royalties and spend the money on nice things for itself.

—Elizabeth Sims

There's no denying, for sheer efficiency and volume of work, nothing surpasses modern computer and word-processing software. Those things keep getting better and better: Where once WordPerfect was the living end, it now makes you want to slam your face on a brick . We're all indebted to Microsoft Word and similar software for making our process incredibly easy....for the final product, there's nothing like deleting and inserting with up-to-the-minute software.

—Elizabeth Sims

Whether taken from 200 B.C., Victorian England, or the Roaring 20s, quotations yield insight both into the nature of the age and also into the nature of the people who originated the quotes. Quotations embody habits of thought, customs, and moral values. By carefully selecting from the writing of one period, one can unfold, little by little, characteristics and values of that particular age. Similarly, by selecting passages from a particular author's writings, a teacher can illustrate the style, techniques, values, and the unique traits of that writer.

—Dan L. Miller

Any discipline can help your writing: logic, mathematics, theology, and of course and particularly drawing. Anything that helps you to see, anything that makes you look. The writer should never be ashamed of staring. There is nothing that doesn't require his attention.

—Flannery O'Connor

A writer of fiction lives in fear. Each new day demands new ideas and he can never be sure whether he is going to come up with them or not.

—Roald Dahl

A hammer made of deadlines is the surest tool for crushing writer's block.

—Ryan Lilly

The quality of your writing is absolutely capped at your understanding of human behavior. You'll never write above what you know about people.

—Tony Gilroy

Most people put off my mother's erratic behavior to the fact that she was a writer, as if that just explained everything. To me that was just an excuse. I mean, brain surgeons can be crazy too, but no one says that's all right.

—Sarah Dessen

The first requisite for immortality is death.

—Stanislaw Lec

You have to write the book that wants to be written. And if the book will be too difficult for grown-ups, then you write it for children.

—Madeleine L'Engle

It's the craziest contradiction we deal with as writers: We're the freest of the world's free spirits and we're constantly strapped to rigid works schedules. Publishers all insist on deadlines. Authors who want their writing published learn to meet them.

—Franklynn Peterson
and Judi
Kesselman-Turkel

If you have to use the English language in almost any structured way in your job, you will have a double, a quadruple difficulty in finding your English language at night and on Sundays. When I had to earn my living for many years, I taught French. I should have taught mathematics. By teaching math or biology or physics, you come refreshed to writing.

—Thornton Wilder

I had always said to myself that forty was the cut off point of my apprenticeship which may for some people sound like a very long one, but the novel as art is a middle-aged art.

—Jane Rule

Reading and writing cannot be separated. Reading is breathing in; writing is breathing out.

—Pam Allyn

I loathed every day and regret every day I spent in school. I like to be taught to read and write and add and then be left alone.

—Woody Allen

I will never do anything like this to her and our children again...I will revel in, truly revel in, the thought that I am no longer a writer.

—Karl Ove Knausgaard

I used to be embarrassed because I was just a comic-book writer while other people were building bridges or going on to medical careers. And then I began to realize: entertainment is one of the most important things in people's lives. Without it they might go off the deep end. I feel that if you're able to entertain people, you're doing a good thing.

—Stan Lee

The Covenant of the Arc: The screenwriting law that says: Every single character in your movie must change in the course of your story. The only characters who don't change are the bad guys.

—Blake Snyder

Why did I decide to start a diary today? Has something important happened? Have I discovered that my friends are keeping diaries of their own? No! I just want a friend. Somebody I can talk to about my everyday worries and joys. Somebody who'll feel what I feel, believe what I say and never reveal my secrets. No human being could ever be that kind of friend. Today, my diary, is the beginning of our deep friendship. Who knows how long it will last? It might even continue until the end of our lives.

—Renia Spiegel, Polish
Teen and
Holocaust Victim,
(1939)

I don't want to live for nothing like most people. I want to be useful or give pleasure to the people around me who don't yet know me. I must have something besides a husband and children, something that I can devote myself to! I want to go on living even after my death.

—Anne Frank

I am the best and sharpest critic of my own work. I know myself what is and what is not well written.

—Anne Frank

I once stayed in a hotel, next door to a well-known writer. He never talked about writing. Each night I heard his typewriter, hour after hour, past midnight. Everybody else in the hotel was asleep. The sound of that machine reminds me, still, that what writers do is write.

—Richard Bach

Success means accomplishing what you set out to do, and in my case, that was seeing my name on the cover of a book—which was the only objective I'd ever had. I felt like a success when my son, not yet two years old, pointed to the photo on the dust cover and said, 'Daddy!'

—Tom Clancy

Getting published is really exciting, but it's not the point of writing. The actual writing is what it's all about—the daily joy in sitting down to a blank page and crafting something beautiful or funny or heartwrenching or even just blah (depending on the day). While getting a book (and articles, and stories) published is a great ego boost, the real meaning in writing comes from the words flowing out of your fingertips—and the sense of achievement in a finished project.

—Bridget McNulty

For me, the job of writing is pretty uphill most of the time. It's like climbing a mountain—you get some fantastic views when you pause or when you get to the top, but the actual process can be tough. I'm sure there are people out there who enjoy writing, and I wish them all the best, but I'm not like that. I wish I could enjoy the process more, but I think I've come to accept that for it to work, I have to be uncomfortable.

—Mark Haddon

Just thinking about distress to one's self may not have and usually does not have the same outcome as writing it down. Why not? First, because the writing is 'official,' indelible; it takes time and requires attention. Writing is also a matter of doing something other than emoting over the unwanted feelings; it may be reciprocally inhibiting the anxiety. Writing offers an 'out,' a relief from the binding anxiety, and relief from the redundant issues of problem-anxiety-distress-distraction-further anxiety. The individual who stops to write something down is more likely to remember his effort and can retain a record of having done the writing. Writing forces one to enter into a different set of activities, compared to 'just thinking about the matter.'

—E. L. Phillips

Being goal-oriented instead of self-oriented is crucial. I know so many people who want to be writers. But let me tell you, they really don't want to be writers. They want to have been writers. They wish they had a book in print. They don't want to go through the work of getting the damn book out. There is a huge difference.

—James Michener

THE ADVANTAGES OF WRITING THERAPY:

- The preparation of a 'written production' such as a diary, autobiography, short story, poem, letter, etc., by a client isn't an expressive and creative act. It both analyzes and synthesizes emotion in a deeply personal way and, as such, works counter to repressive and regressive forces in the personality. It is catharsis in the best sense. It heals through its major symbolism—not unlike Greek drama—and because the unexpressible can often be expressed.
- The content of the 'written production' provides materials for analysis similar to dreams, fantasies, projective tests, and other imaginative productions. The language of the 'written production' is also as much a source of parapraxis as are slips of the tongue, forgetting, etc.
- 'Written production' further interval therapy by providing for rehearsal of therapeutic hours. In this way the development of insight and cognition is encouraged. Above all, if the psychotherapist is the respondent of the 'written production,' his presence in interval-therapy is given a tangible imaginal form.
- A 'written production' usually has a wider social base than an individual therapy session. In this sense, it is more outer-directed for it involves family, peer groups, authority figures, etc., in greater quantities than in the sessions. Since society is the place where the client ultimately makes his life, written productions permit him a wider social integration of analytic material.
- My impression has been that, under certain circumstances, the time required for treatment may be eclipsed by the judicious use of 'written productions.'
- Under emergency circumstances of separation of client and therapist, 'written productions' have a place along with the telephone, standby colleagues, etc.

—Arthur Burton

BENEFITS OF WRITING THERAPY IN CLASSROOM SETTINGS:

- Many students are enabled to discuss their needs and their problems.
- The therapeutic writing facilitates progress in counseling interviews.
- Students become more willing to go into the subject matter of the class and are more successful in it.
- Learning takes place through the curriculum without lowering standards.
- Students assume more responsibility in classroom activities.

- Students achieve an increased sense of security.
- Students gain more self insight.
- As more value is placed upon individuals, they become more aware of themselves

—Joseph S. Zaccaria,
Harold
Alton Moses, &
Jeff S. Hollowell

Books used to be written by humanity's greatest thinkers, or at least our greatest entertainers. Now every halfwit can publish his verbal diarrhea. And millions of shitty, mediocre, uninspired, trite books are drowning out mankind's greatest literary accomplishments.

—Oliver Markus Malloy

Most self-published books are kinda like dreams. Your dream was interesting to you, but when you tell others what you dreamed last night, their eyes glaze over, because your nightly hallucinations really aren't all that interesting to anyone else.

—Oliver Markus Malloy

Writing is hard work, and don't let anybody tell you otherwise. It's hard on the eyes, the back, the fanny, the disposition and the nail polish.

—Louise Dickinson Rich

Writing at its best is simply taking dictation from your soul.

—Catherine Carrigan

A writer gets to live yet another life every time he or she creates a new story.

—Pawan Mishra

When people shine a little light on their monster, we find out how similar most of our monsters are.

—Anne Lamott

What is writing but an expression of my own life?

—Zane Grey

Writing is a solitary endeavor, being an author is not.

—Karen A. Chase

When you put down the good things you ought to have done, and leave out the bad ones you did do—well, that's Memoirs.

—Will Rogers

I'm not a writer. Ernest Hemingway was a writer. I just have a vivid imagination and type 90 WPM.

—Tiffany Madison

Constant work, constant writing and constant revision. The real writer learns nothing from life. He is more like an oyster or a sponge. What he takes in he takes in normally the way any person takes in experience. But it is what is done with it in his mind, if he is a real writer, that makes his art.

—Gore Vidal

Have you ever pondered the miracle of popcorn? It starts out as a tiny, little, compact kernel with magic trapped inside that when agitated, bursts to create something marvelously desirable. It's sort of like those tiny, little thoughts trapped inside an author's head that—in an excited explosion of words—suddenly become a captivating fairy tale!

—Richelle E. Goodrich

I have often believed the pen to be a needle, and ink to be a thread. Each story is an intricately woven tapestry and with each word I invariably sew a piece of myself into the page.

—Shaun Hick

Similar to any other restless act of philosophizing, writing is an attempt to understand our world. Writing enables a person to congeal the fragments of a disorderly life into a meaningful collage. It encourages us to iron out internal inconsistencies and damper an outraged heart. When we stumble in life, writing allows us to pick ourselves up and see the beauty and virtue in doing so. Writing feverously enables us to revive a depleted spirit, discover a joyous stand in the wilderness, and find a means to be at peace with the world.

—Kilroy J. Oldster

I am a compost heap, and everything I interact with, every experience I've had, gets shoveled onto the heap where it eventually mulches down, is digested and excreted by worms, and rots. It's from that rich, dark humus, the combination of what you encountered, what you know and what you've forgotten, that ideas start to grow.

—Anne Patchett

A personal essay is probably the most malleable form of writing style, because it enables a writer to engage in a felicitous conversation with oneself. The more formal rules that govern academic writing are largely inapplicable to personal essay writing. Personal essays are free from the forbidding cadence and rigid structure of thesis writing. A personal essay's lilt reflects the movement of the writer's mind.

—Kilroy J. Oldster

Writing seemed to me to be the most natural thing to do during my college days. I could not open up to others and so I started writing my thoughts in my journal. It gave me a sense of calm and peace.

And now after so many years to write my thoughts in my journal still seems to me to be the most natural thing to do. I am still not able to open up easily in front of people. And so writing keeps me sane!

—Avijeet Das

All methods of writing represent an intellectual technique of inquiry and expression. Both personal essay writing and poetry provide a reputable method of a person sharing their physical and emotional experiences, observations, and thoughts.

Kilroy J. Oldster

Sometimes the title IS the story, and the rest is just an explanation.

—James K. Bowers

We write more when we hurt. Facing a physical, emotional, or spiritual crisis, a person might turn to writing as a panacea. A person overcome with frustration or doubt might attempt to regain their intellectual and spiritual bearings by probing the matrix of their confused thoughts in a logical or creative manner.

—Kilroy J. Oldster

All writing is essentially autobiographical because our composed thought patterns reflect our accumulated life experiences. At some level, every type of work, whether it is literature, poetry, music, painting, photography, sculpture, or architecture, is always a portrait of the creator. We cannot escape ourselves any more than we can outrun our shadow.

—Kilroy J. Oldster

A writer turns to paper to stem a burble of pain, shut the door on sadness, and allow the mind to release unsavory obsessions.

—Kilroy J. Oldster

Writing is a form of intense thinking that takes a person on a journey into previously uncharted territory of the writer's mind.

—Kilroy J. Oldster

All writers want to place their mark upon human consciousness by creating a physical record of their distinctive thoughts and an index of their cherished emotional memories.

—Kilroy J. Oldster

Writing is the act of finding out what I think.

—Stephen King

Writing therapy can serve as an ancillary vehicle for self-insight. During a disciplinary interview a student may be defensive and actually more worried about saving himself or herself or covering up his or her errors than in taking a thoughtful look at himself or herself and his or her behavior. During a writing session, however, he or she will have time to think and reflect, and while still perhaps trying to cover up his or her actions, the writing may prove cathartic and start in motion the process of self-evaluation and self-insight. The student, unhampered by the dean, now has time to cool down, reflect, and express his or her feelings in a comfortable atmosphere. Rather than battling the dean in an interview, the student is only struggling with himself or herself and his or her own problem. He or she may very well, during the writing, even solve the problem or realize the counter productivity of his or her behavior.

—Dan L. Miller

Another important function of writing therapy may also help the dean counsel students in need of help. A student who has no friends, is immature and being teased by other students, or for any reason has a strong need to communicate with someone in a position to help him or her, may be able to keep in close and constant touch with the dean through emails. At any time at home or at school when the student feels troubled and needs to communicate with a friend, he or she should feel free to do so through an email to the dean. The dean should have established with the student a positive relationship that would promote this type of correspondence, and, in fact, the dean could build a large portion of his or her counseling around this particular system of communication. Realistically, the dean cannot spend as much time in counseling as many students would want or as much time as many students may need. A student taking advantage of this system of communication would write as long an email as he or she needed. Many students are discouraged when they want to talk with the dean or their counselor but can't because the dean is out or busy. If the student does get in to see the dean, the dean may be rushed because he or she has other work to attend to. By writing an email, the student is free to say whatever he or she wants and to communicate for as long as he or she wants. The dean, of course, should also make it a point to keep in personal contact with these types of students and to counsel them as often as possible. The email writing system of communication can, moreover, spread the services of the dean over a larger portion of the student body and extend the length of therapy and counseling.

—Dan L. Miller

When I write a novel it is like I am taking a thought for a walk.

—Aminatta Forna

Everyone lies about writing. They lie about how easy it is or how hard it was. They perpetuate a romantic idea that writing is some beautiful experience that takes place in an architectural room filled with leather novels and chai tea.

—Amy Poehler

Art is not a metonym for truth telling. All art is a form of a falsifying; otherwise why would anyone need art to tell us what we already know? Art makes us stand back and see what lies outside the four corners of a canvas, it makes us look inside ourselves and realize the sublime truth that previously eluded us. Art makes us realize what already lies within ourselves waiting for the resolute seeker to discover. Art frequently concentrates on the blemishes of nature. When one sees nature disfigured, it reveals both sides of the same notion

—Kilroy J. Oldster

The ultimate goal of any writer is to explore the lightest and darkest aspects of being. If a writer accomplishes this task, the work might assist other people endure their own heartaches and appreciate more deeply the profundity of life.

—Kilroy J. Oldster

The irony that all writers confront and must overcome is that the writer is afraid to commence, frightened to finish what is slowly becoming an embodiment of oneself, and terrified that unless they do complete their manuscript that all their effort will remain stillborn.

—Kilroy J. Oldster

Sometimes when I prepare to write, I feel the same sensation wash over me as if my toes were curling over the brink of a high cliff, my gaze peering downward into a dark pond, and I anxiously wonder, will the water prove deep enough? Will my words be satisfactory?

—Richelle E. Goodrich

Writing is one of the best therapies that exist. Either on paper, computer, phone or tablet, in any form it is helpful. Whenever you feel like writing, just do it. Let the words flow out of your mind and heart. It doesn't have to make sense to anyone but you. Some people may find it easier to express themselves in writing than verbally. While you will have time to choose the best words, you will also escape the fear of immediate reaction. Take your time and play with the words until you feel you got them right. One can write about anything. About a dream, a fantasy, a love story, happenings during the day, an apology or a greeting, everything is permitted in the world of writing. There it is not good or bad.

—Nico J. Genes

I could never stand to be a writer. Not a real writer. It's entirely too awful, having thoughts that refuse to become sentences.

—Caitlín R. Kiernan

You will find that, if you continue to write fiction, every character you create is partly you.

—Stephen King

We write, not because we claim to know more than others, but perhaps because we want to know more than others. Writers are explorers.

—Bangambiki
Habyarimana

There is good news and bad news regarding the literacy levels and literary engagement of today's youth. The good news is that today's young people are reading and writing at high levels heretofore unachievable. They are engaged in literacy activities for major portions of their day. The bad news is that their reading and writing is comprised of communicating through social media—Twitter, Facebook, and texting. Although the level of literary engagement is high, the quality of the engagement is quite low. Texters and chatters communicate with phrases, single words, sentence fragments, misspellings, myriad abbreviations, web slang, acronyms, and emoticons-:).

—Dan L. Miller

I cannot find any patience for those people who believe that you start writing when you sit down at your desk and pick up your pen and finish writing when you put down your pen again; a writer is always writing, seeing everything through a thin mist of words, fitting swift little descriptions to everything he sees, always noticing. Just as I believe that a painter cannot sit down to his morning coffee without noticing what color it is, so a writer cannot see an odd little gesture without putting a verbal description to it, and ought never to let a moment go by undescribed.

—Shirley Jackson

Writing is daydreaming with ink.

—Liana Brooks

If you're not creating, you're disintegrating.

—Tawny Lara

I wrote the last sentence of *The Patron Saint of Liars* in early April and stumbled out of my apartment and into the beautiful spring feeling panicked and amazed. There is no single experience in my life as a writer to match that moment, the blue of the sky and the breeze drifting in from the bay. I had done the thing I had always wanted to do: I had written a book, all the way to the end. Even if it proved to be terrible, it was mine.

—Ann Patchett

Writing is just rubbing words together long enough to make a fire.

—Gillian Marchenko

There's a difference between the 'art' of writing and the 'craft' of writing. Art is subjective, its beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder, but craft is objective. There is a right way and a wrong way to craft.

—Gerard de Marigny

Writing is therapeutic. It helps you cope with issues that seem gargantuan at the time. The process of expressing yourself about a problem, editing your thoughts, and writing some more can help you control issues that you face.

—Guy Kawasaki

I can't wait to get back to writing today so I can see what happens next.

—Kim Cormack

That is what kills political writing, this absurd pretense that you are delivering a great utterance. You never do. You are just a puzzled man making notes about what you think. You are not building the Pantheon, then why act like a graven image? You are drawing sketches in the sand which the sea will wash away.

--Walter Lippmann

The discipline of writing something down is the first step toward making it happen.

--Lee Iacocca

Of all the arts in which the wise excel, nature's chief masterpiece is writing well.

--Duke of Buckingham

The biggest obstacle to professional writing is the necessity for changing a typewriter ribbon.

--Robert Benchley

Writing ought either to be the manufacture of stories for which there is a market demand—a business as safe and commendable as making soap or breakfast foods—or it should be an art, which is always a search for something for which there is no market demand, something new and untried, where the values are intrinsic and have nothing to do with standardized values.

--Willa Cather

Writing crystallizes thought and thought produces action.

--Paul J. Meyer

So often is the virgin sheet of paper more real than what one has to say, and so often one regrets having marred it.

—Harold Acton

For me, a page of good prose is where one hears the rain [and] the noise of battle.
—John Cheever

Writing is probably one-fifth coming up with the stuff, and four-fifths self-editing again and again and again.

—David Mitchell

When I'm writing a novel, I feel like I have a funnel for a head and everything in my life and outside of it just pours into the story. I'm constantly traipsing through my own emotional landscape and experience, and I also steal from everyone else....And I'm always looking further afield, too. I dove into the study of classical music when writing *Sky* and visual art when writing *Sun*. I took courses in stone carving to better understand Jude and Guillermo and have been taking cooking classes for my new novel. For me, one of the best parts of novel writing is getting to learn about things that interest me via my characters.

—Jandy Nelson

The pen sometimes builds a more enduring monument than can the hammer or chisel.

—James Lendall Basford

A man may speak with his tongue and only be heard around the corner; but another man may speak with his pen and be heard around the globe.

—James Lendall Basford

Ink on paper is as beautiful to me as flowers on the mountains.

—Terri Guillemets

I'd rather be caught holding up a bank than stealing so much as a two-word phrase from another writer.

—Jack Smith

A well-disposed research librarian is a writer's best friend, as essential as ink.

—Barbara Rogan

There is a zone to writing. It takes some effort, some hours of struggle to reach, but once you're there, the words flow as if from a spigot. Thoughts fill up the page. Your fingers function independently of your body and brain as you tap out the poetry. It's the groove that baseball hitters speak of. The hot hand that basketball players relish. It is that sweet moment in a race car when everything slows down despite the speedometer reading 175 miles per hour. Everything doable in life has a zone like this.

--Joe Kita

You write to communicate to the hearts and minds of others what's burning inside you. And we edit to let the fire show through the smoke.

—Arthur Polotnik

How vain it is to sit down to write when you have not stood up to live!

—Henry David Thoreau

It is impossible to discourage the real writers—they don't give a damn what you say, they're going to write.

—Sinclair Lewis

Writing is utter solitude, the descent into the cold abyss of oneself.

—Franz Kafka

One ought only to write when one leaves a piece of one's own flesh in the inkpot, each time one dips one's pen.

—Leo Tolstoy

I write because I'm afraid to say some things out loud.

—Gordon Atkinson

The arts are not a way to make a living. They are a very human way of making life more bearable. Practicing an art, no matter how well or badly, is a way to make your soul grow, for heaven's sake. Sing in the shower. Dance to the radio. Tell stories. Write a poem to a friend, even a lousy poem. Do it as well as you possible can. You will get an enormous reward. You will have created something.

—Kurt Vonnegut

Write what should not be forgotten.

—Isabel Allende

All I need is a sheet of paper
and something to write with, and then
I can turn the world upside down.

—Friedrich Nietzsche

A writer is a person who cares what words mean, what they say, how they say it. Writers know words are their way towards truth and freedom, and so they use them with care, with thought, with fear, with delight. By using words well they strengthen their souls. Story-tellers and poets spend their lives learning that skill and art of using words well. And their words make the souls of their readers stronger, brighter, deeper.

—Ursula K. Le Guin

At the point of the pen is the focus of the mind.

—James Lendall Basford

The best style is the style you don't notice.

—Somerset Maugham

We who make stories know that we tell lies for a living. But they are good lies that say true things, and we owe it to our readers to build them as best we can. Because somewhere out there is someone who needs that story. Someone who will grow up with a different landscape, who without that story will be a different person. And who with that story may have hope, or wisdom, or kindness, or comfort. And that is why we write.

—Neil Gaiman

Being a writer, is ultimately about asking yourself, How alive am I willing to be?

—Anne Lamott

The trouble with writing fiction is that it has to make sense, whereas real life doesn't.

—Iain M. Banks

Writing is a concentrated form of thinking. I don't know what I think about certain subjects, even today, until I sit down and try to write about them. Maybe I wanted to find more rigorous ways of thinking. We're talking now about the earliest writing I did and about the power of language to counteract the wallow of late adolescence, to define things, define muddled experience in economical ways. Let's not forget that writing is convenient. It requires the simplest tools. A young writer sees that with words and sentences on a piece of paper that costs less than a penny he can place himself more clearly in the world. Words on a page, that's all it takes to help him separate himself from the forces around him, streets and people and pressures and feelings. He learns to think about these things, to ride his own sentences into new perceptions.

—Don DeLillo

I knew in my bones that Emily Dickinson wouldn't have written even one poem if she'd had two howling babies, a husband bent on jamming another one into her, a house to run, a garden to tend, three cows to milk, twenty chickens to feed, and four hired hands to cook for. I knew then why they didn't marry. Emily and Jane and Louisa. I knew and it scared me. I also knew what being lonely was and I didn't want to be lonely my whole life. I didn't want to give up on my words. I didn't want to choose one over the other. Mark Twain didn't have to. Charles Dickens didn't.

—Jennifer Donnelly

Ink, a Drug.

—Vladimir Nabokov

Writing is finally about one thing: going into a room alone and doing it. Putting words on paper that have never been there in quite that way before. And although you are physically by yourself, the haunting Demon never leaves you, that Demon being the knowledge of your own terrible limitations, your hopeless inadequacy, the impossibility of ever getting it right. No matter how diamond-bright your ideas are dancing in your brain, on paper they are earthbound.

—William Goldman

The job of the writer is to take a close and uncomfortable look at the world they inhabit, the world we all inhabit, and the job of the novel is to make the corpse stink.

—Walter Mosley

novel rough draft is like bread dough; you need to beat the crap out of it for it to rise.

—Chris Baty

The modern ballpoint pen was invented by two Hungarian brother—George and Ladislao Bíró—who confirmed the advantage of quick-drying ink for use in pens. The first prototype was completed 1938. The pair fled Hungary during World War II and eventually ended up in Argentina. The new pens were favored by the British Royal Air Force during the war because they were much more useful at high altitudes than fountain pens.

—Roger Matile

A word is not the same with one writer as it is with another. One tears it from his guts. The other pulls it out of his overcoat pocket.

—Charles Péguy

A deadline is, simply put, optimism in its most kick-ass form. It's a potent force that, when wielded with respect, will level any obstacle in its path.

—Chris Baty

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.

—Seamus Heaney

Strong words outlast the paper they are written upon.

—Joseph Bruchac

Panicky despair is an underrated element of writing.

—Dave Barry

When I am writing, I am trying to find out who I am, who we are, what we're capable of, how we feel, how we lose and stand up, and go on from darkness into darkness. I'm trying for that. But I'm also trying for the language. I'm trying to see how it can really sound. I really love language. I love it for what it does for us, how it allows us to explain the pain and the glory, the nuances and delicacies of our existence. And then it allows us to laugh, allows us to show wit. Real wit is shown in language. We need language.

—Maya Angelou

No one wants to read poetry. You have to make it impossible for them to put the poem down—impossible for them to stop reading it, word after word. You have to keep them from closing the book.

—Muriel Rukeyser

Two things put me in the spirit to give. One is that I have come to think of everyone with whom I come into contact as a patient in the emergency room. I see a lot of gaping wounds and dazed expressions. Or, as Marianne Moore put it, 'The world's an orphan's home.' And this feels more true than almost anything else I know. But so many of us can be soothed by writing: think of how many times you have opened a book, read one line, and said, 'Yes!' And I want to give people that feeling, too, of connection, communication.

—Anne Lamott

Writing a long and substantial book is like having a friend and companion at your side, to whom you can always turn for comfort and amusement, and whose society becomes more attractive as a new and widening field of interest is lighted in the mind.

—Winston S. Churchill

Writer's block is real. It happens. Some days you sit down at the old typewriter, put your fingers on the keys, and nothing pops into your head. Blanko. Nada. El nothingissimo. What you do when this happens is what separates you from the one-of-these-days-I'm-gonna-write-a-book crowd.

—James N. Frey

In writing. Don't use adjectives which merely tell us how you want us to feel about the thing you are describing. I mean, instead of telling us a thing was 'terrible,' describe it so that we'll be terrified. Don't say it was 'delightful'; make us say 'delightful' when we've read the description. You see, all those words (horrifying, wonderful, hideous, exquisite) are only like saying to your readers, 'Please will you do my job for me.'

—C. S. Lewis

I don't think writers are sacred, but words are. They deserve respect. If you get the right ones in the right order, you might nudge the world a little or make a poem that children will speak for you when you are dead.

—Tom Stoppard

Writing, the art of communicating thoughts to the mind through the eye, is the great invention of the world...enabling us to converse with the dead, the absent, and the unborn, at all distances of time and space.

—Abraham Lincoln

We write by the light of every story we have ever read.

—Richard Peck

Being a writer is 1% inspiration, 50% perspiration and 49% explaining you're not a millionaire like J.K.Rowling.

—Gabrielle Tozer

The society to which we belong seems to be dying or is already dead. I don't mean to sound dramatic, but clearly the dark side is rising. Things could not have been more odd and frightening in the Middle Ages. But the tradition of artists will continue no matter what form the society takes. And this is another reason to write: people need us, to mirror for them and for each other without distortion—not to look around and say, 'Look at yourselves, you idiots!,' but to say, 'This is who we are.'

—Anne Lamott

Writers don't write from experience, although many are hesitant to admit that they don't. ...If you wrote from experience, you'd get maybe one book, maybe three poems. Writers write from empathy.

—Nikki Giovanni

When you're a writer, the question people always ask you is, 'Where do you get your ideas?' Writers hate this question. It's like asking Humphrey Bogart in *The African Queen*, 'Where do you get your leeches?' You don't get ideas. Ideas get you.

—Connie Willis

To those who care about punctuation, a sentence such as 'Thank God its Friday' (without the apostrophe) rouses feelings not only of despair but of violence. The confusion of the possessive 'its' (no apostrophe) with the contractive 'it's' (with apostrophe) is an unequivocal signal of illiteracy and sets off a Pavlovian 'kill' response in the average stickler.

—Lynne Truss

He drove his mind into the abyss where poetry is written.

—George Orwell

It's good for you to write down your thoughts. It's therapeutic because it forces you to slow down and think about life.

—Katie Kacvinsky

The job of the first eight pages is not to have the reader want to throw the book at the wall, during the first eight pages.

—David Foster Wallace

I confess to wincing every so often at a poorly chosen word, a mangled sentence, an expression of emotion that seems indulgent or overly practiced. I have the urge to cut the book by fifty pages or so, possessed as I am with a keener appreciation for brevity.

—Barack Obama

There are a thousand thoughts lying within a man that he does not know till he takes up the pen to write.

—William Makepeace
Thackeray

A letter is always better than a phone call. People write things in letters they would never say in person. They permit themselves to write down feelings and observations using emotional syntax far more intimate and powerful than speech will allow.

—Alice Steinbach

Writing without revising is the literary equivalent of waltzing gaily out of the house in your underwear.

—Patricia Fuller

The mind travels faster than the pen; consequently, writing becomes a question of learning to make occasional wing shots, bringing down the bird of thought as it flashes by. A writer is a gunner, sometimes waiting in the blind for something to come in, sometimes roaming the countryside hoping to scare something up.

—E. B. White

Anyone who is going to be a writer knows enough at fifteen to write several novels.

—May Sarton

Only amateurs say that they write for their own amusement. Writing is not an amusing occupation. It is a combination of ditch-digging, mountain-climbing, treadmill and childbirth. Writing may be interesting, absorbing, exhilarating, racking, relieving. But amusing? Never!

—Edna Ferber

Wrote my way out of the hood...thought my way out of poverty! Don't tell me that knowledge isn't power. Education changes everything.

—Brandi L. Bates

Talent is extremely common. What is rare is the willingness to endure the life of the writer.

—Kurt Vonnegut

I don't go back and look at my early work, because the last time I did, many years ago, it left me cringing. If one publishes, then one is creating a public record of Learning to Write.

—Lorrie Moore

The minute you put in a word that everybody don't know, you have just muddled up that many readers. Running onto a word you can't read, or understand, is just like a detour in the road. You cuss it, and about a half dozen of em, and you will take a different road the next time. I love words but I don't like strange ones. You don't understand them, and they don't understand you. Old words is like old friends, you know em the minute you see um.

—Will Rogers

Writing is.... being able to take something whole and fiercely alive that exists inside you in some unknowable combination of thought, feeling, physicality, and spirit, and to then store it like a genie in tense, tiny black symbols on a calm white page. If the wrong reader comes across the words, they will remain just words. But for the right readers, your vision blooms off the page and is absorbed into their minds like smoke, where it will re-form, whole and alive, fully adapted to its new environment.

—Mary Gaitskill

It's a wonderful thing to be able to create your own world whenever you want to.

—Woody Allen

I enter the world through what I write. I grew up believing, and continue to believe, that I am a screw-up, that growing up with my family and friends, I had nothing to offer in any conversation. But when I started writing, suddenly there was something that I brought to the party that was at a high-enough level.

—Aaron Sorkin

Writing is an intense form of thought.

—Don DeLillo

I could not think without writing.

—Jean Piaget

Good novels are written by people who are not frightened.

—George Orwell

People who are prone to sadness are more likely to pick up a pen.

—Lang Leav

The key to understanding any people is in its art: its writing, painting, sculpture.

—Louis L'Amour

Writing: It starts at the keyboard, and it ends at the far corners of the universe.

—Vincent Lowry

It's possible, in a poem or a short story, to write about commonplace things and objects using commonplace but precise language, and to endow those things—a chair, a window curtain, a fork, a stone, a woman's earring—with immense, even startling power. It is possible to write a line of seemingly innocuous dialogue and have it send a chill along the reader's spine—the source of artistic delight, as Nabokov would have it. That's the kind of writing that most interests me.

—Raymond Carver

I want people who write to crash or dive below the surface, where life is so cold and confusing and hard to see. Your anger and damage and grief are the way to the truth.

—Anne Lamott

The first good reason to write a book is to add value to people's lives.

—Guy Kawasaki

I still encourage anyone who feels at all compelled to write to do so. I just try to warn people who hope to get published that publication is not all it is cracked up to be. But writing is. Writing has so much to give, so much to teach, so many surprises. That thing you had to force yourself to do—the actual act of writing—turns out to be the best part. It's like discovering that while you thought you needed the tea ceremony for the caffeine, what you really needed was the tea ceremony. The act of writing turns out to be its own reward.

—Anne Lamott

Writing a book isn't an easy process nor is it always enjoyable, but it is one of life's most satisfying achievements.

—Guy Kawasaki

Good writing is the hardest form of thinking. It involves the agony of turning profoundly difficult thoughts into lucid form, then forcing them into the tight-fitting uniform of language, making them visible and clear. If the writing is good, then the result seems effortless and inevitable. But when you want to say something life-changing or ineffable in a single sentence, you face both the limitations of the sentence itself and the extent of your own talent.

—Pat Conroy

You write for the people in high school who ignored you. We all do.

—Carolyn Kizer

It's okay to embark on writing because you think it will get you love. At least it gets you going, but it doesn't last. After a while you realize that no one cares that much. Then you find another reason: money. You can dream on that one while the bills pile up. Then you think: 'Well, I'm the sensitive type. I have to express myself.' Do me a favor. Don't be so sensitive. Be tough. It will get you further along when you get rejected.

Finally, you just do it because you happen to like it.

—Natalie Goldberg

To get the right word in the right place is a rare achievement. To condense the diffused light of a page of thought into the luminous flash of a single sentence, is worthy to rank as a prize composition just by itself...Anybody can have ideas—the difficulty is to express them without squandering a quire of paper on an idea that ought to be reduced to one glittering paragraph.

—Mark Twain

If I didn't know the ending of a story, I wouldn't begin. I always write my last lines, my last paragraph first, and then I go back and work towards it. I know where I'm going. I know what my goal is.

—Katherine Ann Porter

A poem was a box for your soul. That was the point. It was the place where you could save bits of yourself, and shake out your darkest feelings, without worrying that people would think you were strange. While I was writing, I would forget myself and everyone else; poetry made me feel part of something noble and beautiful and bigger than me.

—Andrea Ashworth

All the time I'm not writing I feel like a criminal. It's horrible to feel felonious every second of the day. It's much more relaxing to actually write.

—Fran Lebowitz

When the last autumn of Dickens's life was over, he continued to work through his final winter and into spring. This is how all of us writers give away the days and years and decades of our lives in exchange for stacks of paper with scratches and squiggles on them. And when Death calls, how many of us would trade all those pages, all that squandered lifetime-worth of painfully achieved scratches and squiggles, for just one more day, one more fully lived and experienced day? And what price would we writers pay for that one extra day spent with those we ignored while we were locked away scratching and squiggling in our arrogant years of solipsistic isolation?

—Dan Simmons

Late into the night I write and the pages of my notebook swell from all the words I've pressed onto them. It almost feels like the more I bruise the page the quicker something inside me heals.

—Elizabeth Acevedo

Journal writing is a voyage to the interior.

—Christina Baldwin

I just rearrange words into a pleasing order for money.

—Terry Pratchett

We publish only to satisfy our craving for fame; there's no other motive except the even baser one of making money.

—Thomas Bernhard

There are very few professions in which people just sit down and think hard for five or six hours a day all by themselves. Of course it's why you want to become a writer—because you have the liberty to do that, but once you have the liberty you also have the obligation to do it.

—Tobias Wolff

If you are a real writer, then just surrender to the writer's life, all of it, even the bad stuff. When you do that, the beauty appears: the peace, the meaning, the joy, the fulfillment, the sense that you are doing what you were born to do and what could be better, in the end, than that?

—Lauren B. Davis

'Writer's block' is just a fancy way of saying 'I don't feel like doing any work today.'

—Meagan Spooner

In my profession it isn't a question of telling good literature from bad. Really good literature is seldom appreciated in its own day. The best authors die poor, the bad ones make money—it's always been like that. What do I, an agent, get out of a literary genius who won't be discovered for another hundred years? I'll be dead myself then. Successful incompetents are what I need.

—Walter Moers

In the very act of writing I felt pleased with what I did. There was the pleasure of having words come to me, and the pleasure of ordering them, re-ordering them, weighing one against another. Pleasure also in the imagination of the story, the feeling that it could mean something. Mostly I was glad to find out that I could write at all. In writing you work toward a result you won't see for years, and can't be sure you'll ever see. It takes stamina and self-mastery and faith. It demands those things of you, then gives them back with a little extra, a surprise to keep you coming. It toughens you and clears your head. I could feel it happening. I was saving my life with every word I wrote, and I knew it.

—Tobias Wolff

When you are writing a book you have to include some descriptions of things. I said that I could take photographs and put them in the book. But she said the idea of a book was to describe things using words so that people could read them and make a picture in their own head.

—Mark Haddon

You know you're writing well when you're throwing good stuff into the wastebasket.

—Ernest Hemingway

How can I tell Bob that my happiness streams from having wrenched a piece out of my life, a piece of hurt and beauty, and transformed it to typewritten words on paper? How can he know I am justifying my life, my keen emotions, my feeling, by turning it into print?

—Sylvia Plath

In middle school I typed an entire paper while clicking the space bar twice between each word bc I thought that's what double spaced meant.

—Internet Meme

You can make something out of every unfinished story and every rejection if you work at it.

—Tomi Adeyemi

I would say that music is the easiest means in which to express, but since words are my talent, I must try to express clumsily in words what the pure music would have done better.

—William Faulkner

I write to reach eternity.

—James Jones

I do not write poetry; I take words and dip them in feelings.

—Arti Honrao

It's up to the artist to use language that can be understood, not hide it in some private code. Most of these jokers don't even want to use language you and I know or can learn . . . they would rather sneer at us and be smug, because we 'fail' to see what they are driving at. If indeed they are driving at anything—obscurity is usually the refuge of incompetence.

—Robert A. Heinlein

Writing is like baking cupcakes, you're trying to make something from the raw. Like with cupcakes it's flour and eggs and stuff, and with books it's ideas and words. The end result is the same though, you want people to eat them up.

—Emma Shortt

I've always known that the best part of writing occurs before you've picked up a pen. When a story exists only in your mind, its potential is infinite; it's only when you start pinning words to paper that it becomes less than perfect. You have to make your choices, set your limits. Start whittling away at the cosmos, and don't stop until you've narrowed it down to a single, ordinary speck of dirt. And in the end, what you've made is not nearly as glorious as what you've thrown away.

—Carolyn Parkhurst

While writing he found the words came from the muscles in his hands, the feel of the shaft of his pen, the locked joint of his elbow, the scratching noise of the nib marking paper and, underneath all that, some coordinating impulse in his guts.

—Ali Shaw

I'm like one of those old aqueducts: there's so much rubbish clogging up the banks of my thought that it flows slowly, and only spills from the end of my pen drop by drop.

—Gustave Flaubert

Everyone should read, we say, but we act as if only those with special talent should write.

—Roy Peter Clark

Have you ever pondered the miracle of popcorn? It starts out as a tiny, little, compact kernel with magic trapped inside that when agitated, bursts to create something marvelously desirable. It's sort of like those tiny, little thoughts trapped inside an author's head that—in an excited explosion of words—suddenly become a captivating fairy tale!

—Richelle E. Goodrich

I get a fine warm feeling when I'm doing well, but that pleasure is pretty much negated by the pain of getting started each day. Let's face it, writing is hell.

—William Styron

Writing is the voices inside our heads, our minds, the creativity that exists for us to, from nothing, create alternate worlds, manipulate a personality or to introduce a new kind of love, a new kind of hate or pain or happiness or wonder or... anything we want. Through words, we can do, we can be anything we want.

—Allie Burke

Most people carry their demons around with them, buried down deep inside. Writers wrestle their demons to the surface, fling them onto the page, then call them characters.

—C.K. Webb

Feel oddly barren. My sickness is when words draw in their horns and the physical world refuses to be ordered, recreated, arranged and selected. I am a victim of it then, not a master.

—Sylvia Plath

I wonder what the retirement age is in the novel business.
The day you die.

—Yasunari Kawabata

Storytellers are individuals who enjoy creating a holiday for the mind.

—Linda Daly

If you can't write clearly, you probably don't think nearly as well as you think you do.

—Kurt Vonnegut

The writer who loses his self-doubt, who gives way as he grows old to a sudden euphoria, to prolixity, should stop writing immediately: the time has come for him to lay aside his pen.

—Colette

The best thing about Art is that the people who create it live forever.

—Jonathan Heatt

Writing keeps me at my desk, constantly trying to write a perfect sentence. It is a great privilege to make one's living from writing sentences. The sentence is the greatest invention of civilization. To sit all day long assembling these extraordinary strings of words is a marvelous thing...

For me, a line has to sing before it does anything else. The great thrill is when a sentence that starts out being completely plain suddenly begins to sing, rising far above itself and above any expectation I might have had for it. That's what keeps me going on those dark December days when I think about how I could be living instead of writing.

—John Banville

All writers are waiting for replies.

—Niall Williams

We must work at our profession and not make anybody else's idleness an excuse for our own. There is no lack of readers and listeners; it is for us to produce something worth being written and heard.

—Pliny the Younger

Writing is easy. Writing well is hard work.

—Amy Joy

Writing is the best anti-depressant.

—Fierce Dolan

You can't just write and write and put things in a drawer. They wither without the warm sun of someone else's appreciation.

—Anne Morrow
Lindbergh

I am constantly writing autobiography, but I have to turn it into fiction in order to give it credibility.

—Katherine Paterson

I've put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant, and that is the only way of insuring one's immortality.

—James Joyce

Happy children do not seem to grow up to be writers.

—Piers Anthony

For me to ask, ‘Can you give me 15 hours of your life?’ That is major! It’s almost like asking for marriage! It’s such a big deal nowadays to ask someone for their time. So I think, I need to work for that. I need to merit that.

—Min Jin Lee

What makes writing painful for all of us is when we have expectations on recognition. Recognition is something that’s really fanciful and evanescent.

—Min Jin Lee

But ‘why then publish?’ There are no rewards
Of fame or profit when the world grows weary.
I ask in turn why do you play at cards?
Why drink? Why read? To make some hour less dreary.
It occupies me to turn back regards
On what I’ve seen or pondered, sad or cheery,
And what I write I cast upon the stream
To swim or sink. I have had at least my dream.

—Lord Byron

I write to make sense of my life.

—John Cheever

Most writers don’t talk about their craft—they just do it.

—Alfred Lansing

I don’t know much about creative writing programs. But they’re not telling the truth if they don’t teach, one, that writing is hard work, and, two, that you have to give up a great deal of life, your personal life, to be a writer.

—Doris Lessing

The writing of solid, instructive stuff fortified by facts and figures is easy enough. There is no trouble in writing a scientific treatise on the folk-lore of Central China, or a statistical enquiry into the declining population of Prince Edward Island. But to write something out of one's own mind, worth reading for its own sake, is an arduous contrivance only to be achieved in fortunate moments, few and far in between. Personally, I would sooner have written Alice in Wonderland than the whole Encyclopedia Britannica.

—Stephen Leacock

The easiest thing to do on earth is not write.

--William Goldman

Nothing so sharpens the thought process as writing down one's arguments. Weaknesses overlooked in oral discussion become painfully obvious on the written page.
—Hyman G. Rickover

A book is never, ever finished. You simply get to a point where you and your editor are reasonably happy with how it is and you go with that. Left to our own devices, a writer would endlessly fiddle with a book, changing little thing after little thing.
—Kimberly Pauley

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

Each book creates its own structure and its own length. I've written three or four slim books. It may be that the next novel is a big one, but I don't know.
—Don DeLillo

Send message to the future by writing it today!
—Toba Beta

When you're a student of poetry, you're lucky if you don't realize how untalented you are until you get a little better. Otherwise, you would just stop.
—Tony Hoagland

The first (if not necessarily the prime) function of a novelist, of ANY artist, is to entertain. If the poem, painting, play or novel does not immediately engage one's surface interest, then it has failed. Whatever else it may or may not be, art is also entertainment. Bad art fails to entertain. Good art does something in addition.
—Brigid Brophy

That is the mystery about writing: it comes out of afflictions, out of the gouged times, when the heart is cut open.
—Edna O'Brien

When you're writing, you're creating something out of nothing ... A successful piece of writing is like doing a successful piece of magic.
—Susanna Clarke

For me the experience of writing is really an experience of losing control.... I think it's very much like dreaming or like surfing. You go out there and wait for a wave, and when it comes it takes you somewhere and you don't know where it'll go.
—Margaret Atwood

The greatest writers have persistence.

—Gina Nahai

The historian records, but the novelist creates.

—E. M. Forster

BENEFITS OF WRITING THERAPY

Keeping a journal can be extremely helpful for the user, whether it helps them improve their memory, record important bits and pieces of their day, or just helps them relax at the end of a long day. These are certainly not trivial benefits, but the potential benefits of writing therapy reach further and deeper than simply writing in a diary.

In individuals who have experienced a traumatic or extremely stressful event, expressive writing can have a significant healing effect. In fact, participants in a study who wrote about their most traumatic experiences for 15 minutes, four days in a row, experienced better health outcomes up to four months later.

Another study tested the same writing exercise on over 100 asthma and rheumatoid arthritis patients, with similar results. The participants who wrote about the most stressful event of their lives experienced better health evaluations related to their illness.

A recent study suggested that expressive writing may even improve immune system functioning, although it may need to be sustained for the health benefits to continue.

In addition to these more concrete benefits, regular therapeutic writing can help the writer find meaning in their experiences, view things from a new perspective, and see the silver linings in their most stressful or negative experiences. It can also lead to important insights about yourself and your environment that may be difficult to determine without focused writing.

Overall, writing therapy has proven effective for many different conditions or mental illnesses, including:

Posttraumatic stress

Anxiety

Depression

Obsessive-compulsive disorder

Grief and loss

Chronic illness issues

Substance abuse

Eating disorders

Interpersonal relationship issues

Communication skill issues

Low self-esteem

—Courtney Ackerman

Medicines and surgery may cure, but only reading and writing poetry can heal.
—J. Arroyo

Writing is like giving yourself homework, really hard homework, every day, for the rest of your life. You want glamorous? Throw glitter at the computer screen.
—Katrina Monroe

If you wrote something for which someone sent you a cheque, if you cashed the cheque and it didn't bounce, and if you then paid the light bill with the money, I consider you talented.
—Stephen King

Writing with deep feeling improves immune system function, decreases stress, lowers blood pressure, and increases positive short and long term mood changes.
— James Pennebaker

Writing keeps you sharp with age. Writing is a thinking exercise, and like physical exercise, it can help keep you 'in shape' as you age....Just like how friendships help keep you happy and healthy through their ties to social interaction and dialogue, writing seems like the private equivalent—it keeps you thinking regularly and helps keeps the mental rust from forming.

—Gregory Ciotti

A paper cut is a tree's last revenge.

—*theChive*

Bibliotherapy is an expressive therapy that involves the reading of specific texts with the purpose of healing. It uses an individual's relationship to the content of books and poetry and other written words as therapy. Bibliotherapy is often combined with writing therapy. It has been shown to be effective in the treatment of depression. These results have been shown to be long-lasting.

—*goodreads.com*

I've written all these stories without any pornography, without any obscenity. I grew up among sailors and miners and lumberjacks and the roughest kind of men in the world, but I never found it necessary to use all that in the stories. I can make them real without that. I think much of that kind of writing is a cover up for lack of real skill.

—Louis L'Amour

When I sit down to write a poem, I am opening myself up to the magic of possibility, of something beautiful and profound taking shape on the page. I am never sure what will happen.

—Faisal Mohyuddin

How can writing be used to solve a behavior problem, as in the case of a student who comes late to class?

Although students are often late for ‘no good reason,’ sometimes those reasons are important to them. Teachers who automatically assign detention are not willing to listen to what a student might have to say.

If right before class Janie’s boyfriend announces that he is breaking up with her, it’s not hard to figure out why, when she is late, she becomes angry at the teacher who says, ‘Report to me after school.’ If, however, the teacher hands Janie a piece of paper and says in a calm and neutral voice, ‘Please write and tell me why you’re late,’ Janie has a chance to explain without wasting classtime.

Writing doesn’t replace punishment in this situation—although ‘punishment’ might not be called for—but it allows the student a chance to reflect on the situation and to cool down. The teacher later reads what the student wrote and can then make a decision about the next step.

Later by talking to the student privately, person-to-person, not authority-to-subordinate, the teacher can enlist the student’s help in solving the problem so detention isn’t even necessary.

The student is not put into a power struggle with the teacher where both would end up losing. The teacher treats the student as a person worthy of consideration. Being treated as someone whose opinions count gives the student a sense of control in the situation. The teacher has not given up any authority by allowing the student to explain, but the teacher’s willingness to listen prevents the student from feeling like a victim.

The amazing thing about using writing to communicate is that often when students have ‘no good excuse’ for being late, not doing their homework, or whatever, they actually follow up their written explanation with a commitment to take care of the problem....Teachers have fewer problems to deal with in the classroom if they work with students to find solutions rather than trying to maintain control by punishing students to show them who’s boss....If penalties or consequences are called for, the teacher can often get students to accept responsibility of the situation when they take time to listen to the student’s view either on paper or in person and to explain their own view in a natural conversational tone.

Writing itself isn’t the key, but writing offers the busy teacher a means of giving the student an opportunity to talk on paper, buying some time to consider the situation, and scheduling a private conference with the student as a follow-up, if necessary. Such a meeting may have to be held after school, but it serves a different purpose than that of detention.

—Anne Wescott Dodd

When teachers use writing as a means of communication, students almost automatically become more motivated to do assignments and get involved in class activities. They come to believe that the teacher values them and their opinions. Because they have a vehicle for individually communicating with the teacher, they aren't just squares on a seating chart or lines in the gradebook. The teacher cares, so they begin to care more about doing well in that class. It happens as long as students are not punished or penalized for what they write.

—Anne Wescott Dodd

Reading Helps You Write Better. Regular reading can improve your vocabulary, but that's not all. It will also help you be more articulate when it comes to writing. You'd need to study or take a seminar if you want to be a writer, but you can start by making reading a regular habit.

You don't need to be an aspiring writer to have a reason to read every day. Reading can help you with school papers and applications. The more you read, the more you'll learn. College applications require essays, and knowing a lot can help you create a well-written article that can be your ticket to your dream university....It can also help you with your studies or work since regular reading improves your vocabulary and writing skills.

—Leslie Wyman

Among educated citizens, especially those who become afflicted by 'professional' languages, the demon 'jargon' afflicts the written word with what appears to be an incurable disease. One only needs to pick up professional journals in such areas as education, sociology, and law to realize the unintelligibility of much of the written prose as vended by presumably educated people.

—William Goldstein

One sentence can take on eight meanings, simply by moving the word 'only':

Only I hit him in the eye yesterday.

I only hit him in the eye yesterday.

I hit only him in the eye yesterday.

I hit him only in the eye yesterday.

I hit him in only the eye yesterday.

I hit him in the only eye yesterday.

I hit him in the eye only yesterday.

I hit him in the eye yesterday only.

—Ernest Brennecke

Although society assumes that (1) schools should teach grammar and (2) learning grammar will help students to write better, those who teach both writing and grammar have long questioned the second assumption. As early as 1906, researcher Franklin S. Hoyt demonstrated that a knowledge of grammar is not a concomitant of effective writing....While some studies connect grammar instruction and writing, many more suggest that the ability to write well has little to do with how much formal grammar a person knows. One might argue that if the reverse were true, grammarians would be the best writers in our society. Those who have read widely in their works certainly cannot endorse such a contention.

—R. Baird Shuman

Citing a study of 3,000 graded essays drawn from students across the United States, (Rei R.) Noguchi notes that the 20 most common types of error are in punctuation, especially the use of commas and apostrophes; in verb use, particularly irregular verbs; and in pronoun use and reference of pronouns.

—R. Baird Shuman

The study of traditional school grammar (i.e., the definition of parts of speech, the parsing of sentences, etc.) has no effect on raising the quality of student writing. Every other focus of instruction...is stronger. Moreover, a heavy emphasis on mechanics and usage (e.g., marking every error) results in significant losses in overall quality....The presentation of good pieces of writing as models is significantly more useful than the study of grammar....Free writing. This focus asks students to write freely about whatever concerns them. As a major instructional technique, free writing is more effective than teaching grammar in raising the quality of student writing.

—George Hillocks, Jr.

Human beings are the only ones in nature who are aware that they will die. For that reason and only for that reason, I have a profound respect for the human race, and I believe that its future is going to be much better than its present. Even knowing that their days are numbered and that everything will end when they least expect it, people make of their lives a battle that is worthy of a being with eternal life. What people regard as vanity—leaving great works, having children, acting in such a way as to prevent one's name from being forgotten—I regard as the highest expression of human dignity.

— Paulo Coelho

As a student of Zen, you once believed that each life lived, no matter how short, was a complete life. But this was before you fell, body and soul, down the writing well. If death came tomorrow, no way would you be ready! Why? You are thinking about all the stories inside you, bubbling in the cauldron of your mind, stories waiting to rise to the rim.

—Reni Roxas

I love to write. But it has never gotten any easier to do and you can't expect it to if you keep trying for something better than you can do.

—Ernest Hemingway

Here's the sorry-ass deal if you are an unknown writer: The world is not waiting for your novel. Nobody cares if you finish it, not even your mother. Nor the agent who says by all means, send her your manuscript.

Nobody cares. But one. You. You care. Desperately.

The clock in your room tells the time, each tick as fleeting as a heartbeat....You no longer have time to fail. So you remain in the chair, pounding the keys so you can fuel that late-blooming fire that is yours and yours alone. Because it's nontransferable, it's perishable.

Time.

As a writer it is all you ask for.

Time to finish.

—Reni Roxas

Writing is more akin to constructing a crossword puzzle than to solving one. And in what genre you do it is not as important as how interesting you make it.

—Ashley Kunsu

First drafting is mania, and editing is more like depression. It's more like a thing I have to slog through. I don't enjoy it as much, but I understand the necessity of it. With a book you have so many edits—you usually have a developmental edit, a copy edit, a line edit, and first-pass pages. By the time a book gets published, I've looked through it like 20 times, and I'm done with it.

—Ryan G. Van Cleave

Poets serious about making careers in institutions understand that the criteria for success are primarily quantitative. They must publish as much as possible as quickly as possible. The slow maturation of genuine creativity looks like laziness to a committee. Wallace Stevens was forty-three when his first book appeared. Robert Frost was thirty-nine. Today these sluggards would be unemployable.

—Dana Gioia

Good writers are those who keep the language efficient. That is to say, keep it accurate, keep it clear. It doesn't matter whether the good writer wants to be useful, or whether the good writer wants to be harm.

—Ezra Pound

I do not write poetry for publication, I write it for the same reason that, according to Wilde, one should write a diary, to have something sensational to read on the train. And as a way of speaking to myself. But most importantly of all for pleasure.

—Stephen Fry

Maybe you are too old a dog to learn new tricks? Maybe you have missed the bus? That's hoey. Thomas Hardy (a finer poet than he was a novelist in my view) did not start publishing verse till he was nearly sixty.

—Stephen Fry

He started writing poetry again, but it didn't come as easily. It was hard now to get past the self-consciousness—the silliness, really—of being such a well-established adult applying himself, seriously, to such a youthful joy.

—B. J. Novak

Reading and writing, like everything else, improve with practice. And, of course, if there are no young readers and writers, there will shortly be no older ones. Literacy will be dead, and democracy—which many believe goes hand in hand with it—will be dead as well.

—Margaret Atwood

I write because I'm free,
because I can,
because I will.

I write because I must,
because I'm breathing,
because I'd go crazy otherwise,
because it's who I am.

I write to make a statement,
to share my thoughts,
to discover myself,
to express my ideas.

But most of all, I write for future generations.
I write for love.
I write to inspire.
I write to encourage.

I write for me.

—Nadège Richards

This is an embarrassing confession for an adult to make. In their idle hours Winston Churchill and Noel Coward painted. For fun and relaxation Albert Einstein played the violin. Hemingway hunted, Agatha Christie gardened, James Joyce sang arias and Nabokov chased butterflies. But poetry?....An adolescent girl may write poetry, so long as it is securely locked up in her pink leatherette five-year diary. Suburban professionals are permitted to enter jolly pastiche competitions in the Spectator and New Statesman. At a pinch, a young man may be allowed to write a verse or two of dirty doggerel and leave it on a post-it note stuck to the fridge when he has forgotten to buy a Valentine card. But that's it. Any more forays into the world of Poesy and you release the beast that lurks within every British breast—and the name of the beast is Embarrassment.

—Stephen Fry

Put the right word in the right place, make the connection, and there's a perceptible sweetness of impact. Stadiums do not rise when it happens, earthly crowds do not roar, but at your desk or your wobbling perch in Starbucks you feel it: silent terraces of angels pumping their fists.

—James Parker

A deadline—the galloping clock, the smell of the editor—is a particular concentration of mortal tension. The brain on deadline does whatever it can: It improvises, it compresses, it contrives, it uses the language and the ideas that are at hand. Inspiration comes or it doesn't. Here the writer is an athlete—performing under pressure and, if he or she is good, delivering on demand.

—James Parker

Few things are more excruciating for a writer than confronting the words written by her younger self. Her tone is bound to seem stilted, her thoughts alien or insignificant. Did I really think that? she wonders, aghast. Worse yet: Did I really commit it to paper? Ensure that my words would come back to shame me in the future?

—Merve Emre

As a kid, I lived almost entirely inside books, and eventually the books started returning the favor. A lot of my internal world feels like an anthology, or a library. It's eclectic and disorganized, but I can browse in it, and that hugely shapes both what and how I write.

—Kathryn Schulz

The writing life...can feel like a villain: writers' block, rejection letters, bad clients, the novel ending that just refuses to come right, mean reviews, single digit sales. It's a tough gig. By the end of some days we have been made black and blue by a single paragraph, even a single sentence.

—Ericka McIntyre

Writers, by and large, aren't people who play it safe. In fact, considering the grim prospects for making a living (the Author's Guild reported recently that the median income for American writers in 2017 was \$6,080), you could argue that deciding to pursue a writing career requires a certain devil-may-care attitude toward regular meals and personal safety (also, personal hygiene).

—Jeff Somers

Oh my God, what if you wake up some day, and you're 65, or 75, and you never got your memoir or novel written; or you didn't go swimming in warm pools and oceans all those years because your thighs were jiggly and you had a nice big comfortable tummy; or you were just so strung out on perfectionism and people-pleasing that you forgot to have a big juicy creative life, of imagination and radical silliness and staring off into space like when you were a kid? It's going to break your heart. Don't let this happen.

—Anne Lamott

Three qualities are necessary to write superb lyric poetry. First, the writer must have something of a gift: she must be able to make music, command metaphors, compress sense, write melodiously when the situation demands and gratingly when need be. She must be versed in irony; she must have control of tone. But there is more—a second requirement. She must also have something to say. There must be some region of her experience that has transfixed her and that she feels compelled to put into words and illuminate. She must burn to attack some issue, must want to unbind a knot, tighten it, or maybe send a blade directly through its core. Given these powers—the power of expression and the power to find a theme—the poet still must add ambition. She must be willing to write for her readers. She must be willing to articulate the possibility that what is true for her is true for all. When these three qualities—lyric gift; a serious theme, passionately addressed; real ambition (which one might also call courage)—come together, the results can be luminous.

—Mark Edmundson

You can't learn to write in college. It's a very bad place for writers because the teachers always think they know more than you do—and they don't. They have prejudices. They may like Henry James, but what if you don't want to write like Henry James? They may like John Irving, for instance, who's the bore of all time. A lot of the people whose work they've taught in the schools for the last thirty years, I can't understand why people read them and why they are taught. The library, on the other hand, has no biases. The information is all there for you to interpret. You don't have someone telling you what to think. You discover it for yourself.

—Ray Bradbury

Great books write themselves, only bad books have to be written.

—F. Scott Fitzgerald

The hard part about writing a novel is finishing it.

—Ernest Hemingway

The worst enemy to creativity is self-doubt.

—Sylvia Plath

The artist is nothing without the gift, but the gift is nothing without work.

—Emile Zola

The worst thing that can happen to a writer is to get published.

—Dorothy Allison

Bookstores are a writer's drug. We walk the aisles, dancing our fingers over the bindings, lips quivering, wanting a fix.

—Jeanne Veillette
Bowerman

Writing before you are published for the first time is lonely, exciting, full of equal amounts of self-about and hope.

—Bonnie Hearn Hill

Of all the tasks in the world, none is easier to avoid or quit than writing. Any excuse will do.

—Peter Selgin

One should use common words to say uncommon things.

—Arthur Schopenhauer

People often ask me why my style is so simple. It is, in fact, deceptively simple, for no two sentences are alike. It is clarity that I am striving to attain, not simplicity.

Of course, some people want literature to be difficult and there are writers who like to make their readers toil and sweat. They hope to be taken more seriously that way. I have always tried to achieve a prose that is easy and conversational. And those who think this is simple should try it for themselves.

—Ruskin Bond

Every work of art escapes the artist's control—the more popular and complex, the greater the misunderstandings.

—George Packer

THE PERPETUAL POET

So often with others I write in my mind.
My wife when she sees me will poke from behind.
I wake in the night to scribble what seems
Some clever ideas conveyed in my dreams.
At ball games I often draft with my phone
The gist of, to me, the world's greatest poem.
I find that my writing flourishes best,
In places I find myself fully obsessed.
I thrive in that setting,
While often forgetting
I've closed out all life—
Including my wife.

—Dan L. Miller

THE FOIBLES OF FAMOUS AUTHORS—AND ME

Pink, textured pads were the preference of Plath.
The backs of rejections are my chosen path.
On a desk in the attic and facing a wall
His novels Doctorow tended to scrawl.
Cheever it was who faced a hot furnace
Alone in the basement with a pad for his surface.
For me, it's a window I need with a view
Of my neighbors to work in the snow they trudge through.
It's only round pencils that Steinbeck would use.
The hex cut his fingers on others he'd choose.
Rounds tend to shift around in my grip.
The hex gives me service without any slip.
Rostand often bathed while he wrote,
But I tub doze, and my stuff just won't float.
So books in a soapy bathtub I author,
Rejected they'd be by my tepid bath water.

—Dan L. Miller

MY WRITING LIFE

My Mac,
My Dog,
My Muse,
And Me.

—Dan L. Miller

The image of the writer-walker was well enough entrenched by the 20th century that a walk could be consciously undertaken as a literary apprenticeship. In a 1975 reminiscence about New York, the novelist and essayist Edward Hoagland recalls how he stalked the streets of his hometown, first ‘to smell the yeasty redolence of the Nabisco factory’ and then ‘to West Twelfth Street to sniff the police stables.’ The author was inhaling the raw stuff that would fuel creativity: ‘I knew that every mile I walked, the better writer I’d be.’

—Michael LaPointe