Yes, there is no doubt that paper is patient and as I don’t intend to show this cardboard-covered notebook bearing the proud name of ‘diary’ to anyone, unless I find a real friend, boy or girl, probably nobody cares. And now I come to the root of the matter, the reason for my starting a diary; it is that I have no such real friend.

--Anne Frank

The beautiful part of writing is that you don’t have to get it right the first time, unlike, say, a brain surgeon. You can always do it better, find the exact word, the apt phrase, the leaping simile.

--Robert Cormier

When I am asked what kind of writing is the most lucrative, I have to say, ransom notes.

--H. N. Swanson

You can always edit a bad page. You can’t edit a blank page.

—Jodi Picoult

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.

--John Steinbeck

Don’t say the old lady screamed—bring her on and let her scream

—Mark Twain

Verbose writing creates comatose readers.

--Elyse Sommer

Every kind of writing is good save that which bores.

--Voltaire

Simplicity is the glory of expression.

--Walt Whitman

The aim of writing is to enable people a little better to enjoy life or a little better to endure it.

--W. H. Auden
Dante never went to hell. Shakespeare never went to ancient Rome. Writers have the right to exercise their imaginations in any area they think appropriate. I think possibly a book gains by its writer not having been through the experience, rather than the other way around. Experience itself doesn’t authenticate good writing.

--William Styron

The best writing is rewriting.

--E. B. White

Mark Twain once said that the man who does not read good books has no advantage over the one who cannot read them... (I)f you want to write well, then you have to read good writers. If you confine yourself to mediocre writers, then that’s the style you’re going to assimilate.

--William Least Heat Moon

Omit needless words. Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all his sentences short, or that he avoid all detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but that every word tell.

--William Strunk, Jr.

The most valuable of all talents is that of never using two words when one will do.

--Thomas Jefferson

The pen is the tongue of the mind.

--Cervantes

When once the itch of literature comes over a man, nothing can cure it but the scratching of a pen.

--Samuel Lover

The chief glory of every people arises from its authors.

--Samuel Johnson

The ink of the scholar is more sacred than the blood of the martyr.

--Mohammed

Put it before them briefly so they will read it, clearly so they will appreciate it, picturesquely so they will remember it and, above all, accurately so they will be guided by its light.

--Joseph Pulitzer
If you would be pungent, be brief; for it is with words as with sunbeams—the more they are condensed, the deeper they burn.  
—Robert Southey

I’m not happy when I’m writing, but I’m miserable when I’m not.  
--Fannie Hurst

‘I’ll never forget this idea’ is the devil’s whisper. Catch everything that matters in your notebook.  
--Richard Bach

Don’t write about what you know—what you know may bore you, and thus bore your readers. Write about what interests you—and interests you deeply—and your readers will catch fire at your words.  
--Valerie Sherwood

I took a number of stories by popular writers as well as others by Maupassant, O. Henry, Stevenson, etc., and studied them carefully. Modifying what I learned over the next few years, I began to sell.  
--Louis L’Amour

A book title must grab the reader gently by the throat.  
--Richard Peck

To be a writer is to sit down at one’s desk in the chill portion of every day, and to write; not waiting for a little jet of the blue flame of genius to start from the breast-bone—just plain going at it, in pain and delight.  
--John Hersey

When a man is writing, he is living in a different world. He is free. That is what writing is all about. It is a way to freedom.  
--Frank Conroy

I always believed in hooking the reader as fast as possible and never letting him off the hook, the theory being that the minute you relax and let a reader get a little bored you may lose him.  
--Ernest Lehman

I want to change the world, and, despite the difficulties in that, it’s why I write. I’ll settle for small changes, but my purpose in writing is to influence behavior, to influence society and its development, and to explain what I’ve learned.  
--Alvin Toffler
Misspelled words mar a page. They’re as noticeable and as unfortunate as a run in a pair of nylons or a fumble on the football field....When you take the trouble to write something, you do so because you feel it’s worth reading....But misspelling undermines your purpose....Good spelling, on the other hand, seems clear and easy to read. It’s good form. In short, good spelling communicates.

--Edna G. Furness

A manuscript, like a fetus, is never improved by showing it to somebody before it is completed.

--Unknown

Writing, to me, is simply thinking through my fingers.

—Isaac Asimov

Don’t let indolence, the forerunner of death take over. Enough has happened, enough people entered your life, to make stories, many stories, even a book. So let them onto the page and let them work out their destinies.

--Sylvia Plath

The fear of being wrong is the prime inhibitor of the creative process.

--Jean Bryant

If my doctor told me I had only six minutes to live, I wouldn’t brood. I’d type a little faster.

--Isaac Asimov

Don’t you wish you had a job like mine? All you have to do is think up a certain number of words! Plus, you can repeat words! And they don’t even have to be true!

—Dave Barry

Rejection Letter: ‘Dear Mr. Andrews: We cannot use the paper you sent us. You wrote on it.’

--Gregg Levoy

If you stuff yourself full of poems, essays, plays, stories, novels, films, comic strips, magazines, music, you automatically explode every morning like Old Faithful. I have never had a dry spell in my life, mainly because I feed myself well, to the point of bursting. I wake early and hear my morning voices leaping around in my head like jumping beans. I get out of bed quickly, to trap them before they escape.

--Ray Bradbury

Writing and reading is to me synonymous with existing.

--Gertrude Stein
The world always seems brighter when you’ve just made something that wasn’t there before.

—Neil Gaiman

As writers, we know what the ‘writer’s high’ feels like, the sense of elation we get when we’re cooking on a project. The world and all of its problems melt away. Our lives have purpose, direction, meaning. We feel our passions rise within us. We tap into thoughts and emotions and feel restored. As Annie Dillard said, ‘It is life at its most free.’

--Jack Heffron

Why punctuation matters. Some people find inspiration in cooking their families and their dogs. Others find inspiration in cooking, their families, and their dogs.

—Unknown

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

—James Truslow Adams

Planners, builders, laborers, schemers, executives, make a city, a country, a university, habitable, give them their bones and their blood. Poets and novelists make us appreciate the life we live in them, give them their souls.

—Henry S. Canby

A writer never has a vacation. For a writer life consists of either writing or thinking about writing.

—Eugene Ionesco

DECIDES. During my years of teaching graduate MFA candidates, this was the word that was the most overused. ‘I decided to go talk to her.’ ‘She decided it was time to…’ Don’t have someone ‘decide’ to do something. The decision is implied in the action. Skip the decision and go to the deed itself.

—Michelle Richmond

I don’t think anybody can teach anybody anything. I think that you learn it, but the young writer that is as I say demon-driven and wants to learn and has got to write, he don’t know why, he will learn from almost any source that he finds. He will learn from older people who are not writers, he will learn from writers, but he learns it -- you can’t teach it.

—William Faulkner

I make a list of titles after I’ve finished the story or the book—sometimes as many as 100. Then I start eliminating them, sometimes all of them.

—Ernest Hemingway
When in doubt, have a man come through a door with a gun in his hand.
—Raymond Chandler

Write a short story every week. It’s not possible to write 52 bad short stories in a row.
—Ray Bradbury

Formula: 2nd Draft = 1st Draft −10%.
—Stephen King

Assume you write for an audience consisting solely of terminal patients. That is, after all, the case.... What could you say to a dying person that would not enrage by its triviality?
—Annie Dillard

I discovered what I’ve come to see as the one true rule of writing: When in doubt, add a dog....If you want to signal to the reader that the hour is late, or that you know the chapter is dragging, have the dog stretch and yawn. If you need to make things more exciting, let the dog stir up trouble. If you aim to tug readers’ heart-strings so hard that a few might break—and get your book on award lists and best-seller lists in the process—well, you’ve heard the advice ‘Kill your darlings,’ right? So kiss that pooch goodbye.
—Anica Mrose Rissi

In a good novel, the first five words make you forget you’re reading.
—John Gardner

Usually, when people get to the end of a chapter, they close the book and go to sleep. I deliberately write a book so when the reader gets to the end of the chapter, he or she must turn one more page.
—Sidney Sheldon

Every child is an artist until he’s told he’s not an artist.
—John Lennon

Every character should want something, even if it is only a glass of water.
—Kurt Vonnegut

A cliché is dead matter. It causes gangrene in the prose around it, and sooner or later it eats your brain. The only thing to do with a cliché is send it to the sports page. Or the speechwriter, where it will live forever.
—Verlyn Klinkenborg
If you are looking for perfection or an artistic expression that is free of chaos, you should give up writing. Learning to be comfortable with the chaos of early drafts is essential. You’d never expect an infant to wake up one morning fully toilet-trained, speaking in perfect English, and heading off to the bus stop. It’s equally unrealistic to expect your characters and narrative flow to sort themselves out instantly. Art takes time. Stories have their own heartbeat, and they will unfold at their own pace. All you have to do is to continue to show up and do the work. Every day.

—Laurie Halse Anderson

When you face writer’s block, just lower your standards and keep going.

—Sandra Tsing Loh

First, I do not sit down at my desk to put into verse something that is already clear in my mind. If it were clear in my mind, I should have no incentive or need to write about it. We do not write in order to be understood; we write in order to understand.

—Robert Cecil Day Lewis

You’re never going to tell an original story. The world is a very old place and all the stories that matter to people have been told over and over again—and if you want to write fiction, study myth [the archetypal stories], because those are the stories that have withstood the test of time.

—Suzy Spencer

I can shake off everything as I write; my sorrows disappear, my courage is reborn.

—Anne Frank

Everything in life is writable about if you have the outgoing guts to do it, and the imagination to improvise. The worst enemy to creativity is self-doubt.

—Sylvia Plath

Writing is a dreadful labor, yet not so dreadful as Idleness.

—Thomas Carlyle

Write while the heat is in you….The writer who postpones the recording of his thoughts uses an iron which has cooled.

—Henry David Thoreau

Writing nonfiction is more like sculpture, a matter of shaping the research into the finished thing.

—Joan Didion
Wordiness is a sickness of American writing. Too many words dilute and blur ideas. --Eric Hoffer

But words are things, and a small drop of ink, Falling like dew, upon a thought, produces That which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think. --Lord Byron

Rejection is one hundred percent guaranteed in the writing profession. --Gregg Levoy

You cannot correct your work well until you've forgotten it. --Voltaire

I know how utterly I should have failed myself had my bread not been earned elsewhere while I was making my efforts. Get a steady job, and then in such leisure hours as may belong to you...persevere in your literary attempts. Should you fail, then your failure will not be fatal—and what better could you have done with the leisure hours had you not so failed? Such double toil, you will say is severe. Yes; but if you want this thing, you must submit to severe toil. --Anthony Trollope

I know of only one rule: Style cannot be too clear, too simple. --Stendhal

To fulfill a dream, to be allowed to sweat over lonely labor, to be given a chance to create, is the meat and potatoes of life. The money is the gravy. —Bette Davis

I don’t believe in personal immortality; the only way I expect to have some version of such a thing is through my books. —Isaac Asimov

If those who have studied the art of writing are in accord on any one point it is on this: the surest way to arouse and hold the attention of the reader is by being specific, definite, and concrete. The greatest writers—Homer, Dante, Shakespeare—are effective largely because they deal in particulars and report the details that matter. Their words call up pictures. --William Strunk, Jr. & E. B. White

To live a creative life, we must lose our fear of being wrong. --Joseph Chilton Pearce
I think I did pretty well, considering I started out with nothing but a bunch of blank paper.

--Steve Martin

The best stories don’t come from ‘good vs. bad’ but from ‘good vs. good.’

--Leo Tolstoy

Story: someone wants something badly and is having difficulty getting it.

--Frank Daniel

Conflict is simply having characters not get what they want.

--Leslie Dixon

It’s hard enough to write a good drama, it’s much harder to write a good comedy, and it’s hardest of all to write a drama with comedy. Which is what life is.

--Jack Lemmon

For me, reading books and writing them are tied together. The words of other writers teach me and refresh me and inspire me.

--Betsy Byars

I keep six honest serving-men
(They taught me all I knew);
Their names are What and Why and When
And How and Where and Who.

--Rudyard Kipling

In the mind, as in the body, there is the necessity of getting rid of waste, and a man of active literary habits will write for the fire as well as for the press.

--Jerome Cardan

An artist is a sort of emotional or spiritual historian. His role is to make you realize the doom and glory of knowing who you are and what you are. He has to tell, because nobody else can tell, what it is like to be alive.

--James Baldwin

Training to be a writer is a slow and continuous process, with time off for human behavior.

--Marie-Elise

I think that in order to write really well and convincingly, one must be somewhat poisoned by emotion. Dislike, displeasure, resentment, faultfinding, imagination, passionate remonstrance, a sense of injustice—they all make fine fuel.

--Edna Ferber
In Hollywood, writers are considered only the first drafts of human beings.

--Frank Deford

Where strictness of grammar does not weaken expression, it should be attended to in complaisance to the purists of New England. But where by small grammatical negligences the energy of an idea is condensed, or a word stands for a sentence, I hold grammatical rigor in contempt.

--Thomas Jefferson

There is a little word at the end of my pencil. I am the stage director, the costume designer, and the man who pulls the curtain. If I’m in the mood, I can admit to being despotic, too, for when a character is not behaving as I would wish him to, he can be quickly dismissed with a wave of my eraser. This is certainly part of the joy of making books for children.

--Arnold Lobel

I write in the seclusion of my attic. I sit at a desk; I face the wall. If you sit facing the wall, the only way out is through the sentences.

--E. L. Doctorow

There is much complaint that no new books are really written today. This is probably true; but it is just as true that no new books were ever written. Milton borrowed of Dante, and Dante borrowed of Virgil, and Virgil borrowed of Homer, and Homer borrowed of the unknown poets who doubtless sang their songs a long succession of ages before him. But Milton and Dante and Virgil and Homer made the stuff they handled more resplendent and newer by handling it. A gloss of newness was added to an old theme as it came from the hands of Dante. Shakespeare never invented a plot, but he made some of the world-old plots he used gleam with a brighter newness than they had known for a thousand years. Even a genius as supreme as Shakespeare can only use the old stuff that is in the world; and the old stuff of which ideas are made, like the old air and water and soil, is always and forever new and growing newer. The sweetest music comes from violins made of the oldest wood.

--Sam Walter Foss

Never let a domestic quarrel ruin a day’s writing. If you can’t start the next day fresh, get rid of your wife.

--Mario Puzo

The most original authors are not so because they advance what is new, but because they put what they have to say as if it had never been said before.

--Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
Every novel should have a beginning, a muddle, and an end.  
--Peter De Vries

Writing is one of the easiest things; erasing is one of the hardest.  
--Rabbi Israel Salanter

The process of writing a book is infinitely more important than the book that is completed as a result of the writing, let alone the success or failure that book may have after it is written...the book is merely a symbol of the writing. In writing the book, I am living. I am growing. I am tapping myself. I am changing. The process is the product.
--Theodore Isaac Rubin

In America only the successful writer is important, in France all writers are important, in England no writer is important, and in Australia you have to explain what a writer is.
--Geoffrey Cotterell

All the fun’s in how you say a thing.
--Robert Frost

How many good books suffer neglect through the inefficiency of their beginnings!  
--Edgar Allan Poe

You never have to change anything you got up in the middle of the night to write.  
--Saul Bellow

Teaching has ruined more American novelists than drink.
--Gore Vidal

Respect your reader. The niftiest turn of phrase, the most elegant flight of rhetorical fancy, isn’t worth beans next to a clear thought clearly expressed.
--Jeff Greenfield

Translate the stuff of headlines into fictionalized yarns. Any daily small-town newspaper in the US has the stuffings of at least one smashing bestseller buried in its pages.
--Catherine Breslin

Write something every day.  
--Roger Zelazny
Writing is most of all an exercise in determination, first to get the job done, second to get it done right.

--Tom Clancy

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

For your born writer, nothing is so healing as the realization that he has come upon the right word.

--Catherine Drinker Bowen

If one waits for the right time to come before writing, the right time never comes.

--James Russell Lowell

I’m an outline man. I think spontaneous writing is a waste of time.

--Tom Wolfe

‘It’s like undressing in front of a window. At night. With the lights on and the curtains open,’ I replied to a friend’s question about what sending manuscripts off to unknown editors feels like.

‘And a rejection?’ My friend wondered.

‘That means someone’s watching—and pulls the shade down.’

--Jane Kirkpatrick

Do not talk to me of Archimedes’s lever. He was an absent-minded person with a mathematical imagination....Give me the right word and the right accent and I will move the world.

--Joseph Conrad

First, establish a reason for your story, then introduce your characters, and after you’ve done that, make a dash for the climax. That’s all there is to it. Establish a premise and then rush for the final scene. Don’t waste any time en route. Be sure that it contains action, action, and then some more action. Mix a few thrills with it. Bring a tear to the eyes of your audience. Then, the next instant, chase away the tear with a smile. If you do that, then you’ve got a story.

--H. H. Van Loan
Planning to write is not writing. Outlining...researching, talking to people about what you’re doing, none of that is writing. Writing is writing.  
---E. L. Doctorow

It’s an author’s primary duty to entertain. Sling out all the philosophical terms, but keep the reader turning the page.  
---Susan Howatch

A author is somebody for whom writing is more difficult than it is for other people.  
---Thomas Mann

To write a book is to lay bare one’s mind for all to scrutinize, judge, and criticize.  
---Dan L. Miller

You learn to write the same way you learn to play golf. You do it, and keep doing it until you get it right. A lot of people think something mystical happens to you, that maybe the muse kisses you on the ear. But writing isn’t divinely inspired—it’s hard work.  
---Tom Clancy

All writers are more or less crazy—and the only argument I’ll listen to is whether they were crazy to start with or got that way from writing.  
---Allen Marple

The simple declarative sentence is the soul of good writing.  
---David Rosenbaum

There is a meaning in life....there is one thing that matters—to set a chime of words tinkling in the minds of a few fastidious people.  
---Logan Pearsall Smith

What I like in a good author is not what he says, but what he whispers.  
---Logan Pearsall Smith

The fascination of the silent midnight, the veiled lamp, the smoldering fire, the white paper asking to be covered with elusive words; the thoughts grouping themselves into architectural forms, and slowly rising into dreamy structures, constantly changing, shifting, beautifying their outlines,—this is the subtlest of solitary temptations, and the loftiest of the intoxications of genius.  
---Henry Adams
Hot lead can be almost as effective coming from a linotype as from a firearm.
---John O'Hara

I want to live other lives. I've never quite believed that one chance is all I get. Writing is my way of making other chances.
---Anne Tyler

A thing may in itself be the finest piece of writing one has ever done, and yet have absolutely no place in the manuscript one hopes to publish.
---Thomas Wolfe

I write because I'm afraid of dying and maybe there's some chance some scattered bits of my work will live on after me and thereby frustrate Death.
---Dean Koontz

One of the most common and erroneous ideas is that the clever writer hides his meaning. In fact, the good writer makes his meaning as clear as possible. He leaves no doubt about what is being read and he is not vague except when he has good reason.
---Gary Provost

Of all those arts in which the wise excel, Nature’s chief masterpiece is writing well.
---John Sheffield

Words have a longer life than deeds.
---Pindar

Nothing stinks like a pile of unpublished writing.
---Sylvia Plath

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

The book dies a real death for me when I write the last word. I have little sorrow and then go on to a new book which is alive. The rows of my books on the shelf are to me like very well embalmed corpses. They are neither alive nor mine. I have no sorrow for them because I have forgotten them, forgotten in its truest sense.
---John Steinbeck

Why do people always expect authors to answer questions? I am an author because I want to ask questions. If I had answers I'd be a politician.
---Eugene Ionesco
It is hard enough to write books and stories without being asked to explain them as well.

--Ernest Hemingway

I don’t care to talk about a novel I’m doing because if I communicate the magic spell, even in an abbreviated form, it loses it’s force for me. Once you have talked, the act of communication has been made.

--Angus Wilson

Nice writing isn’t enough. It isn’t enough to have smooth and pretty language. You have to surprise the reader frequently, you can’t just be nice all the time. Provoke the reader. Astonish the reader. Writing that has no surprises is as bland as oatmeal. Surprise the reader with the unexpected verb or adjective. Use one startling adjective per page.

--Anne Bernays

If you can tell stories, create characters, devise incidents, and have sincerity and passion, it doesn’t matter a damn how you write.

--W. Somerset Maugham

It is by sitting down to write every morning that one becomes a writer. Those who do not do this remain amateurs.

--Gerald Brenan

A writer doesn’t need to go out and live, but stay home and invent.

--Ned Rorem

I love writing. I love the swirl and swing of words as they tangle with human emotions.

--James Michener

Never fall in love with your first draft.

--Herb Williams

A writer is a simple-minded person....He’s not a great mind, he’s not a great thinker, he’s not a great philosopher, he’s a storyteller.

--Erskine Caldwell

I write the books first, then do the research, then rewrite them.

--Peter Dickinson
Writing is like a twitch. You do it because you have to do it. And it’s fun, God knows it’s fun. All these writers say, ‘Oh, it’s so hard, it’s such torture,’ because they’re having such a good time and if they told people that they’d get lynched.

--Stephen King

What release to write so that one forgets oneself, forgets one’s companion, forgets where one is or what one is going to do next—to be drenched in sleep or in the sea. Pencils and pads and curling blue sheets alive with letters heap up on the desk.

--Anne Morrow Lindbergh

It took me fifteen years to discover I had no talent for writing, but I couldn’t give it up because by that time I was too famous.

--Robert Benchley

In America only the successful writer is important, in France all writers are important, in England no writer is important, in Australia you have to explain what a writer is.

--Geoffrey Cotterell

Originality is simply a pair of fresh eyes.

--T. W. Higginson

Pen and ink is wit’s plough.

--John Clarke

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 driven on by some demon whom one can neither resist nor understand.

—George Orwell

It is better to create than to be learned, creating is the true essence of life.

--Barthold Georg Niebuhr

You must keep sending work out; you must never let a manuscript do nothing but eat its head off in a drawer. You send that work out again and again, while you’re working on another one. If you have talent, you will receive some measure of success—but only if you persist.

--Isaac Asimov

When people are free to do as they please, they usually imitate each other. Originality is deliberate and forced, and partakes of the nature of a protest.

--Eric Hoffer
There is no subject so old that something new cannot be said about it.

--Dostoyevsky

A person who publishes a book willfully appears before the populace with his pants down...If it is a good book nothing can hurt him. If it is a bad book, nothing can help him.

--Edna St. Vincent Millay

The true writer is not a talker; at least he doesn't talk about his writing. Or shouldn't. The blood runs out of his writing veins if he spills, orally, what he is doing, or sounds off about his problems.

--William Targ

A writer who waits for ideal conditions under which to work will die without putting a word on paper....I just let something simmer for a while in my mind before trying to put it into words. I walk around straightening pictures on the wall, rugs on the floor until I'm ready. Delay is natural to a writer. He's like a surfer. He bides his time, waiting for the perfect wave on which to ride in.

--E. B. White

Writing is life making itself known to me through words.

--Jessamyn West

The best writing is always done at night when you're asleep. You put yourself to sleep reading a book or the transcripts of judicial hearings. You let the facts just pour into your mind and then somehow they magically arrange themselves at night.

There is no sense in trying to bull your way through when you're stuck on a passage—it means that somehow the facts don't fit. You have to knock off and go to bed, and if the subconscious doesn't arrange the facts, then you're nowhere.

--Theodore H. White

If you are a real writer you know that what you put down on the page isn't sacred. You just keep throwing out what isn't any good and keep writing. The point of writing isn't self-therapy. You have what amounts to a contract with the reader, and the reader has the right to quit at any time.

--Charles Johnson

I would much rather go to Indonesia or Australia as a working writer than as a tourist, and I feel that way about life. I'd rather go through life as a writer than as a tourist.

--Alvin Toffler
Fortunately, Writer’s Block is almost always curable. Either by the passage of time, or by the informed efforts of the writer on his own, or both. Simple measures to get started again include retyping the last page, chapter, or whole manuscript: replotting from the viewpoint of another character; skipping ahead and dealing with the trouble spot later; or laying aside the narrative until the writer gains a new perspective on his material.

--Jean Backus

In my experience, novelists and others who complain of a mysterious disease called Writer’s Block should be treated with suspicion. This inexplicable failure to write anything can be the result of two conditions—simple laziness or having nothing to say. Writers are sometimes encouraged to treat their laziness as if it were a rare and beautiful neurosis, proof of their artistic temperament if not of their genius. Only the sourest Philistine would deny that one has to be in the right mood to write creatively, they plead.

On the contrary, one needs only to develop a certain power of concentration and have something to say. These writers who, quite genuinely, have nothing to say, no perception to impart, would be better employed in some other occupation like selling hairbrushes or driving buses.

--Auberon Waugh

There are several kinds of compliments handed to writers. Among them I value only one thing higher than laughter: tears. You have to dig more deeply into a reader’s gut to extract tears, which is why they have more value. Create an admirable character, have the reader fall in love with him, then kill him. Create an abominable character, cause the reader to hate him, then cause the character to change, altering the reader’s perception and emotional reaction to the character.

--Barry B. Longyear

Talent is cheap. What matters is discipline.

--Andre Dubus

I even love to revise: it’s like a piece of work I can put on the table and make better, the same way I can make something with my hands.

--Eudora Welty

I write to touch another human being. Not just to entertain, but to give comfort so one can say, ‘Ah, I am not alone in this wilderness.’

--Michael Wagman
Novels are being written these days with no plot, and except for a very talented person like Kafka, this can be very dangerous....the first duty of a novelist is to tell a story.

--Julian Symons

Writing is a sedentary and lonely profession, hardly adventurous in any physical sense. And journalism is worse because journalists are writers who have no education and disdain looking up words in dictionaries or subjects in encyclopedias, relying on their memories. Certainly none of it is romantic. If it were, policemen and nurses and cab drivers would compose all the novels.

--Harry Golden

A writer must first of all have a working vocabulary. He must know the quality of words and their functions, methods of handling them, and their power or futility. He must know which words to avoid as well as the ones most suitable for his use, and he must have an artist's taste and skill in arranging them.

--Norma R. Youngberg

The author of the novel has an infinity of choices. He can move swiftly or slowly. He can be as brief as Camus or Nathaniel West, or take as much time as Tolstoy. He can move everywhere he wants to in time, thought, place, history, allusion, fantasy and reverie. He can digress with any enthusiasm and even take revenge upon an old girl friend by writing her in an unkindly manner.

--Joseph Heller

About the subject of outlines. They’re dangerous and perhaps useful. A first-rate stand-up comic who goes before an audience may know very well what he’s going to do in the five or ten minutes that he’s allotted. On the other hand, once he feels his audience sufficiently warmed up and responding in the way he wishes them to respond, he will throw most of his prepared material to the winds and just ad lib. The same is true of the novelist. Once you feel you’ve established the kind of rapport with your material, once you’re getting the note that you want you’ve got to go along with whatever comes out of your typewriter.

--Wallace Markfield

Anything which is not ridiculously incompetent has a chance of being published.

--Robertson Davies

When I’m not writing, unease moves and twitches at the back of my neck, between my shoulder blades. A writer is somebody who, when he’s writing, never feels there’s anything else he ought to be doing; a writer is somebody who, when he’s doing anything else, always feels he ought to be writing.

--Lesley Conger
There is no word, no action, which is of itself out of place if it springs from artistic necessity.

--Madeleine L'Engle

Originality in writing is largely a matter of doing better what other people have done badly or only fairly well. It often involves combinations of old elements in a new way. Something completely new, as the wheel was once, is rare—perhaps impossible now. Certainly you don’t write a play in a vacuum you pick up ideas from every play you read or see, every scrap of dialogue you overhear, every film, every radio or TV show; from every day at the office, every ride in a tram, meal with the family, class you teach, spadeful of earth you throw, truck you drive...

--Eunice Hanger

The best training for any novelist is to read and teach yourself to have a critical ability. Mostly, just read; and if you love novels, it’s just going to seep right into you. You must want to be a storyteller. If you’re not meant to be a novelist, you’ll find some other medium which will be much better for you. With so many types of writing, it’s a pity when young people think, ‘Oh, I must write a novel,’ when it might be much better for them to be a columnist or an essayist.

--Helen MacInnes

Writing is like being at a party and saying, ‘Have you heard the one about?’ It’s the pleasure of telling a good tale, the logic and neatness of it when you get all the ends to thread up together and it works.

--Paul Gallico

I never talk about future projects. It’s bad luck and it dissipates your energy. Writing for me is like undoing a dream. And you never talk about a dream until it’s over and comes swimming out of your subconscious, do you?

--Robert Anderson

Perhaps you have heard of the Scheherazade Syndrome: ‘If you bore me, you die.’ Authors have to defy that syndrome, an increasing pressure in a TV-consuming society.

--Brian W. Aldiss

The more particular, the more specific you are, the more universal you are. These people who insist on writing cosmic novels about this woman who symbolizes fertility, who climbs up a mountain, slug, slug, slug, and marries a man who is all manhood and they have a baby who represents the principle of duty—they aren’t any good!

--Nancy Hale
When I am writing well, that is akin to what saints call ecstasy. You know it’s good, and no other kind of living can ever measure up to it.

--Edna O’Brien

Treat it as a job—not a mystical calling. Then you’ll get up every morning and go ‘to work’ instead of waiting for the muse to attend you.

--Jean Brady

If the noun is good and the verb is strong, you almost never need an adjective.

--J. Anthony Lukas

Books aren’t written, they’re rewritten....It is one of the hardest things to accept, especially after the seventh rewrite hasn’t quite done it.

--Michael Crichton

There is no reason why anybody should read a writer’s story unless he can capture his or her interest. A writer is competing with many varieties of entertainment, and the man or woman who buys his book has many alternatives—baseball, football, hockey, movies, TV, a drink at a bar, basketball, bowling, etc. A writer is not just competing with other writers, but with all the above. A writer has not just to write a story, he or she must write a better story.

--Louis L’Amour

If you would be a writer, first be a reader. Only through the assimilation of ideas, thoughts and philosophies can one begin to focus his own ideas, thoughts and philosophies.

--Allen W. Eckert

Writing is not a profession, occupation or job; it is not a way of life: it is a comprehensive response to life.

--Gregory Mcdonald

No one put a gun to your head and ordered you to become a writer. One writes out of his own choice and must be prepared to take the rough spots along the road with a certain equanimity, though allowed some grinding of the teeth.

--Stanley Ellin

The beauty or the curse of writing is that there is no formula for success, no government-tested right way. Mechanics have a manual to follow as they reassemble a transmission. Cooks have package directions that lead them from mix to cake. Writers will find neither packed with a typewriter.

--Thomas Clark
The first thing the young writer should do is to read everything, and read all the time. Poetry, philosophy, economics, Sears Roebuck catalogs, history, novels. Reading that’s good, bad, and indifferent, but infinitely varied.

He should also travel as far as his feet, his time, and his finances will carry him.

He should submit everything he sees, hears, reads, or believes to a most searching examination, as if his salvation depends upon it, as indeed it does.

He should write one book, again, good, bad, or indifferent, to prove to himself that he can fill 350 pages with a connected composition, that he has enough stamina to finish the course. The world is full of writers who have ‘not quite finished’ a book for twenty years.

Finally, he should set out to share, observe, and record the experience and the vision of this very wonderful world.

--Morris L. West

Writers write because they can’t help themselves....The born writer writes to live, and he lives to write. It is a compulsion to communicate. We have something to say and, while it may not be an earth-shaking message, it seems so important to us that the words we put on paper are our way of clutching a reader’s arm to plead, ‘Listen—please listen to what I have to tell you.’

--Lenora Mattingly Weber

It is not necessary to portray many characters. The centre of gravity should be in two persons; him and her.

--Anton Chekhov

First I pick a locale, then I populate it with people, and then the people start messing each other up.

--Mary Ellin Barrett

I never write in (a) pokey way....I have to turn loose like the blowing wind. I’ve got to get going. I’ve got to roll. I can’t halt. When I get started, I’m like a flowing stream or a wind that blows over the meadow. I’ve got to move....

I never hang up on a word....If I can’t find the word I want at that time, I just keep going. I’ll hang up when I revise. But I want to get the story down on paper first. I want to get the mood of the poem down. I can think about words later.

--Jesse Stuart
I write about things I don’t know all that well just to try to understand them. The act of writing is an investigative, learning act.

--Grace Paley

You should never try to write anything you wouldn’t enjoy reading.

--Alison Lurie

The secret in writing detail is to become more observant. Look at your shoes. They are not merely shoes; they are dirty tennis sneakers, pumps, clogs, oxfords, sandals, or galoshes. The ring on your finger is a diamond, a turquoise, gold wedding band, or a five-and-dime special that turns your finger green. As you remember back, try to remember specifics instead of general terms.

--Janice T. Dixon and Dora D. Flack

Virtually every beginning poet hurts himself by an addiction to adjectives. Verbs are by far the most important things for poems—especially wonderful tough monosyllables like ‘gasp’ and ‘cry.’ Nouns are the next most important. Adjectives tend to be useless.

--Donald Hall

You’ve got to get an education from somewhere if you’re going to write. I don’t believe in unlettered, untutored writers. It seems to me literature springs from literature. But whether you have the formal degree or not; that’s empty as far as your writing goes. Your writing depends on the quality of the work—wherever it comes from. Have you ever heard of an unlettered, untutored writer who was a good writer? They might be good storytellers, and if what they say is taken down it might make what they call oral literature.

--Elizabeth Spencer

Write down the thoughts of the moment. Those that come unsought for are commonly the most valuable.

--Francis Bacon

Goethe said there would be little left of him if he were to discard what he owed to others.

--Charlotte Cushman

Of all sad words of the writer’s pen, saddest are these, ‘I didn’t jot it when!’

--Laurence J. Peter

Personally, I would sooner have written *Alice in Wonderland* than the whole *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

--Stephen Leacock
The ideas I stand for are not mine. I borrowed them from Socrates. I swiped them from Chesterfield. I stole them from Jesus. And I put them in a book. If you don’t like their rules, whose would you use?

--Dale Carnegie

No matter what it is you write, you teach.

--Michael Seidman

Nothing is new except arrangement.

--William Durant

(A novel) begins to seep into your brain, drop by drop. But it isn’t as though you’re getting sap out of one tree; you’re getting sap out of 50 trees spread around in a very thick woods. It’s not a neat and orderly experience. These drips and drops collect, and suddenly, you have a puddle. At that point you may want to write something down.

--Philip Roth

Grammar ‘rules’ are to be obeyed only when they contribute to the sense and rhythm of the prose....A well-split infinitive, produced for a purpose like honest cordwood, is much more effective than any number of sapless ‘correct’ sentences.

--Paul Darcy Boles

If you want to get rich from writing, write the sort of thing that’s read by persons who move their lips when they’re reading to themselves.

--Don Marquis

The two creatures most to be pitied are the spider and the novelist—their lives hanging by a thread spun out of their own guts.

--Katherine Patterson

Revising is repugnant. I have to play for keeps on every page.

--Robert Penn Warren

People who I did not think could write on bathroom walls earn over $50,000 a year (writing) because they stick to it.

--Bill Emerson

Too much polishing and you spoil things. There’s a limit to the expressibility of ideas. You have a new thought, and interesting one. Then, as you try to perfect it, it ceases to be new and interesting, and loses the freshness with which it first occurred to you. You’re spoiling it.

--Leo Tolstoy
Writing for a living is the most rewarding and the most impoverishing thing anyone can do.

--Norman Mailer

Weak verbs are the lazy writer’s crutch and the reader’s despair.

--William E. Unger

Why does a man spend fifty years of his life in an occupation that is often painful? I once told a class I was teaching that writing is an intellectual contact sport, similar in some respects to football. The effort required can be exhausting, the goal unreached, and you are hurt on almost every play; but that doesn’t deprive a man or a boy from getting peculiar pleasures from the game.

--Irwin Shaw

The ability to write simple, direct prose that says precisely what you want it to say in the fewest words has always been the mark of an educated person.

--Business Week

I see but one rule: to be clear. If I am not clear, all my world crumbles to nothing.

--Stendhal

Writing is easy: all you do is sit staring at the blank sheet of paper until the drops of blood form on your forehead.

--Gene Fowler

A good writer is basically a story-teller, not a scholar or a redeemer of mankind.

--Isaac Bashevis Singer

Less is more.

--Robert Browning

Writing books is better than planting vines: the latter serves only the needs of the stomach, whereas the former feeds the soul.

--Alcuin

The greatest force that the written word alone can exercise is its ability to influence one’s mind, one’s heart, one’s conscience into action—good or bad—without raising a voice, using physical coercion, or public embarrassment.

--O. A. Battista

Two sorts of writers possess genius: those who think, and those who cause others to think.

--Joseph Roux
The greatest part of a writer’s time is spent in reading, in order to write; a man will turn over half a library to make one book.

--Samuel Johnson

Four hostile newspapers are more to be feared than a thousand bayonets.

--Napoleon I

He that uses many words for the explaining of any subject, doth like the cuttlefish, hide himself for the most part in his own ink.

--John Ray

A writer and nothing else: a man alone in a room with the English language, trying to get human feelings right.

—John K. Hutchens

How can you write if you can’t cry?

--Ring Lardner

Writing is the only profession where no one considers you ridiculous if you earn no money.

--Jules Renard

It’s a nervous work. The state that you need to write is the state that others are paying large sums to get rid of.

--Shirley Hazzard

I write for the same reason I breathe - because if I didn’t, I would die.

--Isaac Asimov

Most writers regard truth as their most valuable possession, and therefore are most economical in its use.

--Mark Twain

Writers are the engineers of human souls.

--Joseph Stalin

Stop being lazy! Lazy in doing research! Lazy in your outlining of your piece! Lazy in your thinking! Lazy in your writing! Writing is work! Thinking is work! Writing means rewriting. There is a correct word to express a precise idea. Precision, precision, precision! Accuracy, accuracy, accuracy!

--Gini Kopecky
Often must you turn your stylus to erase if you hope to write something worth a second reading.

--Horace

Readers are like sheep. If there’s any gate on the right or left, they’ll take it. You must, therefore, always keep them on the path.

--John Wood

Writers! Choose a subject equal to your abilities; think carefully what your shoulders may refuse and what they are capable of bearing.

--Horace

The writer...is a person who talks to himself, or better, who talks in himself.

--Malcolm Cowley

One need not believe too literally in Oscar Wilde’s account of how he spent the morning putting in a comma, and the afternoon in taking it out again.

--F. L. Lucas

I think that everyone who does not need to be a writer, who thinks he can do something else, ought to do something else.

--Georges Simenon

We write to create a world in which we can live, to heighten our awareness of life, to lure and enchant and console others, to serenade our loves...and to transcend our life.

--Anaïs Nin

More than one way exists to write any sentence longer than one word. Any sentence longer than four or five words can be written four or five ways. Some ways are better than others; some are dead wrong; one may be right, depending on context. Next time, in another context, that same sentence may be better if you write it another way.

--Andrew Offutt

Listen to yourself. If you want to write, write. You’ll hear discouraging voices urging you to do the sane thing and get a job. Sometimes the voice will come from within. Listen to that one and see if it’s stronger than the voice within that prompts you to write. You may have to do this many times, but a pattern will emerge. If you decide to write, kindly thank those who love you for their concern, tune out their advice (you don’t need to announce that you’re doing this) and write.

--Peggy Anderson
Never write on a subject without first having read yourself full on it.  
--Jean Paul Richter

Think like a wise man but communicate in the language of the people.  
William Butler Yeats

Writing good editorials is chiefly telling the people what they think, not what you think.  
--Arthur Brisbane

Whatever we conceive well we express clearly.  
--Nicholas Boileau

The two most engaging powers of an author are to make new things familiar, and familiar things new.  
--Samuel Johnson

If you wish to be a writer, write.  
--Epictetus

Most of the basic material a writer works with is acquired before the age of fifteen.  
--Willa Cather

A writer’s problem does not change. He himself changes and the world he lives in changes but his problem remains the same. It is always how to write truly and having found what is true, to project it in such a way that it becomes a part of the experience of the person who reads it.  
--Ernest Hemingway

An author ought to write for the youth of his own generation, the critics of the next, and the schoolmasters of ever afterwards.  
--F. Scott Fitzgerald

Talent is like a faucet; while it is open, one must write. Inspiration is a farce that poets have invented to give themselves importance.  
--Jean Anouilh

Good writing is a kind of skating which carries off the performer where he would not go.  
--Ralph Waldo Emerson

If I had to give young writers advice, I’d say don’t listen to writers talking about writing.  
--Lillian Hellman
Nothing you write, if you hope to be good, will ever come out as you first hoped.
--Lillian Hellman

Writing is the hardest way of earning a living, with the possible exception of wrestling alligators.
--Olin Miller

What no wife of a writer can ever understand is that a writer is working when he's staring out of the window.
--Burton Rascoe

Failure is very difficult for a writer to bear, but very few can manage the shock of early success.
--Maurice Valency

Style, in its finest sense, is the last acquirement of the educated mind.
--Alfred North Whitehead

Style is effectiveness of assertion.
--George Bernard Shaw

Every style that is not boring is a good one.
--Voltaire

No style is good that is not fit to be spoken or read aloud with effect.
--William Hazlitt

I never write metropolis for seven cents because I can get the same price for city. I never write policeman because I can get the same money for cop.
--Mark Twain

A sequel is an admission that you've been reduced to imitating yourself.
--Don Marquis

The most essential gift for a good writer is a built-in, shock-proof shit detector.
--Ernest Hemingway

The only sensible ends of literature are, first, the pleasurable toil of writing; second, the gratification of one's family and friends; and lastly, the solid cash.
--Nathaniel Hawthorne
Writing comes more easily if you have something to say.  
--Sholem Asch

The pen is the tongue of the hand—a silent utterer of words for the eye.  
--Henry Ward Beecher

The pen is mightier than the sword.  
--Bulwer-Lytton

No man but a blockhead ever wrote except for money.  
--Samuel Johnson

What is written without effort is in general read without pleasure.  
--Samuel Johnson

Most people won’t realize that writing is a craft. You have to take your apprenticeship in it like anything else.  
--Katherine Anne Porter

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

If it were not for a rainy day, a drunken vigil, a fit of the spleen, a course of physic, a sleepy Sunday, an ill run at dice, a long tailor’s bill, a beggar’s purse, a factious head, a hot sun, costive diet, want of books, and a just contempt for learning—but for these...the number of authors and of writing would dwindle away to a degree most woeful to behold.  
--Jonathan Swift

Writing is a dog’s life, but the only one worth living.  
--Gustave Flaubert

You don’t write because you want to say something; you write because you’ve got something to say.  
--F. Scott Fitzgerald

In composing, as a general rule, run your pen through every other word you have written: you have no idea what vigor it will give your style.  
--Sydney Smith
In composition I do not think second thoughts are best.  
--Byron

The desire to write grows with writing.  
--Erasmus

All writing comes by the grace of God.  
--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Certainly the Age of Writing is the most miraculous of all things man has devised.  
--Thomas Carlyle

When I want to read a book, I write one.  
--Benjamin Disraeli

What comes from the heart goes to the heart.  
--Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Nothing is ended with honour which does not conclude better than it began.  
--Samuel Johnson

Learn to write well, or not to write at all.  
--John Dryden and John Sheffield

It is only by writing ill that you can attain to write well.  
--Samuel Johnson

What is easy is seldom excellent.  
--Samuel Johnson

The more a man writes, the more he can write.  
--William Hazlitt

If you would not be forgotten, as soon as you are dead and rotten, either write things worth reading, or do things worth the writing.  
--Benjamin Franklin

Literary fame is the only fame of which a wise man ought to be ambitious, because it is the only lasting and living fame.  
--Robert Southey
Too much polishing weakens rather than improves a work.

--Pliny the Younger

There is probably no hell for authors in the next world—they suffer so much from critics and publishers in this.

--C. N. Bovee

Talent alone cannot make a writer. There must be a man behind the book.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Writing, when properly managed,...is but a different name for conversation.

--Laurence Sterne

The reason why so few good books are written is, that so few people that can write know anything. In general an author has always lived in a room, has read books, has cultivated science, is acquainted with the style and sentiments of the best authors, but he is out of the way of employing his own eyes and ears. He has nothing to hear and nothing to see. His life is a vacuum.

--Walter Bagehot

Books are the treasured wealth of the world and the fit inheritance of generations and nations....Their authors are a natural and irresistible aristocracy in every society, and, more than kings or emperors, exert an influence on mankind.

--Henry David Thoreau

When you steal from one author, it’s plagiarism; if you steal from many, it’s research.

--Wilson Mizner

A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately at peace with himself. What a man can be, he must be.

--Abraham Harold Maslow

A bad book is as much of a labor to write as a good one; it comes as sincerely from the author's soul.

--Aldous Huxley

A good many young writers make the mistake of enclosing a stamped, self-addressed envelope, big enough for the manuscript to come back in. This is too much of a temptation to the editor.

--Ring Lardner
We do not write as we want to but as we can.  
--Somerset Maugham

In Hollywood the woods are full of people that learned to write, but evidently can’t read. If they could read their stuff, they’d stop writing.  
--Will Rogers

As to the adjective; when in doubt, strike it out.  
--Mark Twain

Word by word the great books are written.  
--Voltaire

There are only two powers in the world, the sword and the pen; and in the end the former is always conquered by the latter.  
--Napoleon I

Either write things worth reading, or do things worth writing.  
--Benjamin Franklin

All good writing is swimming under water and holding your breath.  
--F. Scott Fitzgerald

Achilles exists only through Homer. Take away the art of writing from this world, and you will probably take away its glory.  
--Francois Rene de Chateaubriand

The writer, using fragments of disorder, seeks to impose order on the world around him, that otherwise immense panorama of futility and anarchy.  
--Wright Morris

A novelist is a person who lives in other people’s skins.  
--E. L. Doctorow

Anyone can make history. Only a great man can write it.  
--Oscar Wilde

The original writer is not one who imitates nobody, but one whom nobody can imitate.  
--Francois Rene de Chateaubriand
The true writer has nothing to say. What counts is the way he says it.  
--Alain Robbe-Grillet

When a writer becomes the center of his attention, he becomes a nudnik. And a nudnik who believes he’s profound is even worse than just a plain nudnik.  
--Isaac Bashevis Singer

Of all those arts in which the wise excel,  
Nature’s chief masterpiece is writing well.  
--John Sheffield

‘Fool!’ said my muse to me, ‘look in thy heart, and write.’  
--Sir Philip Sidney

A man may write at any time, if he will set himself doggedly to it.  
--Samuel Johnson

If you would not be forgotten,  
As soon as you are dead and rotten,  
Either write things worth reading,  
Or do things worth the writing.  
--Benjamin Franklin

In every man’s writings, the character of the writer must lie recorded.  
--Thomas Carlyle

All good books are alike in that they are truer than if they had really happened and after you are finished reading one you will feel that all that happened to you and afterwards it all belongs to you: the good and the bad, the ecstasy, then remorse and sorrow, the people and the places and how the weather was. If you can get so that you can give that to people, then you are a writer.  
--Ernest Hemingway

The writer’s only responsibility is to his art. He will be completely ruthless if he is a good one. He has a dream. It anguishes him so much he must get rid of it. He has no peace until then. Everything goes by the board: honor, pride, decency, security, happiness, all, to get the book written. If a writer has to rob his mother, he will not hesitate; the ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ is worth any number of old ladies.  
--William Faulkner

I write from the worm’s-eye point of view.  
--Ernie Pyle
Really the writer doesn’t want success....He knows he has a short span of life, that the day will come when he must pass through the wall of oblivion, and he wants to leave a scratch on that wall—Kilroy was here—that somebody a hundred, or a thousand years later will see.

--William Faulkner

If you write about the things and the people you know best, you discover your roots. Even if they are new roots, fresh roots...they are better than...no roots.

--Isaac Bashevis Singer

The literary man has a circle of the chosen few who read him and become his only public....What more natural than that he should write for those who, even if they do not pay him, at least understand him?

--Amado Nervo

In youth men are apt to write more wisely than they really know or feel; and the remainder of life may be not idly spent in realizing and convincing themselves of the wisdom they uttered long ago.

--Nathaniel Hawthorne

Writing is one of the few areas in life where ‘Do it right the first time or don’t do it at all’ doesn’t apply. If we tried to do it right the first time, most of us would never finish a sentence.

--Ronald John Donovan

There are three rules for writing a successful novel. The problem is, no one knows what they are.

--W. Somerset Maugham

Writing is not writing skills, but knowing how to see....Tune in and notice all the details. There are people who can’t read and write who are great novelists. They’ve got two lenses...a telephoto lens for big pictures and a lens a dentist would use. What they do to show the big picture is to use those details they see with the small lens.

--Carolyn Chute

I love being a writer. What I can’t stand is the paperwork.

--Peter de Vries
The main thing to remember in autobiography is not to let any damn modesty creep in to spoil the story.

--Margery Allingham

Each of us, then, makes his own illusion of the world—illusion poetic, sentimental, joyous, melancholy, foul, or dismal—according to his nature. And the writer has no mission other than to reproduce faithfully this illusion, with all the processes of art he had learned.

--Guy de Maupassant

Only the hand that erases can write the true thing.

--Meister Eckhart

One man is as good as another until he has written a book.

--Benjamin Jowett

The day you write to please everyone you no longer are in journalism. You are in show business.

--Frank Miller, Jr.

The first essence of journalism is to know what you want to know; the second, is to find out who will tell you.

--John Gunther

Like stones, words are laborious and unforgiving, and the fitting of them together, like the fitting of stones, demands great patience and strength of purpose and particular skill.

--Edmund Morrison

The writer is committed when he plunges to the very depths of himself with the intent to disclose, not his individuality, but his person in the complex society that conditions and supports him.

Jean-Paul Sartre

There should be two main objectives in ordinary prose writing: to convey a message and to include in it nothing that will distract the reader’s attention or check his habitual pace of reading—he should feel that he is seated at ease in a taxi, not riding a temperamental horse through traffic.

--Robert Graves and Allan Hodge

The obscurity of a writer is generally in proportion to his incapacity.

--Quintilian
Every author, however modest, keeps a most outrageous vanity chained like a
madman in the padded cell of his breast.

--Logan Pearsall
Smith

Writing is no trouble: you just jot down ideas as they occur to you. The jotting is
simplicity itself—it is the occurring which is difficult.

--Stephen Leacock

Caesar had perished from the world of men
Had not his sword been rescued by his pen.

--Henry Vaughan

When an author is yet living, we estimate his powers by his worst performance; and
when he is dead, we rate them by his best.

--Samuel Johnson

How vain to sit down to write when you have not stood up to live.

--Henry David
Thoreau

Every writer without exception, is a masochist, a sadist, a peeping Tom, an exhibitionist, a narcissist, an injustice collector and a depressed person constantly haunted by fears of unproductivity.

--Edmund Bergler

Footnotes, the little dogs yapping at the heels of the text.

--William James

As for style of writing, if one has anything to say, it drops from him simply and directly, as a stone falls to the ground.

--Henry David
Thoreau

(Writing)—the art of applying the seat of the pants to the seat of the chair.

--Mary Heaton Vorse

It has been said that writing comes more easily if you have something to say.

--Sholem Asch

Fundamentally, all writing is about the same thing: it’s about dying, about the brief
flicker of time we have here, and the frustrations that it creates.

--Mordecai Richler
Our society, like decadent Rome, has turned into an amusement society, with writers chief among the court jesters—not so much above the clatter as part of it.

--Saul Bellow

If you would be a reader, read; if a writer, write.

--Epictetus

The waste basket is a writer’s best friend.

--Isaac Bashevis Singer

If a man means his writing seriously, he must mean to write well. But how can he write well until he learns to see what he has written badly. His progress toward good writing and recognition of bad writing are bound to unfold at something like the same rate.

--John Ciardi

A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.

--Virginia Woolf

Better to write for yourself and have no public, than to write for the public and have no self.

--Cyril Connolly

Writing has power, but its power has no vector. Writers can stir the mind, but they can’t direct it. Times change things, God changes things, the dictators change things, but writers can’t change anything.

--Isaac Bashevis Singer

I write for myself and strangers. The strangers, dear Readers, are an afterthought.

--Gertrude Stein

Writing is a solitary occupation. Family, friends and society are the natural enemies of a writer. He must be alone, uninterrupted and slightly savage if he is to sustain and complete an undertaking.

--Laurence Clark Powell

I think it’s bad to talk about one’s present work, for it spoils something at the root of the creative act. It discharges the tension.

--Norman Mailer
You have to throw yourself away when you write.  
---Maxwell Perkins

As for my next book, I am going to hold myself from writing it till I have it impend- 
ing in me: grown heavy in my mind like a ripe pear, pendant, gravid, asking to be cut or it will fall.  
---Virginia Woolf

No man understands a deep book until he has seen and lived at least part of its con- 
tents.  
---Ezra Pound

The job of the novelist is to entertain....To entertain...you need more than clarity.  
You need eloquence. You need flair. You need the whole gamut of words and sen- 
tence structures—the involved and the complex as well as the bare bones simple.  
---Melvin J. Grayson

A writer’s life is his crucible. First you draw on your own experience. When you 
have drained your own experience or have stopped experiencing in quantity, you 
must draw on the experience of others through observation and research. Research is vital.  
---Paddy Chayefsky

The idea is to get the pencil moving quickly....To write a scene, work up feeling: ride 
in on it.  
---Bernard Malamud

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

Read, read, read. Read everything—trash, classics, good and bad, and see how they do it. Just like a carpenter who works as an apprentice and studies the mast. Read! You’ll absorb it. Then write. If it is good, you’ll find out. If it’s not, throw it out the window.  
---William Faulkner

All this advice from senior writers to establish a discipline—always to get down a thousand words a day whatever one’s mood—I find an absurdly puritanical and im- 
practical approach. Write, if you must, because you feel like writing, never because you feel you ought to write.  
---John Fowles
I think it’s a pretty good rule not to tell what a thing is about until it’s finished. If you do you always seem to lose some of it. It never quite belongs to you so much again.

--F. Scott Fitzgerald

‘Get black on white’ used to be Maupassant’s advice—that’s what I always do. I don’t give a hoot what the writing’s like, I write any sort of rubbish which will cover the main outline of the story, then I can begin to see it.

--Frank O’Connor

Advice to young readers who want to get ahead without any annoying delays: don't write about Man, write about a man.

--E. B. White

You have to assume that the act of writing is the most important of all. If you start worrying about people’s feelings then you get nowhere at all.

--Norman Mailer

Say all you have to say in the fewest possible words, or your reader will be sure to skip them; and in the plainest possible words or he will certainly misunderstand them.

--John Ruskin

Words must be weighed, not counted.

--Polish Proverb

Always seek the hard, definite, personal word.

--T. E. Hulme

1. Never use a long word where a short one will do.
2. If it is possible to cut out a word, always cut it out.
3. Never use the passive voice where you can use the active.
4. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
5. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything barbarous.

--George Orwell

Never allow the integrity of your own way of seeing things and saying things to be swamped by the influence of a master, however great.

--George P. Lathrop

Write something to suit yourself and many people will like it; write something to suit everybody and scarcely anyone will care for it.

--Jesse Stuart
I would advise any writer trying to achieve success to ignore popular fashion as much as possible, and write what he or she really wants to write. Of course, it helps to remember that writing is an act of communication. The more accessible your work is, the more people will want to read it.

--Stephen King

No genuine piece of writing ever happens without the author’s total emotional belief and involvement in what he or she is writing about. It must germinate inside his own unconscious and consciousness and emotions if it is to be a truly fine book.

--Charlotte Zolotow

Writing can get harder rather than easier as you get better at it. The competence a good writer acquires is not so much facility as it is staying power.

--Sheridan Blau

Be merciless on yourself. If a sentence, no matter how excellent, does not illuminate your subject in some new and useful way, scratch it out.

--Kurt Vonnegut

Newspaper reporters and technical writers are trained to reveal almost nothing about themselves in their writings. This makes them freaks in the world of writers, since almost all of the other ink-stained wretches in that world reveal a lot about themselves to readers.

--Kurt Vonnegut

Keep your hands from literary picking and stealing. But if you cannot refrain from this kind of stealth, abstain from murdering what you steal.

--Augustus Toplady

One may write from the outside of his mind, as it were; write and write, learnedly and eloquently, and make no impression; but when he speaks from real insight and conviction of his own, men are always glad to hear him, whether they agree with him or not. Get down to your real self...and let that speak. One’s real self is always vital, and gives the impression of vitality.

--John Burroughs

To produce a mighty book, you must choose a mighty theme. No great and enduring volume can ever be written on the flea, though many there be that have tried it.

--Herman Melville

The secret way to fail as a writer is set out with the determination to please everyone.

--Herbert Bayard Swoop
There is probably no hell for authors in the next world...they suffer so much from critics and publishers in this.  

--Christian Nestell Bode

I would rather be attacked than unnoticed. For the worst thing you can do to an author is to be silent as to his works.

--Samuel Johnson

Authors are judged by strange capricious rules,  
The great ones are thought mad, the small ones fools.

--Alexander Pope

The only happy author in this world is he who is below the care of reputation.

--Washington Irving

There seems to be no physical handicap or change of environment that can hold a real writer down.

--Kathleen Norris

The great art of writing is the art of making people real to themselves with words.

--Logan Pearsall Smith

The art of the pen is to rouse the inward vision, to spring imagination with a word or phrase.

--George Meredith

The writer’s intention is limited by the tempers and experience of the reader.

--Vernon Lee

The palest ink is better than the most retentive memory.

--Chinese Proverb

...and as sentences should follow one another in harmonious sequence, so the paragraphs must fit on to one another like the automatic couplings of railway carriages.

--Winston Churchill

There is excitement in the very act of composition. Some of you know this at first hand--a deep satisfaction when the thing begins to take shape. Actually, I wonder if life holds a deeper satisfaction.

--Catherine Drinker Brown
This race and this country and this life produced me. I shall express myself as I am.
--James Joyce

An enormous amount of other learning must take place before one can write worthwhile essays of ideas; that is in the nature of the whole abstraction process.
--James Miffed

Writing is good for us because it brings our thoughts out into the open, as a boy turns his pockets inside out to see what is in them.
--Oliver Wendell Holmes

Writing can be, like the practice of any other art, a way of life. It is what we all want, to find a way to live.
--Sherwood Anderson

The vital difference between a writer and someone who merely is published is that the writer seems always to be saying to himself, as Stendhal actually did, ‘If I am not clear, the world around me collapses.’
--Alfred Kazin

The best writing, both prose and poetry, as Shakespeare pre-eminently shows, makes use, with condensation and selection, of playful, impassioned, imaginative talk.
--Sidney Cox

I hate anything that occupies more space than it is worth. I hate to see a load of band-boxes go along the street, and I hate to see a parcel of big words without anything in them.
--William Hazlitt

A young author is tempted to leave anything he has written through fear of not having enough to say if he goes cutting out too freely. But it is easier to be long than short.
--Samuel Butler

Creativity is continual surprise, and only because it is surprise can it be truth. When we grow self-conscious we hide, we cloak, we disguise, we lie. So the true writer artist always hopes, through working swiftly with his emotions to spring forth the delights and terrors, to trap them before they escape.
--Ray Bradbury

It doesn’t matter which leg of your table you make first, so long as the table has four legs and will stand up solidly when you have finished it.
--Ezra Pound
It is much easier to sit at a desk and read plans for a billion gallons of water a day, and look at maps and photographs; but you will write a better article if you heave yourself out of a comfortable chair and go down in tunnel 3 and get soaked.

--Stuart Chase

Think of and look at your work as though it were done by your enemy. If you look at it to admire it you are lost...If we look at it to see where it is wrong, we shall see this and make it righter. If we look at it to see where it is right, we shall see this and shall not make it righter. We cannot see it both wrong and right at the same time.

--Samuel Butler

The mere act of reading aloud put his work before him in a new light and, by constraining his attention to every line, made him judge it more rigorously. I always intend to read, and generally do read, what I write aloud to some one; any one almost will do, but he should not be so clever that I am afraid of him. I feel weak places at once when I read aloud where I thought, as long as I read to myself only, that the passage was all right.

--Samuel Butler

A writer is unfair to himself when he is unable to be hard on himself.

--Marianne Moore

Life is a jungle of events whose meanings are at once too casual (and to that extent insignificant) and too full of possible implication (without offering us any guidance as to which implication or set of implications we should choose). The skilled storyteller makes those meanings at once more significant and less confused.

--David Daiches

I have often at the beginning of a book found myself very uncertain what I would do, and appalled at the difficulty of knowing what to put where, and how to develop my incidents. I never have that feeling now because I have always found that there is some one point or other in which I can see my way. I immediately set to work at that point and before I have done and settled it, I invariably find that there is another point which I can also see and settle, etc., etc....

--Samuel Butler

The art and soul of storying

In one line can be writ:
Simplicity's to writing, as brevity to wit.

--Robert Hart

You know you’re a writer when every blooming flower becomes a ‘why’ and every planted seed becomes a ‘what if.’

--Rose Adkins
If your story has only suspense, it probably isn’t a very good story. But if it has no suspense, you don’t have a story at all.

--E. M. Forster

The appeal of writing is primarily the investigation of mystery.

--Joyce Carol Oates

I write for me. For the audience of me. If other people come along for the ride then it’s great.

--Edward Albee

It is terribly difficult for a writer to know what he is up to, since so many decisions are already made before he sits down to write—like the selection of material, which I believe is not a conscious choice on the writer’s part. It’s as unconscious as the deeply mysterious business of a novel arriving—when you suddenly feel a little twitch. The only thing that appeals to you about that twitch or idea is that you can write a novel about it; it has no other appeal, and you might even deplore it, but there it is...the selection of material is a moral decision, but it’s not a decision; it’s a recognition.

--Martin Amis

It is the task not only of the actor but of the artist as well to find the sort of expression that will arouse in others what is going on in himself.

--George Herbert Mead

Writing must be as immediate as life, or there are no juices, no chance to involve yourself or others in your vitality.

--Ray Bradbury

You writers, choose a subject that is within your powers, and ponder long what your shoulders can and cannot bear. He who makes every effort to select his theme aright will be at no loss for choice of words or lucid arrangement.

--Horace

Do one thing...imagine what you’re writing about. See it and live it. Don’t think it up laboriously, as if you were working out mental arithmetic. Just look at it, touch it, smell it, listen to it, turn yourself into it.

--Ted Hughes

Just because people work for an institution they don’t have to write like one. Institutions can be warmed up. Administrators and executives can be turned into human beings. Information can be imparted clearly and without pompous verbosity.

--William Zinsser
Few men make themselves masters of the things they write or speak.
--John Selden

Memorable sentences are memorable on account of some single irradiating word.
--Alexander Smith

Simplify, simplify, simplify.
--Henry David Thoreau

No passion in the world is equal to the passion to alter someone else’s draft.
--H. G. Wells

I have never thought of myself as a good writer. Anyone who wants reassurance of that should read one of my first drafts. But I’m one of the world’s great rewriters.
--James A. Michener

For me, writing is a way of paying as much attention as possible.
--Susan Sontag

Writing is like religion. Every man who feels the call must work out his own salvation.
--George Horace Lorimer

When we encounter a natural style, we are astonished and delighted; for we expected to see an author, and we find a man.
--Blaise Pascal

Less is more, in prose as in architecture.
--Donald Hall

An author really hasn’t made it until he no longer shows his books to his friends.
--Dorothy Parker

My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you see! That—and no more, and it is everything! If I succeed, you shall find there...encouragement, consolation, fear, charm—all you demand—and, perhaps, also that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask..
--Joseph Conrad
Writing is turning one’s worst moments into money.  
   --J. P. Donleavy

When you are not practicing, remember, someone somewhere is practicing, and when you meet him he will win.   
   --Ed Macauley

The two most beautiful words in the English language are: ‘Check enclosed.’  
   --Dorothy Parker

If you’re not failing now and again, it’s a sign you’re playing it safe.  
   --Woody Allen

As a woman is understandably undone when a large, laboriously prepared dinner gets eaten in ten minutes, so is a writer who sees someone read in an hour what it took him four years to write.  
   --Peg Bracken

There is no justification for being a writer. You have to give yourself a reason to write every day. You have to say to yourself, ‘No matter what, I deserve to write for one more day.’  
   --Norman Mailer

You write a hit play the same way you write a flop.  
   --William Saroyan

First you’re an unknown, then you write one book and you move up to obscurity.  
   --Martin Myers

The writer who draws his material from a book is like one who borrows money only to lend it.  
   --Kahlil Gibran

Write out of love, write out of instinct, write out of reason. But always for money.  
   —Louis Untermeyer

It is not wise to violate the rules until you know how to observe them.  
   --T. S. Eliot

A real writer of nonfiction books is as much a dramatist as a journalist. It does not lessen the responsibility for accuracy, but the writer owes the reader something additional. It is the writer’s fault, not the reader’s, if the reader puts down the book.  
   --David Halberstam
Enjoy good reviews for a day or so, but don’t believe them. If you do, you’re morally obliged to believe bad reviews, which is preposterous.  

--Stephen Becker

Writing is finding out what you really know.  

--William Sloan

Authors who please everyone at once are quickly exhausted.  

--Andre Gide

Talent is helpful in writing, but guts are an absolute necessity.  

--Jessamyn West

Write tight.  

--Helen Newton

To write simply is as difficult as to be good.  

--W. Somerset Maugham

What’s all this business about being a writer? It’s just putting one word after another.  

--Irving Thalberg

There’s nothing mystical or magic about being a writer. A writer is just a person who writes something. There are almost no people who are not dentists who can fix teeth, but there are a lot of people who aren’t professional writers who write very well. This is one of the reasons why being a writer is tougher than being a dentist.  

--Andy Rooney

The profession of book writing makes horse racing seem like a solid, stable business.  

--John Steinbeck

Readers are judges of your right to practice words: they can revoke your license with a yawn.  

--Lester Logan

Quantity produces quality. If you only write a few things, you’re doomed.  

--Ray Bradbury
Novelists tend to be hard-working people. Writing is not a mystery; it’s a job.
--Reynolds Price

Just get it down on paper, and then we’ll see what to do with it.
--Maxwell Perkins

I don’t think anyone gets writer’s block. I think fear takes over.
--Neil Simon

Writing is an escape from a world that crowds me.
--Neil Simon

When the thought is there,
the pen is not;
with the pen in hand,
the thought’s forgot.
--J. Griffin Pitts

A writer is a compulsive liar, a dreamer, a mythomaniac, or a madman.
--Françoise Sagan

You can’t fake it. Bad writing is a gift.
--Ricard le Gallienne

Ideas pull the trigger, but instinct loads the gun.
--Don Marquis

I make myself revise whether I like it or not.
--John Fowles

It seems to me that all writing must come from the gut level. All the craft in the
world cannot summon emotion.
--Chris Wiltz

We must labour to be beautiful.
--W. B. Yeats

Actually if a writer needs a dictionary he should not write. He should have read the
dictionary at least three times from beginning to end and then loaned it to someone
who needs it.
--Ernest Hemingway
From the moment I picked your book up until I laid it down I was convulsed with laughter. Some day I intend reading it. --Groucho Marx

Writing is a suspension of life in order to recreate life. --John McPhee

Half my life is an act of revision. --John Irving

In good writing, words become one with things. --Ralph Waldo Emerson

The idea is to get the pencil moving quickly. --Bernard Malamud

A good writer cannot write badly on purpose. --Paddy Chayefsky

A writer lives, at best, in a state of astonishment. --William Sansom

When I stepped from hard manual work to writing, I just stepped from one kind of hard work to another. --Sean O’Casey

What an author likes to write most is his signature on the back of a paycheck. --Brendan Francis

Any writer overwhelmingly honest about pleasing himself is almost sure to please others. --Marianne Moore

The only human value of anything, writing included, is intense vision of the facts. --William Carlos Williams

The one absolute requirement for me to write...is to be awake. --Isaac Asimov

Writing is not a profession but a vocation of unhappiness. --Georges Simenon
It’s a crazy business, anyway, locking yourself in a room and inventing conversations, no way for a grownup to behave.  

--John Leonard

Read, read, read. Read everything—trash, classics, good and bad, and see how they do it....Then write.  

--William Faulkner

Nothing is new except arrangement.  

--Will Durant

Writing is pretty crummy on the nerves.  

--Paul Theroux

Writers can treat their mental illnesses every day.  

--Kurt Vonnegut

Writers should be read—but neither seen nor heard.  

--Daphne du Maurier

It’s easier to write about money than to obtain it.  

--Voltaire

Writers are chroniclers of the human experience. Writing ability is a sacred trust and should be used as such. Writers should not only entertain but should also use their talent to illuminate the unfortunate things in life and thus enlighten the heart.  

--Patrick D. Smith

If you continue to write, you go past the place where praise, publication or admiration sustains you. The more praise the better—but it does not sustain you. You arrive at a point where only the possibilities of poetry provide food for your desires, possibilities glimpsed in great poems that you love. What began perhaps as the north wind’s cooky—what continued variously as affectation and self-love, what zaps crazily up and down in public recognition—finds repose only in love of the art, and in the desire, if not precisely the hope, that you may make something fit to endure with the old ones.  

--Donald Hall

I want fiction always to situate us in the psychic and literal spot where life is most difficult, most dangerous, most beautiful.  

--John Hawkes
Fiction has to be better made than life.  

--John Irving

If you mean to be a writer, then decide what you want to write and write it. Talking about it, dreaming about it, will get you nowhere. It will probably take years for you to get the hang of it. It took me years. If you can find a working writer whose product you respect and who is willing and able to share some of his know-how with you, take his classes. But in the end it’s up to you. I’d say that in today’s tough publishing climate, you have to want to be a writer very, very much in order to succeed.  

--Joseph Hansen

The writer uses imagination and human experience to create three-dimensional characters—characters with pasts, futures, parents, siblings, hopes, fears, sorrows, happiness. At the same time that the writer shows us individuals, he or she is showing us our common humanity, inviting identification and involvement.  

--Nancy Bond

The desire to write is an odd flame.  
The sprays of criticism  
Can only bank, not extinguish.  
And the more paper it is fed,  
the hotter it burns.  

--Deanna B. Durbin

There is no lack of messages. Writers who worry about the world are many, but writers who write a good story are few. So if I have a choice to care out with either a new version of the Ten Commandments or a new story, I will rather pick the new story.  

--Isaac Bashevis Singer

Warmth is extremely important to me as a writer. It’s one of the four cardinal virtues of good writing, the others being: simplicity, clarity, economy. The first three are do-able; the fourth is intangible.  

--William Zinsser

Though there are exceptions, as a rule, the good novelist does not worry primarily about linguistic brilliance—at least not brilliance of the showy, immediately obvious kind—but instead worries about telling his story in a moving way, making the reader laugh or cry or endure suspense, whatever it is that this particular story, told at its best, will incline the reader to do.  

--John Gardner
A man’s fiction, no matter how remote it may be from the realistic or the autobiographical, is very much the record of his particular life.

--Ross MacDonald

Writing is like driving a car at night. You can see only as far as the headlights, but you can make the whole trip that way.

--E. L. Doctorow

In a good short story, the characters are pinned inescapably in the present. Things might have been different before the story began and might change after it ends, but for the present moment, things are the only way they can be. For its success, the short story depends not on language or subject matter but on melding the two.

--Linda Furman

The advice I would offer to any writer is that even when you think you have revised your book to the point where you cannot look at it again, it is time to sit down and revise it some more.

--Michael Korda

One doesn’t become a writer by thinking about being a writer; one becomes a writer by writing. It’s very easy for writers to feel that we’re collecting material by living in the world and relating to other people or that we’re learning our craft by reading other good writers. But basically you have to get down to the hard chore of writing.

--P. D. James

If it sounds like writing, I rewrite it.

--Elmore Leonard

When one writes a book one is in the rare position of being responded to on a level which for most of us, most of the time, goes unremarked. One bases one’s life on certain essential ideas about the nature and purpose of the entire endeavor and the participants thereof—but seldom do these essential ideas, which in fact govern choices and actions receive direct attention. Seldom, in the course of daily living, do people have the opportunity or the inclination to tell us about ourselves, how they see us, what they think of what we do.

--Cynthia Voigt

I do believe that literature is revolutionary and thus, political in a deeper sense. Literature not only sustains a historical experience and continues a tradition. It also—through moral risk and formal experimentation ad verbal humor—transforms the conservative horizon of the readers and helps liberate us all from the determinisms of prejudice, doctrinal rigidity and barren repetition.

--Carlos Fuentes
Inspirational raptures may happen, but most books are shaped through hard, disciplined work.

--Leo Lionni

I think the writer’s obligation is just to tell the truth, and that’s the one commitment he can’t betrayed without destroying himself. For the writer, the creative person, the practice of what he or she does is the connection between the inner and outer life, between political circumstances, economic and social circumstances, and his own internal being.

--E. L. Doctorow

When I start writing a novel, I never have a great idea or a set of blueprints. I just have a general feeling of excitement, and I start writing in its direction. It’s like following a scent trail. I always do a lot of revision, and I promise myself that I will before I ever start, because that gives me freedom. The scent trail doesn’t always take you to the right place, and if something doesn’t work you can always throw it away.

--Thomas McGuane

I never play it safe when I write a book. I bring myself to the edge of a cliff, trying something new. I’m not saying it hasn’t been done before. I’m saying that I’ve never done it. To be safe is not to try. The challenge of trying something is what charges me up.

--Janet Dailey

The editor must try to broker between what he senses happening in a culture at large and the mechanisms that exist for purveying what is happening. There is a fine line between responding to what the market demands and printing what the house feels the audience should have or needs. If you don’t supply demand, you’ll be out of business. But if you don’t create, you won’t be very alive. So you must have both.

--Jonathan Galassi

A good novel ought to have a shape. Pop novelists never fail to gather their strands of action into a climax. They are helped in this by the comparative inertness of their characters. The characters of an art novel resist the structure which their creators try to impose on them; they want to go their own way. They do not even want the book to come to an end and so they have, sometimes arbitrarily, as in E. M. Forster, to be killed off. A good novel contrives, nevertheless, somehow to trace a parabola. It is not merely a slice of life. It is life delicately molded into a shape. A picture has a frame and a novel ends where it has to—in some kind of resolution of thought or action which satisfies as the end of a symphony satisfies.

--Anthony Burgess
You speak to hear yourself, to keep the memory alive, but writing about the memo-
ry is to make it universally accessible, to give it to others, to see if others can benefit
from that as entertainment, as education, as insight into things experienced by a
person different than you.

--Stratis Caviareos

A narrative is like a room on whose walls a number of false doors have been paint-
ed; while within the narrative, we have many apparent choices of exit, but when the
author leads us to one particular door, we know it is the right one because it opens.

--John Updike

I like to discover ways to tell stories without seeming to tell stories. To make some-
thing true, you have to use artifice. Creating the illusion of truth—meaning, telling
the truth.

--E. L. Doctorow

Writing is a very mysterious mix of being highly conscious and self-conscious and
just following something that you seem to feel. You have to be very conscious, you
have to be a very good reader of what you write, but you also have to abandon your-
self and be innocent about your writing.

--Susan Sontag

What matters is the honorableness of the craft. You should write your best no mat-
ter whatever or whoever you’re writing for.

--William Zinsser

The pressure of writing is tremendous. The pressure of invention, the pressure of
moving forward, the pressure of being original. And I don’t mean ‘original’ in the
grand literary sense but in the sense of doing something new of yourself. It’s not
only daily pressure but hourly, every minute. It’s every second, really. Sentence by
sentence. It’s hard to think of another profession where you are constantly starting
from scratch.

--Philip Roth

I’m not sure how much you can teach writing. I think you can help people and point
out techniques. Basically, writers have to find their own voices, and you can learn
writing by writing. You learn writing also by studying the best writers, and you
learn writing by living fully. There are techniques the same way that people no
doubt can teach certain techniques for painting. But unless you have the original
talent, I don’t think that teaching itself can produce very much.

--P. D. James
All you can write about is what you know, but then you have to put your imagination to work.

--Harriet Doerr

The action is the subject of a play. When people ask me what plays are about, I say, ‘Well, it’s about what happens from the beginning to the end.’ Symbolism, metaphor, and meaning are not my concern—they should be inevitable results of the action, not something that is put in or layered on.

--Edward Albee

Writing is not made out of experience, it’s made out of language. There’s no experience which is better or worse. It depends on what you do with it and the way you write.

--Susan Sontag

Stories spring from experience, and then the storyteller goes on to say, ‘Yes, but what if?’ and ‘What then?’

--Madeleine L’Engle

The story speaks to the inner life of the reader. It is, I believe, as essential as food and water, as sleep, dreams, and love.

--Norma Fox Mazer

Words are the coin of the realm in this place. Millions of words have echoed through this chamber and found their way to the printed page. Give to the word merchants who labor here continuing sensitivity to the influence of the spoken word.

Help them to appreciate the power of words to inspire, to discourage, to console, to convict, to persuade, to alienate, to honor, to disparage, to encourage, to disappoint, to comfort, to embarrass, to edify, to offend, to strengthen, to weaken, to motivate, to immobilize, to give hope, to frustrate, to purify, to pollute, to build, to destroy.

--Rev. Richard C. Halverson

I don’t like to interpret my own work. I only know I write because I want to connect with people, and that comes from my emotional, not my intellectual equipment. I want readers to say, ‘Wow, I know how she feels.’

--Bette Greene

It’s one thing to accept an improbable plot and quite another to accept an improbable style. I’m willing to suspend my disbelief, but not my affection for the English language.

--Anatole Broyard
Movies...are increasingly about technique, and technology, rather than people, and
draw their inspiration from other movies rather than from any special passion or
insight of the director. Literature is in danger of becoming similarly stylized and
self-absorbed. There is a vast and growing body of fiction that takes as its subject
the process of inventing fiction, or the conventions of fiction in this or that form, or
the nature of fictional structures. This work is considered experimental by those
who produce and admire it, generally the same people, but in practice most of it has
become so ritualized and predictable that it is, in effect, simply another form of si-

For that matter, most of the noise that fills our lives is white noise. We live in a
great silence where what frightens us and moves us and sustains us is rarely given
voice. But when that silence is broken we bend forward and listen.

--Tobias Wolff

A poem can be read and reread and reread and will continually yield more and more
meanings, but on that first reading, there's just something in a wonderful poem that
is mesmerizing and captivating immediately.

--Galway Kinnell

Good writing, the kind that makes me pay attention, is not simply an expression of
an author's temperament, financial motivations, neuroses or beliefs. Good writing is
an act of communication, one that takes into account the needs of the most impor-
tant person involved in the project: the reader. A truly good writer wants to com-
municate, not to express; he or she has information about the world to get across in
the most effective manner possible.

--David Groff

Writers learn from life, master it, pretend it happened another way, rise above it by
relearning it. Unlike most people, writers have a strong sense of revenging them-
selves on life.

--Judith Rossner

I don't think it's ever possible to say where a story comes from, or why it presents
itself from the angle it does. What seems to happen is that a character, or a situa-
tion, seems to arise as it were from nowhere and proceeds to take over one's whole
mind, worrying your brain like a dog with a bone, refusing to let go until you sit
down and work it out properly, and actually write the thing. Only then does this ob-
session—compulsion, whatever it is—relax its grip.

And even then, this only happens when you've got it right. If, when I think I've fin-
ished a story, I still feel myself obsessed by it and in its grip, then I know it isn't fin-
ished—something in it still has to be worked on and put right.

--Celia Fremlin
The brain is better for a writer than a computer.  
-N. Wiener

Ideas won’t keep: something must be done about them.  
--Alfred North Whitehead

Creativity is so delicate a flower that praise tends to make it bloom, while discouragement often nips it in the bud. Any of us will put out more and better ideas if our efforts are appreciated.  
--Alex F. Osborn

The written word has long been a mightier influence in changing man’s ideas and behavior than the spoken promise.  
--Laurence J. Peter

I think the whole glory of writing lies in the fact that it forces us out of ourselves into the lives of others.  
--Sherwood Anderson

Words are one of our chief means of adjusting to all situations of life. The better control we have over words, the more successful our adjustment is likely to be.  
--Bergen Evans

Every animal leaves traces of what it was; man alone leaves traces of what he created.  
--J. Bronowski

Don’t use a big vocabulary, either general or technical. SESQUIPEDALIANISM OBFUSCATES PELLUCIDITY. If you get my drift.  
--David Viscott

Quality is never an accident; it is always the result of high intention and skillful execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives.  
--Willa A. Foster

The truly creative person (and the only one who should tackle either the creative article or fiction has to write, whether or not he seems to have anything to write about. He is drawn to his desk almost against his will. He may think of excuses to postpone the misery of perhaps finding he has no ideas, but in the end he submits; he begins to discipline himself to his daily stint. Once this happens, a remarkable thing occurs: Ideas come.  
--Marjorie Holmes
Great writers are not the only interesting writers.  

--C. J. Squire

The creative process depends least of all upon accident. It requires that the mind be properly worked and tended, that it be given the blessing of silence and the gift of sequence. Whether the moment of triumph produces a spark or a thunderbolt, it is certain to have a lasting effect. It can generate the carrying power to sustain an author through a thousand nights of torment at he writing desk.

--Norman Cousins

One difference between Johnson and most writers is that he not only wrote for money but admitted it.

--Richard Armour

There’s a story in every man. The challenge is to find it. Then the problem is to tell it without putting the customers to sleep.

--Jim Murray

When I’m writing, I’m only conscious that I’m a storyteller first, I’m interested in creating real people, dramatic situations that will keep the reader turning pages. Then, if I can say here’s the chance for me to explore ideas...great. I don’t think of myself as a thematic writer, but as a storyteller. If they don’t work as stories, then no one will read them so the message would get lost anyway.

--Robert Cormier

Every writer goes through a period when you play it safe. You don’t tell anyone you’re writing—in case you fail at it. But there has to come a point when you say to yourself, ‘I’m serious, I’m going to give this every bit of effort I have.’

--Jean Auel

I’ll put a couple of characters together and see if they do something. If they just stand there and smile at each other, that doesn’t work. So I get rid of one and bring in another that’s a little more antagonistic or something.

--Carolyn Chute

You can be a writer without talent. But without the desire, every word you write will come hard and leaden. You won’t last.

--Art Spikol

Style is simply how you string your words together. It doesn’t have to be unique; in fact, when it is it can get in the way: unique gets tiresome.

--Art Spikol
Writing, like virtue, is very much its own reward. --Lawrence Block

The man who has made a financial success of writing is in the worst danger of all, and it is hardly a secret that I am one of those who has made money. But I believe, and I suppose I have always believed, that the writer who loafs after he has made a financial success is confessing that the money was all he was after in the first place. That was never my idea. Much as I like owning a Rolls-Royce, for instance, I could do without it. What I could not do without is a typewriter, a supply of yellow second sheets, and the time to put them to good use.

--John O'Hara

Writing is discipline. It is planting the seat of your pants—or your skirt—in a chair and hanging in there through all the pain and loneliness of creation.

--Sidney Sheldon

You are a writer. What does that mean? On a blank sheet of paper you create universes. You populate them, create life, control the fates of your creations. You are as close to being a god as any mortal can hope to come. And you are more and other.

You are a shaman, the record-keeper. You record the history and mythology of the tribe; you are the perpetrator of the myths, the reporter whose commentaries will be used by later historians who try to define our age. Your role goes beyond earning a living: It is to excite the imagination of a reader, to inspire flights of fancy that may ‘alter and illuminate our times.’ As writers, you bear an awesome responsibility—to your contemporaries as well as your children. No matter what it is you write, you teach.

--Michael Seidman

Three remarks about books one should never make to a writer: ‘How’s it doing?’ ‘I couldn’t find it anywhere’ and ‘Haven’t you finished it yet?’ --Judith Martin

You beat your pate, and fancy wit will come; Knock as you please, there’s nobody at home.

--Alexander Pope

The books I haven’t written are better than the books other people have. --Cyril V. Connolly

Creativity is so delicate a flower that praise tends to make it bloom, while discouragement often nips it in the bud. Any of us will put out more and better ideas if our efforts are appreciated.

--Alex F. Osborn
Creative minds always have been known to survive any kind of bad training.  
--Anna Freud

All of us learn to write in the second grade...most of us go on to greater things.  
--Bobby Knight

A falsehood once received from a famed writer becomes traditional to posterity.  
--John Dryden

Show me a hero and I will write you a tragedy.  
--F. Scott Fitzgerald

Anyone can make history. Only a great man can write it.  
--Oscar Wilde

The men who act, stand nearer to the mass of man than the men who write; and it is in their hands that new thought gets its translation into the crude language of deeds.  
--Woodrow Wilson

What is originality? Undetected plagiarism.  
--Dean William R. Inge

Every thought is new when an author expresses it in a manner peculiar to himself.  
--Marquis de Vauvenargues

About the most originality that any writer can hope to achieve honestly is to steal with good judgment.  
--Josh Billings

Is originality the fine art of remembering what you hear but forgetting where you heard it?  
--Laurence J. Peter

When a thing has been said and well said, have no scruple; take it and copy it. Give reference? Why should you? Either your readers know where you have taken the passage and the precaution is needless, or they do not know and you humiliate them.  
--Anatole France
It is a mean thief, or a successful author, that plunders the dead.  
--Austin O’Malley

Taking something from one man and making it worse is plagiarism.  
--George Moore

Plagiarists, at least, have the merit of preservation.  
--Benjamin Disraeli

It is the little writer rather than the great writer who seems never to quote, and the reason is that he is never really doing, anything else.  
--Havelock Ellis

Call them, if you please, bookmakers, not authors range them rather among second-hand dealers than plagiarists.  
--Voltaire

If you’re going to write, don’t pretend to write down. It’s going to be the best you can do, and it’s the fact that it’s the best you can do that kills you.  
--Dorothy Parker

The hunger for applause is the source of all conscious literature and heroism.  
--Duc de La Rochefoucauld

Literature is like any other trade; you will never sell anything unless you go to the right shop.  
--George Bernard Show

Posterity—what you write for after being turned down by publishers.  
--George Ade

A publisher lives by what he feels. Authors do too, but authors are blind moles working their solitary way along their individual tunnels; the publisher is like the Pied Piper of Hamelin, piping his way along a path he wants them to follow.  
--Lovat Dickson

The trouble with the publishing business is that too many people who have half a mind to write a book do so.  
--William Targ

No author is a man of genius to his publisher.  
--Heinrich Heine
Every style that is not boring is a good one.  

--Voltaire

No style is good that is not fit to be spoken or read aloud with effect.  

--William Hazlitt

If any man wishes to write a clear style, let him first be clear in his thoughts.  

--Johann W. von Goethe

No writer long remains incognito.  

--E. B. White

Style is the man himself.  

--Georges de Buffon

Style is the physiognomy of the mind, and a safer index to character than the face.  

--Arthur Schopenhauher

I might go so far as to say that any writer who produced a book of unquestioned good taste has written a tasteless book...There is no taste in life or nature. It is simply the way it is...There is shocking bad taste in the Old Testament, abominable taste in Homer and execrable taste in Shakespeare.  

--John Steinbeck

In creating, the only hard thing's to begin.  

--James Russell Lowell

Analysis kills spontaneity. The grain once ground into flour springs and germinates no more.  

--Henri Frederic Amiel

Every man is a borrower and a mimic; life is theatrical and literature a quotation.  

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Originality is nothing but judicious imitation. The most original writers borrowed one from another. The instruction we find in books is like fire. We fetch it from our neighbours, kindle it at home, communicate it to others, and it becomes the property of all.  

--Voltaire
Those who write clearly have readers; those who write obscurely have commentators.

--Albert Camus

There is no substitute for talent. Industry and all the virtues of no avail.

--Aldous Huxley

A talent somewhat above mediocrity, shrewd and not too sensitive, is more likely to rise in the world than genius, which is apt to be perturbable and to wear itself out before fruition.

--Charles Horton Cooley

Everyone has a talent. What is rare is the courage to follow the talent to the dark places where it leads.

--Erica Jung

I always write the last chapters of my books before I write the beginning....It’s always nice to know where you’re going, is my theory.

--Truman Capote

Theater is great training ground for novelists. Theater experience teaches you the architecture of scenes, how dialogue must build to revelation.

--Robert Ludlum

Children’s books are the most important thing you can do, because these are people who are learning about reading.

--Daniel Pinkwater

The novelist’s place has traditionally been on the side of the loser. I can see no purpose in writing about people who seem to have won everything. There’s no story there...Why write about happiness, anyway? There’s nothing there—no conflict, no catalyst for discovering anything about humanity.

--Nelson Algren

All I’m doing each time I set out to write a novel is to try and make it as well as I can. I don’t think about form....I’m just trying to make this thing fit right, the way a carpenter likes everything square and plumb, even if it won’t show. I just try to make it right for its own sake, between me and it.

--Robert Parker

(Writing for children) is really much more difficult than writing for adults. It’s ever so much harder to hold a child’s concentration.

--Roald Dahl
The storyteller’s art is ancient and sacred. It is, an art in which the artist realizes his very existence as completely as he can. He lives by means of his investment in language, and language is element. He is alive in proportion to his ability to express his spirit in words.

--N. Scott Momaday

To me, writing a book is a great voyage of discovery; what attracts me to a subject in part is what I don’t know about it, what I can learn from it.

--David McCullough

I started out with short stories because I thought they would be easier to write than a book. They’re not, really. They don’t take as long, but you’re compelled to be thrifty with your words and make a character as real as you can in a very small space.

--Joyce Harrington

I believe that we who presume to write for children have a number of obligations. The first is to write as well as we can. The second is to be honest. The third (and if we get by the first two it is here that we are truly measured) is that we hold out a vision of life that is both challenge and achievement. It does not matter if the vision is happy or tragic, witty or somber. What matters, and matters desperately, is that we proclaim that life is worth living, that the struggle we undertake together must be one that fulfills the promise of ourselves.

--Avi

Writing a novel is one way of announcing one’s opinion of the world. The best novels have the advantage of being allusive, indirect, evocative, and beautiful rather than flat-footed, querulous, or strident.

--Jane Smiley

The way a writer shapes human experience depends to a great extent on her history—all those forces, most of which she had nothing to do with, that made her what she is.

--Katherine Paterson

It is clear that the craft of the short-story writer is very different from the ruminating craft of the novelist. The story has to construct a form that drives home what is to be said. It has to be succinct and piercing. It has to leave out in order to put something sharper and more telling in. Novelists can cover up faults of design; the short story cannot.

--V. S. Pritchett
There is only one thing to do with a novel and that is go straight on through to the end of the damn thing.

--Ernest Hemingway

The young man or woman writing today has forgotten the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself which alone can make good writing because only that is worth writing about, worth the agony and the sweat.

...The poet’s, the writer’s, duty is to write about these things. It is his privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past. The poet’s voice need not merely be the record of man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail.

--William Faulkner

All writers, even the worst, are led into assuming a role vaguely comparable to God’s, for they create characters over whom they exercise almost total control. I should add, though, that a writer is even more like a double agent than he is like God. He condemns and sustains his characters by turns. Their relationship is so ambiguous that when the characters come to elude his control—one doesn’t know whom to blame.

--Graham Greene

Lives are sometimes saved by novels, but generally fiction doesn’t have that much effect. Nevertheless, when you’re a writer you have to pretend, believe that writing has an enormous effect. You have to convince yourself that every story you write is something wonderful.

--John Gardner

I have a vision of the process of writing a novel. I’m in a dark room where there are lots of sticks and logs. I pile them all up and build a construction, all in the dark. Then I turn the light on. It can look very different from what you intended it to be; but it can often be better.

--David Plante

If I don’t know the ending of a story, I wouldn’t begin.

--Katherine Anne Porter

I am immediately suspicious of anybody who tells me he is going to write a story or novel from an exclusively intellectual premise. I think most good fiction begins with people: the writer and his characters, who they are, what they want.

--Kit Reed
Writing a book has stages. First there’s the euphoria of the inception of an idea. That is followed by the agony of the actual execution. You work all day, and then you make the mistake of reading what you’ve written. You feel like you’re trying to climb a mountain and you’ve taken only a baby step. You spend 1000 hours writing, and when you read what you’ve written in those 1000 hours, you want to throw the whole project away. Now, as I’m getting older, it’s getting worse rather than getting better. I know where all the pitfalls are, and the writing process is more demanding, more complicated.

--Robin Cook

Blessed are the weird people poets, misfits, writers, mystics, painters and troubadours for they teach us to see the world through different eyes.

—Jacob Nordby

This constant exercise of memory seems to be the chief occupation of my mind, and all my experience seems to be simply memory, with continuity, marginal notes, constant revision and comparison of one thing with another. Now and again thousands of memories converge, harmonize, arrange themselves around a central idea in a coherent form, and I write a story....I must know a story ‘by heart’ and I must write from memory.

--Katherine Anne Porter

Writing is learned on the job and the real teacher is experience.

--Kit Reed

A writer sitting in New England should be able to write a perfectly persuasive novel about slum life in Mexico City. In theory. But in practice, we do seem tied to our own lives. I’ve tried to stretch my imagination as far as it will go, but there’s a point beyond which you’re just transcribing other people’s research, and not writing out of a felt sense of things.

--John Updike

The task of the poet or novelist is to convey states of mind and of being as immediately as possible, through language. Immediacy of language is not always or necessarily simplicity, although simplicity is a highly desirable literary instrument.

--Shirley Hazzard

Swimmers know that if they relax on the water it will prove to be miraculously buoyant; and writers know that a succession of little strokes on the material nearest them—without any prejudgments about the specific gravity of the topic or the reasonableness of their expectations—will result in creative progress.

--Bill Stafford
The art of writing is all about the inspiration of the moment and the excitement of riding the wave of an idea.

—Elizabeth George

The simple declarative sentence is kind: I like to comfort the reader frequently with the familiar.

--Julian Barnes

I quit writing if I feel inspired, because I know I’m going to have to throw that away. Writing a novel is like building a wall brick by brick; only amateurs believe in inspiration.

--Frank Yerby

I keep poems for months at a time before I let them go. I rework them a lot. I wouldn’t want to give the impression that I dash off some poem a day. Even to change a line a day, that’s something. And I have kept poems for thirty years back.

--Robert Penn Warren

No matter how good the writing may be, a book is never complete until it is read. The writer does not pass through the gates of excellence alone, but in the company of readers.

--Katherine Paterson

Maybe the nature of fiction is that, unlike reporting for the New York Times, it has to admit everything—all aspects and forms of thought and behavior and feeling, no matter how awful they may be. Fiction has no borders; everything is open, you have a limitless possibility of knowing the truth.

--E. L. Doctorow

Any writer’s first novel is where you catch them unguarded, and that’s the one to examine in order to understand what the process of literary creation is all about.

--Virginia Woolf

When you write, you have to get in touch with some deep place in yourself, and when you get older...you build up layers you have to get through, like a tough skin.

--Alice Munro

The world is immortal. And it follows from this that just as we had the writer as soon as writing was invented 5,000 years ago, so we will have the writer, of necessity, for as long as civilization continues to exist. He may write with other tools and in different forms, but he will write.

--Isaac Asimov
I never really doubted that I could write a novel. I know that sounds conceited but it’s true. The only thing I ever doubted about writing was whether I’d find the time and energy. But I always knew I could do it. Everything in life is a matter of confidence, whether it’s riding a bicycle or writing a book.

--P. D. James

With a play, you do out-of-town previews—you get feedback before it opens on Broadway. Not so with a novel, where only you, your editor, and a couple of other people see the finished product before publication.

--Robert Anderson

When a woman comes to write a novel, she will find that she is perpetually wishing to alter the established values—to make serious what appears insignificant to a man, and trivial what is to him important.

--Virginia Woolf

In order to write and to write well—especially poetry—it is better to hear your own language spoken every day—in grocery stores, in streetcars, in bed.

--Joseph Brodsky

It seems to me that writing is a marvelous way of making sense of one’s life, both for the writer and for the reader. With the invention of the daguerreotype, writing was thought to be completely finished. Radio, TV, even the gramophone was supposed to have sounded the knell for literature. But that particular extremely intimate communication a writer and a reader enjoy, makes it somehow disappointing for me to meet an author. If late at night I might read a paragraph, sometimes no more than a sentence, but possessing a brilliance and an intimacy that completely transcends human relationships, to meet the writer in the lobby of the hotel is going to be a comedown.

--John Cheever

The novelist should allow himself the freedom to weed out pure facts or even to twist facts, as long as the final view of history does not contradict what happened in the larger scheme. I think imaginative writing has often cast a clearer light on history than a lot of scholarly work.

--William Styron

In order to write a novel you have to be terribly bossy. You have to be so convinced that the way you see things is right, that you can sit down and write a whole book out of that vision without even stopping to consider that there might be another point of view. And you have to tell all your characters what to do all the time. It’s do this, do that....You create these people, and then you push them around.

--Susan Cheever
Writing is an expression of the way I see. Writing is tremendously important to me. If I’m unable to write for several weeks I’m physically ill, but what I say and saying it are inseparable.

--Marilyn French

There are few people more dishonest than writer professing to recall how they came to do things. Most good ideas, in my experience, come out of thin air, either after a very good night or a very bad one, and characters are much the same.

--John le Carré

When you’re writing novels you’re not in business to create propaganda. You’re showing patterns in people’s lives and the consequences of choosing one thing over another. It’s a way of raising people’s consciousesses. And it has to be done truthfully or it doesn’t work.

--Marge Piercy

I have often imagined that if I were in solitary confinement for an indefinite time and knew that no one would every read what I wrote, I would still write poetry, but I would not write novels. Why? Perhaps because the poem is primarily a dialogue with the self, and the novel a dialogue with others....I suppose I have written novels to find out what I thought about something and poems to find out what I felt about something.

--May Sarton

The great epics, like our own classics, must mean something, not by didactic pedagogy, propaganda, or edification—but by their action, a murky metaphysical historic significance, a sober intuition into the character of a nation—profundities imagined, as if in a dream, by authors who knew what they had written.

--W. H. Auden

Writing comes very hard to me. I do not understand why people think writing is easy....I am at a loss to know how to arrive at Word One, much less the whole piece.

--Mark Harris

Most beginning writers cannot go forward because they insist upon making every sentence clean before going on to the next. Somehow I learned to live with the chaos of a first draft.

--Mark Harris

The novelist may do what the historian is not allowed: imagine his characters whole, and let the chips fall where they may.

--Frances Taliaferro
The life of the writer is essentially lonely; he has to live among the interest and creations of his own mind, and therefore he has above all things, as a condition of his work, to accustom himself to loneliness.

--Gustave Flaubert

The need to write comes from the need to make sense of one's life and discover one's usefulness. For me, it's the most intimate form of communicating about love and memory and nostalgia.

--John Cheever

The novelists who take the greatest risks may not be those who use experimental techniques, for experimentalism can cover a multitude of sins. It is, rather, the writers who use conventional techniques who need a world of courage, for they work with the ordinary materials of life and run the risk of succumbing to that ordinariness.

The conventional novelist has to wring excitement out of what is, out of the naked truth. He has to persuade his heavy characters to dance and sing, for there is no other sound and fury in his work. When he fails, we tend to take that failure personally, because he is talking about us.

--Anatole Broyard

As the biographer becomes involved in gathering, selecting, organizing, and finally writing, he or she cannot help but become the re-creator of a life. Although, as Virginia Woolf pointed out, the creative process in biography is bounded by fact, the creative mind is still at work, picking and choosing the threads that will be woven into the fabric of a life.

--Jeanne W. Halpern

This is the secret of good storytelling: to lie....A storyteller, like any other sort of enthusiastic liar, is on an unpredictable adventure. His initial lie, his premise, will suggest many new lies of its own. The storyteller must choose among them, seeking those which are most believable, which keep the arithmetic sound.

--Kurt Vonnegut

The what-if syndrome is the writer’s springboard. It’s been responsible for more storytelling than any other form of prodding, except possibly outrage.

--Robert Ludlum

Writers are never good enough to fake emotions. You can change events, make it summertime instead of wintertime, make it Quincy instead of Dorchester, but you can’t really change emotions.

--Bette Greene
I like a writer who uses adjectives sparingly; who uses action verbs to give his story the punch and power he wants it to have.

--Murlin B. Spencer

In historical dramas, facts can be helpful tools, but it takes art to snare the truth.

--Frank Rich

I think most writers write because there is a compulsion to do so. All of us have a great story to tell but often the difficulties in sitting down and completing the project are overwhelming. And thus for the author the ‘first novel’ is usually the most difficult. It is a grand mountain to be climbed which for many the preparations alone seem impossible. For others the drive exist to make that climb, yet, once they have achieved the summit the rewards seem too small, the hours of solitude too great to continue further, and for some fewer still the compulsion exists not only to climb one mountain but to climb others so that as they reach the peak of one pinnacle their eyes are already fixed upon some distant summit; gauging the distances, the route, to start another climb.

--T. W. Hard

The writer’s...decisions are based on training, experience, competence, self-criticism, remembered criticism, luck, a compulsion to do the very best. Hard work. And caring. That is what creativity means to me. Creativity is the art of making constant choices in a consistent manner toward an imagined, perfect, inseparable whole.

--Ellen Raskin

A writer is...only half his book. The other half is the reader, and from the reader the writer learns.

--P. L. Travers

It is all very well to draw scenes and tell tales and repeat phrases, but by inviting the reader into the realm of his memories, the writer...has certain responsibilities. There should be some evidence of an interior life, an illumination as well as an explanation.

--Philip Terzian

Fiction is a mixture of imagination and reality. Besides imagination, you get help from dreams, fantasies—all kinds of ideas surface when you concentrate on inventing.

--Hilma Wolitzer

The worst reason for anything being part of a novel (is) that it really happened. Everything has really happened, sometime! The only reason for something to happen is a novel is that it’s the perfect thing to have happen at that time.

--John Irving
It occurs to me that I have spent a good part of my life trying to construct bridges....There were so many chasms I saw that needed bridging—chasms of time and culture and disparate human nature—that I began sawing and hammering at the enough wood planks for my children and for any other children who might read what I had written....The bridge that the child trusts and delights in—and in my case, the book that will take children from where they are to where they might be—needs to be made not from synthetic or inanimate objects, but from the stuff of life. And the writer has no life to give but her own.

--Katherine Paterson

Writers were not born to change the world. We cannot even make it worse. A writer is not a god. He is someone with the talent to write a story that will entertain. It is not for us to explain life. Fiction can entertain and stir the mind; it does not direct it. If a preacher like Tolstoy could not help his people, we are not going to be helped by a lot of little preachers.

--Isaac Bashevis Singer

Every author has to have some Pavlovian dog trick, some little routine to set him off every day. Mine is, if I can get past page 20, I feel I'm on my way—either is a screenplay or a book.

I write all the time, and I think about it all the time, so when I come to the typewriter in the morning that's just the time when I put it down. It's too late to think about it then. This is not uncommon among writers who realize that they're working out a thing when their conscious minds are otherwise occupied by mechanical tasks—shaving, driving a car.

--James K. Feibleman

It is only the vividness of memory that keeps the dead alive forever. A writer’s job is to imagine everything so personally that the fiction is as vivid as your personal memories.

--John Irving

Life is the ultimate source of all fictions, even the most fantastic, and...in its blundering, dilatory, often secret way, it provides an infinite number of fables, renewed in substance and from for each new generation.

--Malcolm Cowley

Novel writing is a craft that must be learned. You just simply do not open your mouth and breathe in the air of a novelist. It takes years of learning, years of observations, years of trial.

--Jay Bennett
You have to be clear on what your motives are and what you want to do in writing a novel: whether you want to make a living at it, whether you want to make a lot of money, or whether you really don't want to write at all but want to go to a psychiatrist or find a lover and the writing is a substitute. I wanted to make some money.

--Bari Wood

A common fault in writing is to spend too much time on the early part of a composition. As a result, some ideas receive too much attention simply because they are considered first and other things too little attention because they come later.

--Robert Barrass

I'm a back-to-the-wall, deadline-looming, undisciplined-in-time writer whose mind starts functioning toward evening, so when at last there is no escape from the typewriter I write into the small hours for days and weeks at a time, growing ever more tired and miserable. And the more dejected I become, the more easily the words flow! It's a working schedule not to be recommended.

--Sheila Burnford

To say that what (you write) is not literature is just like saying that a book can't be any good if it makes you want to read it. When a book, any sort of book, reaches a certain intensity of artistic performance it becomes literature. That intensity may be a matter of style, situation, character, emotional tone, or idea, or half a dozen other things. It may also be a perfection of control over the movement of a story similar to the control of a great pitcher over the ball. That is to me what you have more than anything else and more than anyone else.

--Raymond Chandler

I almost always write with a pen on typewriter-sized paper, or in a large notebook of that size, am often at a desk, or sitting in an armchair. I save first drafts—as a matter of fact, I am a saver and keep all changes in any poem, whether few or many, and have always been fascinated by the look of the text as it develops.

--Richard Eberhart

I believe in the mystery of creation and have gone on record that some of my poems which are considered by best ones have been given to me, as it were, as if the poem used the man, not the other way around, or as if the personality were a vane on which the wind of the spirit moved to make the poem.

--Richard Eberhart

In nonfiction, you’re reporting and in fiction you’re making—I won’t say creating—a disciplined system of your own....In the political events we see, there is no beginning and no end. In a novel at least, a journalist can impose a kind of order on things, make a logic in what happens.

--Robert S. Elegant
Just as a poem can be a brief, intense experience, the short story or play can create indelible impressions that stick to the memory, even though the time span of the work is short. Emotional impact needs no yardstick. The talent of the writer dictates the length of dramatic art.

--David A. Shon and Richard H. Tyre

Writing a short play poses a tough problem for the finest playwright. It challenges the writer to create one dramatic situation—ordinarily one major problem that must be resolved. It limits the writer to a few characters. It must unfold in one continuous action. Each word of dialogue must contribute to the definition of the characters and the development of the plot. There is no room for windy words. The writing must be lean and charged, moving the play forward while involving the reader or viewer.

--David A. Shon and Richard H. Tyre

Everyone is necessarily the hero in his own life story.

--John Barth

Good books, good painting and sculpture and graphics, good music, have all come from those studios at MacDowell and Yaddo. But other good work has also been produced at dining room tables or at basement desks or in the car parked at the suburban railroad station waiting for the 5:03 from New York or on the lid of the toilet seat. Stay home or go to a colony with its sometimes frustrating perfection. It really doesn’t matter as long as your vision is clear, your motivation strong, and you have something important to say.

--Doris Grumbach

Never throw away anything you’ve written. Some time you can find a place for it.

--Joe Gores

Agatha Christie once described to me her own particular method of getting down to work...She would...repair to a very bad hotel. In a bad hotel, there was nothing to do but to write, and plenty of time to do it in. The beds were so uncomfortable that you had no inclination to retire early or to get up late...the meals were so bad that there was no temptation to linger over them....So the book would be done in a matter of weeks and you could pack up the few dull clothes which were all you need bother to take with you, and go off triumphantly home.

--Christianna Brand
Writing is one art form that can be practiced almost anywhere at almost any time. Normally, you cannot paint in the office, or sculpture in the classroom or play the piano in a plane or the trumpet on a train. But, given some paper and a writing element, one can write in any of these places. What emerges will not always be a work of art; yet it could be.

--Theodore M. Bernstein

Even when work goes comparatively unrewarded, there is bound to come some assurance, to the born writer, that it would not be best for him to turn to life insurance or hydraulics. Perhaps this assurance comes in a meagre sentence of praise....Perhaps it comes only like a shaft of planet light, piercing quickly into the would-be author's spirit.

--MacKinlay Kantor

A writer’s ambition should be to trade a hundred contemporary readers for ten readers in ten years’ time and one reader in a hundred years’ time.

--Arthur Koestler

The man who writes about himself and his own time is the only man who writes about all people and all time.

--George Bernard Shaw

The first requirement for writing at all: a belief that one has significant testimony nobody else can provide.

--Shirley Hazzard

It’s worth considering why some gifted writers have careers and others don’t. It doesn’t appear to be a matter of the talent itself....As far as I can tell, the decisive factor is durability. For the gifted writer, durability seems to be directly connected to how one deals with uncertainty, rejection, and disappointment, from within as well as without, and how effectively one incorporates them into the creative process itself, particularly in the prolonged first stage of a career.

--Ted Solotaroff

Before I was a writer, I was an actor and then a producer. What I learned in the theater is that if you don’t keep the audience interested, the show closes—theater without pacing is a bore. So I consistently sharpen, sharpen, sharpen. I mull over ten or fifteen pages at a time, and then I eliminate, eliminate, eliminate. You have to put yourself in the readers’ position.

--Robert Ludlum
An outstanding writer is one who becomes, over time, a seasoned editor of his or her own material.

--Deborah Purcell

When you write, don’t think about how smart you are; think about how smart the readers are. Write to communicate with readers, not to impress them.

--Gary Provost

What we do when we write is to want the world to love us in a way no human being could love another.

--Denise Gess

What is style?...The art of clear, effective, and readable writing. The rhythm that makes a sentence sound right to the mental ear. The ruthless cutting out of phrases that only clutter and impede this special music. And always, always, the patient, painstaking search for the perfect combination of words and phrases that will create this mental music and express what is to be said in the most moving and effective way.

--Marjorie Holmes

An effective style is a matter of thoughts in combinations that are fresh, arresting, and filled with surprises.

--Marjorie Holmes

Loving to get our name in print isn’t egotistical; it’s just a positive way to react to those who used to tell you, ‘You’ll never amount to anything.’

--John Warren Steen

No one who cannot limit himself has ever been able to write.

--Nicolas Boileau

I’d rather write a book four times over than spend a great deal of time getting every chapter just right. I did a number of drafts. Between the first and second there were some real changes, and between the second and third is what I’d call ‘finding the language.’

There was a real clash in my mind between the joy of weaving plots and the realization that for me writing was not the rendition of a story but the rendition of life. Other writers are more interested in the interplay of characters, and I am more interested in the feel of them.

--Christopher Isherwood
To the writer most in tune
with nature’s laws,
technique is a result
and not a cause.

--John D. Engle Jr.

You write as you write, in your time, as you see your world. One form is as good as another. There are a thousand ways to write, and each is as good as the other if it fits you, if you are any good.

--Lillian Hellman

I blame myself for not often enough seeing the extraordinary in the ordinary. Somewhere in his journals Dostoevsky remarks that a writer can begin anywhere, at the most commonplace thing, scratch around in it long enough, pry and dig away long enough, and, lo!, soon he will hit upon the marvelous.

--Saul Bellow

As a novelist, it is a good part of my job to attempt to formulate, as dramatically and as precisely as I can, the pain and anguish that we all feel. Now more than ever, it seems to me, it becomes the writer’s job to remind people of their common humanity—of the fact, if you will, that they have souls.

--Saul Bellow

In our Literary Lives...we make grand statements, such as hope is false, death is real. But when we sit down at the typewriter all that guff is gone. When I write I’m no longer embarrassed or terrified. I have no sense of hope or vanity. I’m on my own and I love it.

--Lore Segal

In writing of myself—which is the only subject anyone knows intimately—I have occasionally had the exquisite thrill of putting my finger on a little capsule of truth, and heard it give the faint squeak of mortality under my pressure, an antic sound.

--E. B. White

I write so often of people with no magnitude, at least on the surface. I write of ‘little people.’ But are there ‘little people’? I sometimes think there are only little conceptions of people. Whatever is living and feeling with intensity is not little, and examined in depth, it would seem to me that most ‘little people’ are living with that intensity that I can use as a writer.

--Tennessee Williams

You should never try to write about anything too long after your experience of it. Little bits of yourself rub off in this kind of writing.

--Beryl Bainbridge
When you write and you have a deadline and you have a writing block, you chop the block down by just sitting at a typewriter. But there are times when you have nothing on order, nothing pressing, and it becomes—I don’t call it a block; I call it laziness.

--Carl Reiner

The aim the writer sets himself is the same as that of the magician—to penetrate to the secret, beating heart of life; and by touching it, marvelously to transmute one set of circumstances to another. His method is the same. Instinctual he senses that words are inherently magical, and that by setting one with another he may formulate the language which is his spell.

--Mollie Hunter

Writing is like painting. At first the painter looks back and forth—from his canvas to the bowl of flowers he’s painting on the canvas. But finally his total concentration is focused on what is in front of him on the easel, and it may barely resemble the bowl of flowers. The same holds true in writing. The writer draws from memory, imagination and experience, then they melt together and fuse. The best writing, I think, is full of lies that tell the truth.

--Robert Anderson

I’ve never outlined a novel before starting to write it—at the outset I’ve never been aware of the story I was trying to handle except in the most general terms. The beginnings of my novels have always been mere flickerings in the imagination, though in each case the flickerings have been generated, clearly enough, by a kind of emotional ferment that had been in process for some time.

--John Hawkes

To write books is rather like driving a vintage car. Starting is usually difficult and, once on your way, you never know if the works will seize up or you will run out of fuel. On the other hand, when the engine has been running well for a good while, you daren’t stop in case you can’t start up again. An author will go round searching for new material for his next book just as the driver must go round searching for new bits for his old car.

--Val Brio

The novelist’s first exercise is to conjugate the verb ‘to see.’ The next is to conjugate ‘to feel.’ The next is to conjugate ‘to form.’

--Paul Horgan

We live in a rough cold world today. But I make a different world when I write: I make it what I think it ought to be.

--Paul Gallico
Novel writing goes, at its best, beyond cleverness to that point where one’s whole mind and experience and vision are the novel, and the effort to translate this wholeness into prose is life: a circle of creation.

--Gore Vidal

I sometimes think that writers are the great pretenders of all time. They feel everything both more and less. Without question, they are split people, experiencing and observing at one and the same time. Then they are accused of betraying their friends or their lovers when all the time it is they who feel betrayed, because nobody, but nobody, felt as extremely as they did at a given moment.

--Edna O'Brien

Writing my stories—or, at any rate, rewriting them—I enjoy. It is the thinking them out that makes the iron enter into the soul.

--P. G. Wodehouse

Good writing—as distinct from mere ‘style’—is first of all sound thinking. A writer needs a prehensile mind, one that can grasp an idea and hold it in the round, firmly and forcibly, using it as a tool. I don’t even mean that these ideas need necessarily be conscious ones—but they must be present, drive engine and providing its motive power....The writer does not express ‘himself’—he expresses his view of the world, refracted through his own unique personality.

--Sydney J. Harris

There are five hundred reasons why I began to write for children, but to save time I will mention only ten of them. Number 1: Children read books, not reviews. They don’t give a hoot about the critics. Number 2: They don’t read to find their identity. Number 3: They don’t read to free themselves of guilt, to quench the thirst for rebellion, or to get rid of alienation. Number 4: They have no use for psychology. Number 5: They detest sociology. Number 6: They don’t try to understand Kafka or Finnegans Wake. Number 7: They still believe in God, the family, angels, devils, witches, goblins, logic, clarity, punctuation, and other such obsolete stuff. Number 8: They love interesting stories, not commentary, guides, or footnotes. Number 9: When a book is boring, they yawn openly, without any shame or fear of authority. Number 10: They don’t expect their beloved writer to redeem humanity. Young as they are, they know that it is not in his power. Only the adults have such childish illusions.

--Isaac Bashevis Singer

The rule...for revision: keep going at a reasonable pace to the end, skipping the impossible; then start afresh until you have solved the true problems and removed the insoluble.

--Jacques Barzun
As poets and playwrights, essayists and novelists, we are the verbal alchemists of society, changing base words into beauty and truth, one and the same. We are witch doctors practicing mind magic on the skulls of flesh eaters. If truth is indivisible, as it must be, then our images—consciously created out of our commonalities—help man to see the face of truth.

--Shane Stevens

We are all of us storytellers. It can be no other way. And the story we tell is of the nature of man. That, too, never changes.

--Shane Stevens

I am fortunate as a writer in not being dependent on my surroundings....I have written quite happily on ocean liners during gales, with the typewriter falling into my lap at intervals, in hotel bedrooms, in woodsheds, in punts on lakes, in German internment camps, and in the inspecteurs' room at the Palais de Justice in Paris at the time when the French Republic suspected me of being a danger to it.

--P. G. Wodehouse

The function of a work of art is to be communicable....all artists realize that the vision is valueless unless it can be shared.

--Carson McCullers

A writer lives, at best, in a state of astonishment. Beneath any feeling he has of the good or evil of the world lies a deeper one of wonder at it all. To transmit that feeling, he writes.

--William Sansom

There is a danger that a writer can write so movingly that he gives the reader the illusion that he has done something about the problem.

--Kurt Vonnegut

I don’t see—from the artistic point of view—the qualitative difference between the way authors of children’s books and adult books go about their work.

--Lloyd Alexander

I'm against the picture of the artist as the starry-eyed visionary not really in control or knowing what he does. I think I'd almost prefer the word 'craftsman.' He's like one of the old-fashioned ship-builders, who conceived the boat in their mind and then, after that, touched every single piece that went into the boat. They were in complete control; they knew it inch by inch, and I think the novelist is very much like that.

--William Golding
I write novels about what interests me and I can’t write about anything else. And one of the things which interests me most is discovering the humanity in the apparently inhuman character.

--Graham Greene

The novelist and short story writer, like none other, is licensed to do outlandish things with his fiction. He is not obligated by law or custom to prove that such-and-such a thing actually happened or that a particular character ever existed in life. His only limitation is his own imagination. He is permitted to imagine, to invent, and to create persons and happenings as long as they conform to the laws of probability and to ethical customs. He has the privilege to saturate his pages with perfume or with mephitis until our senses are stultified. He can populate his fictional world with men and women who live by mayhem and murder. He can bring all the saints of heaven to stand before our eyes and inspire us with their goodness.

--Erskine Caldwell

All the novelist and short story writer has to do to accomplish his fiction is to make his storytelling meaningful and convincing and interesting. And, as always, the superior author implies more than he says in print. Such is the doctrine of wordsmanship.

--Erskine Caldwell

Whenever we read a book, although we do not read it aloud, or even consciously form the words in our minds, we are aware of a voice. It is as though someone had been speaking to us, telling us something, or working upon our feelings. It is this voice which we roughly call style, and however much a writer may ignore his personality or even seek to conceal it, he cannot disguise his voice, his style, unless he is deliberately writing a parody. It is here that the truth will out...and if we know a writer of any note, it is extraordinary how we seem to hear the inflections of his living voice as we read what he has written.

--Bonamy Dobrée

I don’t see how it’s possible to attempt extended creative work with ink or ballpoint. Pen work is so laborious that it can give you a totally misleading notion of the amount of graft (work) you’ve done: that pile of ink-scrawl looks and feels a lot, but it’s often very little. With pen and pad you’re tempted to write crouched by the fire in an armchair, and slackness comes out in your prose. With a typewriter you have to sit upright and use both hands like a real manual worker—no nonsense about eating lunch with one hand while you scratch away with the other. Most important, the mere fact that you’re printing your work while you compose gives that work an objective, separated look: it’s not an effluvium from your body, a sort of heart’s blood too precious for the harsh world’s spilling; it’s something you’re making, like a chair, and, like a chair, it’s for somebody else’s use.

--Anthony Burgess
The novelist—it is his distinction and his danger—is terribly exposed to life. Other artists, partially at least, withdraw; they shut themselves up for weeks alone with a dish of apples and a paintbox, or a roll of music paper and a piano. When they emerge it is to forget and distract themselves. But the novelist never forgets and is seldom distracted. He fills his glass and lights his cigarette, he enjoys presumably all the pleasures of talk and table, but always with a sense that he is being stimulated and played upon by the subject-matter of his art. Taste, sound, movement, a few words here, a gesture there, a man coming in, a woman going out, even the motor that passes in the street or the beggar who shuffles along the pavement, and all the reds and blues and lights and shades of the scene claim his attention and rouse his curiosity. He can no more cease to receive impressions than a fish in mid-ocean can cease to let the water rush through his gills.

--Virginia Woolf

The real short story writer is a jeweler....He stays in his shop, he polishes those jewels, he collects craft, lore, confirms gossip, assays jeweler’s rouge, looks to steal the trick of the arcane, and generally disports like a medieval alchemist who’s got a little furnace, a small retort, a cave, a handful of fool’s gold, and a mad monk’s will. With such qualifications, one in a hundred becomes an extraordinary writer.

--Norman Mailer

Some writers are self-centered to the point of failing their audiences. Their writing is so complex, so filled with ambiguity and obscurity, so turgid with hidden and private meanings, that most readers may reject the communication process altogether....The mature writer, on the other hand, masters the forms and techniques of whatever genre he is working in, so that his words will do what he intends them to do....Until the writer’s statement is understood, communication cannot begin.

--Thomas E. Sanders

Style is the principle of decision in a work of art, the signature of the artist’s will. And as the human will is capable of an indefinite number of stances, there are an indefinite number of possible styles for works of art.

--Susan Sontag

Any writer who keeps up a running quarrel with his time—which means any writer—leaves a kind of unintended private history behind him like a dog’s tracks on a beach.

--Archibald MacLeish

It is the job of the writer to make the inarticulate intelligent.

--Ralph Ellison
To me, what makes a writer is that moment of lonely, frightening dignity when he sees a dramatic version of a dangerous truth about the society in which he lives. He sees the consequences of committing this to paper, and he goes ahead regardless. And thus does civilization advance.

--Richard M. Powell

All fiction is ‘experimental.’ The experiment that works is the one that counts. Style, design, subject matter, language: the writer has total freedom. He also has the freedom to reach—to reach for and grasp just a little more than he may think he has the power to do.

--Nolan Miller

The germ of an idea can lie dormant for months, or years, then germinate and come to flower, because the soil is right, the atmosphere propitious.

--Daphne DuMaurier

The plays which have lasted are about people not in total accord with their time or with society—Oedipus, Macbeth, Hamlet. It is dangerous for society to have only writing that confirms our own optimistic view of ourselves and the world.

--Edward Albee

I hold that the writer has a duty, sink or swim, to be lucid. To be, when it is fitting, profound, subtle, allusive, sincere, startling, difficult, but to struggle with all his energy to be clear. Not concise, not correct, not simple, not single-stranded—but lucid, as lucid as possible. A lucid sentence may not convey the truth; there may, at a given point, be no expressible truth. But incoherence, confusion, obscurity, which do not yield to hard effort to grasp what is being said, are always the work of a charlatan, a self-deceiving humbug or a clumsy idiot.

--Storm Jameson

I have only one subject—myself. If I'm going to reveal something about all of us, then it has to be through me. I have that limitation, or advantage.

--William Saroyan

Writers should be read, and authors should be remembered, not because of what the critics said or by pollsters’ ratings. They should be remembered for the excitement they give the reader who wants to tuck himself away from the day’s problems and indulge in a shameless communication with a storyteller who invites you to share adventure.

--Theodore H. White

Everyone is necessarily the hero of his own life.

--John Barth
What writers sometimes forget is that it is their responsibility, with the help of conscientious editors, to observe what is logical and accepted in usage, not to make their own rules, arbitrarily, and reject, pompously, the editor’s efforts to maintain conformity as interference or ‘censorship.’

What editors sometimes forget is that their rules of accepted usage are not dicta arbitrarily proclaimed by dictionaries and style books, to be superficially imposed, but are drawn from the practices of good writers, past and present.

--Margaret Nicholson

Writing is a bit like sculpture. You have to go with the material—allow the material to find its own form.

--Thomas Tryon

I’m not interested in symbolism, but form. I guess I’m a very traditional writer, I’m just interested in persuading people that what I’m writing is the truth.

--Paul Theroux

My point to young writers is to socialize. Don’t just go up to a pine cabin all alone and brood and write. You reach that stage soon enough anyway.

--Truman Capote

Everything influences playwrights. A playwright who isn’t influenced is never of any use. He’s the litmus paper of the arts.

--Arthur Miller

To turn life into words is to make life yours to do with as you please, instead of the other way round. Words translate and transmute raw life, make bearable the unbearable.

--Gore Vidal

The only imagination allowed (in writing biography) is over form, not facts, but that imagination can be considerable. Biography can become a work of art and literature.

--Leon Edel

To universalize culture is our ultimate aim. It is our particular business as writers simply because no other group is in a position to care as much as we can care about it, and because it is in the nature of writing to reach out to the whole world. It is, perhaps above all, the ultimate way in which men will one day come to identify with one another and thus make the insanity of war less likely.

--Arthur Miller
In my opinion, a true description of Nature should be very brief and have a character of relevance. Commonplaces such as, ‘the setting sun bathing in the waves of the darkening sea, poured its purple gold, etc.’...one ought to abandon. In descriptions of nature one ought to seize upon the little particulars, grouping them in such a way that, in reading, when you shut your eyes, you get a picture....Nature becomes animated if you are not squeamish about employing comparisons of her phenomena with ordinary human activities.

--Anton Chekhov

A great number of people just wait at the idea station and never board a creative train of thought. But all about them are thought starters. Obviously, these thought starters do not tell you in so many words, ‘Here is the beginning of an idea that if pursued further—often much further—will be a whale of an idea....’ Newspapers and magazines, not to mention your own observation along the street, give you hundreds of tidbits with which to start. Different minds see different possibilities....Ideas sparkle everywhere. Watch for them, particularly in your own mind.

--Robert P. Crawford

Good writing must have a poetic faculty whether you write in prose or in verse. When those words come down on wings, they have the same kind of value no matter what form they wind up in.

--Katherine Anne Porter

Style in writing is something like style in a car, a woman, or a Greek temple—a kind of linear mastery of materials that stands out from the landscape and compels a second look.

--Sheridan Baker

Style is the product of a craftsman alive to experience and to the possibilities and the obstinacies in the material he works. It is a labor of love, and like love it can bring pleasure and satisfaction.

--Sheridan Baker

A writer should like words the way some people like stones. He should like phrasing and syntax, and the very punctuation that keeps them straight. His interest in language should equal his interest in what he has to say, or he will never get the two together in any way he can call his own. He will never convince or delight, or get a second look.

--Sheridan Baker
A novelist and an historian both seek the same truths. An historian gets his out of the documents, a novelist out of his imagination.

--Shelby Foote

There is a certain mystery about writing, just as there is about life. But the stylistic side of writing is, in fact, the only side that can be analyzed and learned.

--Sheridan Baker

A writer, thinking of himself rather than his reader, may have included material to impress the reader with the writer’s knowledge, ability, or diligence. He may even have written an entirely unnecessary paper just to produce another publication. To discard his own writing ruthlessly is the first lesson he must learn. A good writer fills his own wastebasket rather than his reader’s.

--H. J. Tichy

Life has presented us with an inexhaustible source of themes, and just as it took men a long time to discover the priceless particles of uranium in a plain stone, so we, once impotent in our paucity of theme and idea, have now suddenly learned to discover in every man an unwritten novel; in every human action material for a story; dramatic tensions in conflicts and the motives for songs in moods. Like a child who dreams of standing before a rich dining room table, but who lacks a spoon to sample the preferred delicacies, we discover with surprise that our greed is greater than our stomach, our pockets are too small, and our strength insufficient to carry it all away with us. But, instead of being satisfied with what is within arm’s reach, we often try to grasp everything that is in view, more even than our arms can embrace, and we remain empty-handed.

--Erih Kos

Some novelists have written mainly to make money, and they might be amused at being credited with prophetic vision or superior insight. But the ones who have withstood the test of time are those who, with their art of storytelling and character depiction, have revealed to us something that we did not quite know about ourselves before. They have reminded us that there is a little of Squire Weston, Uriah Heep, or Captain Ahab in every man and a trace of Moll Flanders, Becky Sharp, or Hester Prynne in every woman.

--George D. Crothers

A biographer is not a court record or a legal document. He is a human being, writing about another human being, and his own temperament, his own point of view, and his own frame of reference are unconsciously imposed upon the men he is writing about. Even if the biographer is free from...the need for making money and wants to write nothing but the literal truth, he is still handicapped by the fact that there is no such thing as a completely objective human being.

--Marchette Chute
The art of writing true dramatic dialogue is an austere art, denying itself all license, grudging every sentence devoted to the mere machinery of the play, suppressing all jokes and epigrams severed from character, relying for fun and pathos on the fun and tears of life. From start to finish good dialogue is handmade, like good lace; clear, of fine texture, furthering with each thread the harmony and strength of a design to which all must be subordinated.

--John Galsworthy

I adore to write, but I suffer. I would not do anything else in the world but write even though I suffer beyond reason.

--Janet Flanner

Writing is a model act of intelligence taking form, intelligence becoming shareable, intelligence becoming an act of communion with others.

--Susan Sontag

Writing...is an odd profession and life work because it is so peculiarly balanced. Half of it is literally hard labor, a kind of slavery of searching for the precisely, the justifiably right words or even the right unique single word, perhaps of only one simple syllable. And then when found and that particular little stricture of hard labor suddenly ended, what euphoria in equal brief measurer, what a lightness and relief in pleasure, what mental felicity and rise in spirits.

--Janet Flanner

We can only say about a thousandth of what we think and what we feel. We can’t get much of that on paper.

--Katherine Anne Porter

One is not a writer for having chosen to say certain things, but for having chosen to say them in a certain way. And, to be sure, the style makes the value of the prose.

--Jean-Paul Sartre

The impulse to tell stories is as natural, and hence as little in need of justification, as is the impulse to dance.

--George P. Elliott

Each author’s quest and contribution is to say in his own way what life has said to him.

--John Mason Brown

Talent goes into the first draft, and the art into the drafts that follow.

--John le Carre
I is hard to say what interests a child in a book. They can become fascinated by the strangest things...But in general it is probably safe to assume that a successful child’s book has any of the same elements as a successful adult book: gripping plot, interesting characters, a bit of surprise, and most important, competent writing.

--Sandra Schmidt

The work of a writer is only a kind of optical instrument he offers the reader in order to permit him to discern in himself something he might never have seen without this book.

--Marcel Proust

Only one thing is asked of the writer: that he tell his story as best he can, and having done so, curiously enough, get on with another.

--John le Carre

During the long, long haul of work on a full-length play there are periods when I am obliged to read what I’ve been writing to see how it is or isn’t shaping up. Almost invariably I am so disappointed or repulsed by what I read that I am unable, for a while, to continue work on it, to start a second, third, or fourth draft of the pachydermous project, and then, since I can’t just stop working, I divert myself with some shorter project, a story, a poem, or a less ponderous play. These diversions are undertaken simply as that, as diversions, and they nearly always have a quality in common, which is experimentation in content and in style, particularly in style. The fatigue I felt before this escapade is lifted. I find myself enjoying my work again. The inside weather changes; even the outside weather seems to get lighter and brighter, and I am easier to live with.

--Tennessee Williams

At a very early stage of the novel’s development I get this urge to collect bits of straw and fluff, and to eat pebbles. Nobody will ever discover how clearly a bird visualizes, or if it visualizes at all, the future nest and the eggs in it. When I remember afterwards the force that made me jot down the correct names of things, or the inches and tints of things, even before I actually needed the information, I am inclined to assume that what I call, for want of a better term, inspiration, had been already at work, mutely pointing at this or that, having me accumulate the known materials for an unknown structure. After the first shock of recognition—a sudden sense of ‘this is what I’m going to write’—the novel starts to breed by itself; the process goes on solely in the mind, not on paper; and to be aware of the stage it has reached at any given moment, I do not have to be conscious of every exact phrase. I feel a kind of gentle development, an uncurling inside, and I know that the details are there already, that in fact I would see them plainly if I looked closer, if I stopped the machine and opened its inner compartment; but I prefer to wait until what is loosely called inspiration has completed the task for me.

--Vladimir Nabokov
Talent is a combination of the gift of response and the gift of abstraction; art the organization of talent.  
--John le Carre

There is no life which is so satisfying, so sacred from intrusion as the writer's.  
--John le Carre

I don’t claim that my novels are truth. I claim that they are fiction, out of which a kind of truth emerges.  
--Muriel Spark

I polish most of my writing a great deal, writing many corrections on every page and then copying it over. In fact, I throw away many versions of every page before I am satisfied with it. I always read it at least once aloud to myself to be sure that the sentences are not too long or too choppy and that the rhythms sound right.  
--Olivia Coolidge

A story, the germ of a design, comes from real life. From one’s own more or less real life. Never mind how the imagination will transform it into something rich and strange and, above all, unrecognizable; that happens later, if at all. Meanwhile, the imagination has done nothing more than be somewhat entranced by what looks for a moment to be possible.  
--Howard Nemerov

Hemingway in the late years worked with painful slowness. He wrote mostly in longhand, frequently while standing at a bookcase in his bedroom; occasionally he would typewrite (‘when trying to keep up with dialogue’). For years he carefully logged each day’s work. Except for occasional spurts when he was engaged in relatively unimportant efforts, his output ran between 400 and 700 words a day. Mary Hemingway remembers very few occasions when it topped 1,000 words. He did not find writing to be quick or easy.  
--Robert Manning

When a writer retires deliberately from life or is forced out of it by some defect, his writing has a tendency to atrophy, just like a man’s limb when it’s not used.

I’m not advocating the strenuous life for everyone or trying to say it’s the choice form of life. Anyone who’s had the luck or misfortune to be an athlete has to keep his body in shape. The body and mind are closely coordinated.  
--Ernest Hemingway
No good book has ever been written that has in it symbols arrived at beforehand and stuck in....That kind of symbol sticks out like—like raisins in raisin bread. Raisin bread is all right, but plain bread is better.

--Ernest Hemingway

People usually ask after my writing habits, thinking, I suppose, there must be some carefully kept secret that accounts for my prolific production. Actually there isn’t. I do all my own typing, but I type 70 words a minute and never slow down. The key characteristic is, I suppose, single-mindedness. I type every day, except when the typewriters are kept forcibly out of reach; I start early each day and continue typing till the number of typographical errors reaches an unacceptable concentration.

--Isaac Asimov

A really unconscionable amount of a publisher’s time is spent declining as politely as possible manuscripts, for the most part unsolicited, which are hopeless. I mean that word of course in a purely subjective sense, because one publisher’s poison is another publisher’s meat, and my guess is that an unbelievable proportion of really bad manuscripts find quite respectable imprints sooner or later, and more frequently sooner than later.

--Alfred A. Knopf

To write clearly is great gain, but it is not the whole of writing. Beyond this obtainable clearness, beyond even the clearness which is touched with grace (a quality to be valued even in modest supply) lies much else. A straight giving of facts, the easy intimacy of a letter, the flash of a picture or an idea or an action is not enough. No one of them is large enough to fill the full circle of disciplined writing. To say exactly what does fill that full circle is not possible, for since disciplined writing expresses the infinite ways of men, it must take infinite forms. It is life moving in words. Being so alive and differing so in its forms and spirit, it cannot be fully analyzed.

--Percival Hunt

The creative process is often not responsive to conscious efforts to initiate or control it. It does not proceed methodically or in a programmatic fashion. It meanders. It is unpredictable, digressive, capricious.

--John Gardner

It is through the process of making artistic form—plays, poems, novels—out of one’s experience that one becomes a writer, and it is through this process, this struggle, that the writer helps give meaning to the experience of the group. And it is the process of mastering the discipline, the techniques, the fortitude, the culture, through which this is made possible, which constitutes the writer’s real experience as writer, as artist.

--Ralph Ellison
There seems no danger that the short story will decline in the number of its practitioners or the impact of their work. Indeed, we are more convinced than ever that it is in the short story that the new writers of the country, with all the freedom their elders and they have won, will give us the true particular essence of the art of fiction. And that it will be in short stories we will see the most effective world-in-miniature dramatizations of the conflicts of our time.

--Whit and Hallie Burnett

People always ask authors ‘How long did it take you to write?’ and indeed as a scholar I have spent much of my time, intelligence, and energy trying to establish the dates for the writing, the composition, of various poems, plays, stories. Apart from the obvious encyclopedic convenience of having an end date—which in any case is always supplied by the date of its appearance in print—to assign for a work, any author must look upon the scholar’s work as highly unrealistic and totally unrevealing as far as any understanding of the artistic process is concerned.

The answer to the question: ‘How long?’ has to be ‘My entire life up to the moment when the publisher cries ‘halt’ because any further changes would result in fantastic printing charges.’

--John Stewart Carter

Creation is a continuing process. I wrote nothing but scholarly articles for twenty years, yet all that time I must somehow have been writing because when I wrote my first purely narrative sentence...I began to draw on all that had happened to me in forty-six years. Suddenly—but not suddenly at all—I wanted to speak.

--John Stewart Carter

There is nothing left for us novelists to do but think. For unless we think, unless we make a clearer estimate of our condition, we will continue to write kid stuff, to fail in our function; we will lack serious interests and become truly irrelevant.

--Saul Bellow

The writer is admired, the writer is envied. But what has he to say for himself? Why, he says, just as writers have said for more than an century, that he is cut off from the life of his own society, despised by its overlords who are cynical and have nothing but contempt for the artist, without a true public, estranged. He dreams of ages when the poet or the painter expressed a perfect unit of time and place, had real acceptance, and enjoyed a vital harmony with his surroundings—he dreams of a golden age....Well, this is no age of gold.

--Saul Bellow

One likes to be comprehended, not praised (by a reviewer).

--John Cheever
We writers...can either shut up because the times are too bad, or continue because we have an instinct to make books, talent to enjoy, which even these disfigured times cannot obliterate. Isolated professionalism is death. Without the common world, the novelist is nothing but a curiosity and will find himself in a glass case along some dull museum corridor of the future.

--Saul Bellow

The relationship between publisher and author is the same as the relationship between a knife and a throat.

--Lincoln Schuster

The conscious and unconscious levels in a novelist are often at war. A book is prepared in the unconscious, and it is important for a novelist not to betray that unconscious. If you do, the unconscious will not ‘prepare’ material for you, and you will face a writing block.

--Norman Mailer

Technique is something that comes into existence with the individual work. In any real sense, it is actually discovered by the author, just as he discovers his own experience and deepest meaning in the course of creating his play. It materializes, always anew or always somewhat differently, in each new play in accordance with the demands of character, situation, moral slant, and intellectual bent. That is what successful technique is, and there is, of course, no teaching-formula for it. There is only one way of teaching it, and that is by stimulating the writer to discover his own technique by finding, liberating, and shaping his own inmost experience and meaning.

--John Gassner

The good writer makes a story by adding one part of his experience to another, fitting, adjusting, tinkering, building up, until a form emerges in which both the complexity of life and the transformation of the story are equally evident....He looks for the story that can emerge from the recombinations of experience that he constructs with words on paper.

--R. V. Cassill

The editing of books is one of the more cheerful trades....the biggest psychic income is the editor’s feeling that he often helps to bring to birth a talent or an idea. He can, in his better moments, think of himself as a midwife to the culture of his time—a part of the process by which civilization is created, preserved, and handed on from one generation to another.

--John Fischer

In art, truth lies in surprising.

--Julian Green
I think often how the writing of a book is the making of a journey. A novelist goes traveling with his mind on a trip to a certain place at a certain time with certain people; on such a trip his purpose and his obligation is to record vividly what he sees and what he hears and how it feels to be there. If he is vivid enough, there will be readers to go with him and to share with him the experience of such a journey, be it rough or smooth, wild or tame, wise or foolish, good or evil, long or short. About the only kind of trip readers do not care to make with a writer is a dull trip.

--Tom Lea

Writers of any significance have always played an oddly dual role. They have been voices and echoes at one and the same time. They have spoken for others while speaking for themselves. Although their voices have been theirs uniquely, in them they have expressed the unphrased needs of others. They have been spokesmen for their eras, too.

--John Mason Brown

The businessman who is a novelist in his spare time, an occasional and amateur novelist, is a character who must always be envied by professionals. For here is a man who has avoided the treadmill of talent and the catastrophes which lie in the path of genius. The businessman who is a novelist is able to drop in on literature and feel no suicidal loss of esteem if the lady is not home, and he can spend his life preparing without fuss for the awful interview.

--V. S. Pritchett

Beginning writing is never on paper; it is in the mind...the recognition of vital experience in our lives. We feel, we know, and we try to put this into patterns.

--Peggy Simson Curry

The tongue of experience has most truth.

--Arabic Proverb

All there is is sitting down to work and trusting that the ignition key still turns everything on.

--Peter Straub

The hardest part about writing is sticking it out.

--Peggy Anderson

You must want to enough. Enough to take all the rejections, enough to pay the price in disappointment and discouragement while you are learning. Like any other artist you must learn your craft—then you can add all the genius you like.

--Phyllis Whitney
Listen to everyone. Then choose what is best for you. --Lawrence Treat

The complete novelist would come into the world with a catalog of qualities something like this. He would own the concentration of a Trappist monk, the organizational ability of a Prussian field marshal, the insight into human relations of a Viennese psychiatrist, the discipline of a man who prints the Lord's Prayer on the head of a pin, the exquisite sense of timing of an Olympic gymnast and, by the way, a natural instinct and flair for exceptional use of language. Obviously, no man or woman has all of this. Yet unless he has some of it, dished out solely by the grace of the Lord, he cannot become a writer.

--Leon Uris

Dreaming and hoping won't produce a piece of work; only writing, rewriting and re-rewriting (if necessary)—a devoted translation of thoughts and dreams into words on paper—will result in an article, story or novel.

--Roberta Gellis

Read a lot, finding out what kind of writing turns you on, in order to develop a criterion for your own writing. And then trust it—and yourself.

--Rosemary Daniell

Read at least one book a day. Study the memoirs of authors who interest you.

--Arthur C. Clarke

You learn by writing short stories. Keep writing short stories. The money's in novels, but writing short stories keeps your writing lean and pointed.

--Larry Niven

The writer's genetic inheritance and her or his experiences shape the writer into a unique individual, and it is this uniqueness that is the writer's only stuff for sale.

--James Gunn

Compromise will be imposed from without. Therefore, avoid it from within. To please your readers don't betray yourself.

--Flora Rheta Schreiber

Life is a short run—milk it. Write what you really want to write.

--Ralph G. Martin

Write to please yourself. As you do, you'll reflect on your pages the thoughts and values of the people who share your own strange view of the world, and you'll remind them that they're not mad or alone.

--Richard Bach
The reader has certain rights. He bought your story. Think of this as an implicit contract. He’s entitled to be entertained, instructed, amused; maybe all three. If he quits in the middle, or puts the book down feeling his time has been wasted, you’re in violation.

--Larry Niven

Tell the readers a story! Because without a story, you are merely using words to prove you can string them together in logical sentences.

--Anne McCaffrey

Take the greatest possible unknown and say it in the simplest possible way.

--Rosemary Dantell

Think of language as malleable, like clay—that you are simply shaping that clay to hold your meaning, whatever that may be.

--Rosemary Daniell

Don’t think and then write it down. Think on paper.

--Harry Kemelman

Study the writers’ magazines and pound hell out of the typewriter.

--Erle Stanley Gardner

If I had any advice to give, I’d take it myself.

--John Steinbeck

The new writer should observe, listen, look...and then write. Nothing begets better writing than the simple process of writing.

--Rod Serling

The beginning writer needs talent, application and aspirin. If he wants to write just to make money, he is not a writer.

--James Thurber

Beware of advice—even this.

--Carl Sandburg

As for style of writing, if one has anything to say, it drops from him simply and directly, as a stone falls to the ground. There are no two ways about it, but down it comes, and he may stick in the points and stops wherever he can get a chance.

--Henry David Thoreau
A writer can’t help but develop style—and, if a good writer, adapt different styles to the uses of different materials. (Telling writers that they had to develop their own style to be successful) has sent innumerable writers out searching for different styles, as if one costume was suitable for all occasions, and has placed the emphasis of innumerable would-be writers on style instead of structure.

--James Gunn

A writer can only write what he knows about; and while ignorance of life, or a superficial understanding of life, has never stopped many writers from publishing books...it is certainly not the goal of any good or serious writer.

--Gay Talese

Almost all advice is silly. No one knows what an individual author is doing, and even he or she is not perfectly sure.

--Gregory Mcdonald

Above all else, you must be your own harshest critic, your own strictest editor, your own most demanding taskmaster; if you are honest with yourself in these respects, you will never please yourself entirely, but in continuing to try to do so, you cannot help but please others.

--Edward R. Eckert

Until you can spot flaws in your material—and know how to repair them—and until you really want to go through this process (as opposed to deeming yourself and your work flawless), you may get money for your writing but you aren’t a writer.

--John Jakes

Remember the word ‘irresistible.’ The writer confronts massive resistance from both publisher and reader. Trap an editor from the title, from the first paragraph to the very end. The same must be said of the reader. The writer must stop the editor from rejecting the manuscript. The writer must prevent the reader from putting the book down. The writer’s work must be irresistible.

--William X. Kienzle

You fail more than you succeed, even when your efforts get published and you get paid.

--Larry Grobel

Don’t give up, because those who don’t like your work may very well be wrong. And after you’re published, don’t pay any attention to the critics.

--Andrew Greeley
Be wary of people who want to rush in with advice. They usually want to maintain the status quo.

--Ann Beattie

Any advice, ideas or suggestions about writing from people not in the creative world should be staunchly ignored and the damaging mental vibrations quelled with a good hot fudge sundae.

--Nancy Winslow Parker

To be flattered by good criticism is corrupt and to be threatened by bad criticism is cowardly.

--Harry Mark Petrakis

The publisher is the enemy. An enemy that one may work with fairly amicably on occasion, but an enemy nonetheless. It’s like a relationship between the US and Russia. A writer who faces that reality will never be surprised or disappointed by her publisher, or anything that publisher does.

--Bertrice Small

Most publishers are basically commercial-minded. They have no time for literary idealism.

--Irving Wallace

Once the writing begins, turn out a set number of completed pages a day. There is a compelling tendency to surrender to writer’s block. Setting a schedule and sticking to it helps prevent that.

--William X. Kienzle

Every writer must acknowledge and be able to handle the unalterable fact that he has, in effect, given himself a life sentence in solitary confinement. The ordinary world of work is closed to him—and that’s if he’s lucky!

--Peter Straub

Writing is difficult, often painful, and always lonely. As you learn to write better, writing becomes more difficult, more painful, and no less lonely.

--Betty Rollin

Preserve time each day for absolute quiet and privacy, whether you are writing or not. It is, after all, the inner life that alone nourishes the writer’s real sensibilities.

--Donald Spoto
Good fiction is people. And people are people you know. And the more you write about people you know, the more other people who read it recognize themselves or their problems or the way they feel about things.

--Theodore Sturgeon

Reporting on the extreme things as if they were the average things will start you on the art of fiction.

--F. Scott Fitzgerald

You know you’re a born writer if...

At college, you enclosed SASE when you wrote ‘Hi, Dad, send money’ letters.

You make carbons of love letters.

You do rough drafts before filling out magazine survey cards.

While seated at your typewriter, you’re capable of meditating for 15 minutes at a stretch on the growth rate of grass.

--Craig H. Barrett

There’s nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at the typewriter and open a vein.

--Red Smith

Normally I don’t pay attention to ages except for the books I write for beginning readers. For them I edit out complexities of style and if possible cut the vocabulary down. But for everyone else, I write the same for the 6-year-old and the adult. They both can comprehend anything if you give it to them in straight-ahead form.

--Dr. Seuss

The actual process of writing a novel is very different from writing a play. In the novel you must add texture, details—extend scenes, rather than pare them down.

--Robert Anderson

With a novel, which takes perhaps years to write, the author is not the same man at the end of the book as he was at the beginning. It is not only that his characters have developed—he has developed with them, and this nearly always gives a sense of roughness to the work: a novel can seldom have the sense of perfection which you find in Chekhov’s story, ‘The Lady with a Dog.’ It is the consciousness of that failure which makes the revision of a novel seem endless—the author is trying in vain to adapt the story to his changed personality—as though it were something he had begun in childhood and was finishing now in old age.

--Graham Greene
A playwright is a problem solver. I think of a character in a difficult situation, then try to figure out the events that led him to that point and how he’ll get out of trouble. The play writes itself from there.

--Milan Stitt

A writer...is an imaginative person who seeks to convey his imaginative vision to his fellow-men by means of words, just as if he were a painter he would try to convey it in terms of colour and shape, or if a musician in terms of sounds. His medium is the dictionary, especially that great dictionary which is forever writing itself on the lips of a nation in speech.

--John Wain

People are your plots then, only if you know them well enough and present them with problems they will have great difficulty in solving. As you take them through their struggle, you will generate conflict. This is good; it is what you must have, for without conflict, your story will simply not move. The most elaborate plot in the world is useless without the animation that conflict imparts to it.

--William C. Knott

The design of my novel is fixed in my imagination and every character follows the course I imagine for him. I am the perfect dictator in that private world insofar as I alone am responsible for its stability and truth.

--Vladimir Nabokov

Whatever you want to say, there is only one word that will express it, one verb to make it move, one adjective to qualify it. You must seek that word, that verb and that adjective, and never be satisfied with approximations, never resort to tricks, even clever ones, or to verbal pirouettes, to escape the difficulty.

--Guy de Maupassant

When I am considering poetry to publish, I don’t look for the well-made or the unwell-made poem, the cooked or the raw. The important thing is to speak with your own voice—the thing that is yours and nobody else’s.

--Howard Moss

When I ask myself what my materials are, it seems to me that I cannot exclude anything. I use the whole of my life. I use all that I have experienced and observed and been told of and thought about in solitude and read about in books. A very great deal of it has come from books. I am convinced that all of it, however acquired, enters in some subtle way into everything I write....When I am writing with all my power I have the resources of the whole of my life just behind the tip of my pencil.

--Richard McKenna
No matter how great...a writer's intellectual perception, its expression...will be worth little unless he perceives also through the emotions. Stark intellectuality is as unacceptable as stark sentimentality.

--Paul Horgan

The danger for a writer who does not insist on psychology in his treatment of character is that he will become a puppet master, manipulating more or less adroitly manufactured figures who are ultimately boring.

--Arthur Ganz

If you're going to touch or tempt the world with what you write, you'd better make the ultimate effort, and in my prose writing I'll crawl on my elbows to get it right.

--Hortense Calisher

Your ability never reaches your hopes. You must be arrogant enough to think you can do it (write another book), and humble enough to do it.

--Hortense Calisher

Writing is the scrim through which the reader sees the story. If the writing is too fancy, or has patterns in it, there's a conflict in the scrim. It disturbs the reader and he doesn't see it clearly.

--James M. Cain

Style is more than a technical mannerism, more than a consistent way to apply colors or to wiggle a line. It is a method of going directly to the heart of each situation and peeing and depicting it in its own specific term; it is participating in each particular mood and finding the proper technique for expressing it; it is presenting clearly, without detours and unnecessary frills, what is talked about; it is understanding and feeling about characters and environments the way we feel about ourselves and our world. A formal, independent style does not allow such complete identification; it does not permit each story, each character to live its own life. It dresses the actors with the same costumes, over and over again, no matter what their play is and no matter what their lives are.

--Leo Lionni

People write realistically but at the same time they want to create environments which are somehow desirable, which are surrounded by atmospheres in which behavior becomes significant, which display the charm of life....The realistic tendency is to challenge the human significance of things. The more realistic you are, the more you threaten the grounds of your own art. Realism has always both accepted and rejected the circumstances of ordinary life. It accepted the task of writing about ordinary life and tried to meet it in some extraordinary fashion.

--Saul Bellow
I always know when I’m not writing well. That’s when I invent a flimsy excuse to leave my work.

--Edna O’Brien

Draw your chair up close to the edge of the precipice and I’ll tell you a story.

--F. Scott Fitzgerald

Writing...is a civilized art that is rooted in tradition. It draws upon the experience and practices of the masters, and all successful experimentation and novelty in writing is ultimately based upon techniques that have already been successfully demonstrated. Certainly, no serious writer can be so smug as to ignore what others have produced and are producing; nor can he be so dull as to be unaware of past achievements and present ventures in the realm of style and techniques.

--Winston Weathers

and Otis Winchester

If you intend to write, get all the facts and then sit down and write it as near like poetry as you can without violating the record. Use your imagination. Let it pour, like hot iron, turn it on free-swinging, expansive, overwhelming, exultant, triumphant. That is, if you are to bring any fire and passion to a dull and drab world.

--James Daugherty

It is the writer’s privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart.

--William Faulkner

The writer has his own vision at work. If there lie within him intense and deep feelings, a passion and an urgency for life and all that life evokes, a vigorous reality emerges. If that author has the artistry to commit into words, the soul of his thoughts and feelings, his characters and their story will reach us with genuineness and significance. There will be an underlying universality, a touchstone of reality.

--Mae Durham

Those writers who speak for and with their age are able to do so with a great deal more ease and grace than those who speak counter to prevailing attitudes.

--Flannery O’Conner

There is a widespread mistaken notion that ‘writing’ is a talent that exists in a void—a sense of words and phrases, a style, a gift of expression and arrangement. But this is only the hollow form of writing; it needs to be filled with substance.

--Sydney J. Harris

It is no good looking for models. We want anti-models.

--John Berryman
The problem of aesthetic creation is very different from that of scientific discovery. The question to be resolved is generally imposed on the scientist from without...and the framework of the problem is outlined with such rigor that, for a given state of knowledge, it is hardly possible to allow more than one correct solution. In contrast with this, the aesthetic work is in the first place imposed on the artist from within in response to some creative demand which in its origins has nothing in common with the difficulties peculiar to the aesthetic propensities of his age; it arises, rather, out of some rejection, in part or whole, of these propensities and nothing stands in the way of the resolution of this inner demand into a plurality (indefinite in number) of works of equal value.

--Jean-Paul Weber

I am not, and must not be, aware of my audience when I write my books. I must be wholly subjective, conscious only of the particular limiting cage of form of the...book into which I must shape and compress my creation....I write only out of myself but also for myself.

--Meindert DeJong

One does not write for children. One writes so that children can understand. Which means writing as clearly, vividly, and truthfully as possible. Adults might put up with occasional lapses; children are far less tolerant. They must never be bored; not for an instant. Words must live for them; so must people. That is what really matters, and it entails believing entirely in what one writes and having a real urgency to convince the reader that it is absolutely, utterly true.

--Leon Garfield

Writing aims to communicate, but if it does not hold the attention, it fails of its purpose and might as well not have been written. Unfortunately, monotony often exerts its deadly effect without either the author or the reader having any awareness of the fault. Yet the fault is quite readily corrected, if only we are aware of it.

Monotony can take several forms. I would consider, primarily, monotony in regard to sentence length and sentence structure. While the length of the sentence obviously will vary, the effect of a sentence depends more on its structure than on the mere number of words that it contains....

To correct monotony of structure, the writer must first of all become aware that it exists. From a recently published text I selected a random page and jotted down the first word in each of the 26 sentences. Eighteen of these began with the word ‘the,’ two with ‘these,’ and three with ‘this.’ In the remaining three sentences the initial word was ‘although’ once, ‘in’ once, and ‘its’ once. The reader may increase his sensitivity to bad writing by the simple procedure of noting the initial words of sentences, comparing various authors one with the other.

--Dr. Lester S. King
My own experience has been that the tools I need for my trade are paper, tobacco, food, and a little whisky.

—William Faulkner

One cannot stretch a rubber band beyond its determined length....Padding often tends toward diffusion.

--Stanley Richards

Writers are interested in folk tales for the same reason that painters are interested in still-life arrangements: because they illustrate essential principles of storytelling. The writer who uses them has the technical problem of making them sufficiently plausible or credible to a sophisticated audience. When he succeeds, he produces, not realism, but a distortion of realism in the interests of structure.

--Northrop Frye

Two essential writing skills are involved (in technical writing): organizing one’s thoughts, then writing them into strong sentences. These skills can be applied in producing any kind of technical writing—memo, report, manual, proposal—and must be applied if the work is to excel.

--Hardy Hoover

The most difficult part of writing...(is) revising, the careful reworking of a story after the emotional explosion that produces the first draft. Writing in the heat of feeling (is) hard enough, but to return to the pages after the heat (has) cooled and see the words one thought diamonds and pearls become gimcracks and baubles is a somber and demoralizing experience.

--Harry Mark Petrakis

A good writer always works at the impossible.

--John Steinbeck

Literature, as art, is not life ‘as is’ but life ‘as if.’ It does not, as Hamlet said, ‘hold, as it were, the mirror up to nature.’ Art does not conceive human experience as simple and direct. Too many seemingly irrelevant acts clutter our daily lives; too many activities occur which are too dull or too prosaic to make interesting literature. It is the writer, as artist, who points up the importance of an act, an experience, by his ordering of specific detail, thereby giving meaning and directness to experience. Art then is not a mirroring or an exact copy. It is not a snapshot of an experience, but an artistic ordering of details which communicates an artistic truth and an appearance of validity.

--J. A. Christensen
The craft or art of writing is the clumsy attempt to find symbols for wordlessness. In utter loneliness a writer tries to explain the inexplicable.

--John Steinbeck

The contemporary novelist’s job is to take pieces of life and arrange them on paper. And the more direct their passage from street to paper, the more lifelike they should turn out....(The novelist) needs to make what is set down seem truly contemporary, to give the impression of things happening here and now, to force upon the reader a feeling of immediacy...the novelist must know how things happen—not how they are remembered in later years—and he must write them down that way.

--Dashiell Hammett

The material of fiction is experience. I can count four kinds....

The four kinds of experience are recollected, fantasized, invented, learned.

Learned experience is what we hear about from others, or get from research, and try to fit to our characters. It happened historically.

Invented experience is what we imagine for our characters with no reference to similar events in our own lives. It could happen.

Fantasized experience does start with an actual event but, for our characters, we give it a different outcome. It might well have happened, given a change or two of factors.

Recollected experience sounds simplest: it happened personally. For my first 310,000 words of fiction—three published novels and one not published--I managed to avoid it.

It is part of the style of a writer...that he favors one or two of these kinds of experience, and very few of us use them all with equal facility.

--Vance Bourjaily

The reward of writing is in the writing itself. It comes with finding the right word. The quest for a superb sentence is a groping for honesty, a search for the innermost self, a self-discipline, a generous giving out of one’s most intimate rhythms and meanings.

--John Hersey

To be a writer is to throw away a great deal, not to be satisfied, to type again, and then again, and once more, and over and over.

--John Hersey
The image of the artist holding a mirror up to nature leaves out of account this
transformation, by selection and invention, of the otherwise meaningless jungle of
actuality. His good eye, his good ear, demon-guided, decides fastidiously, intellectu-
ally and imaginatively what, alone among all the eyes and ears of the world, he
shall see and hear in the green wilderness. What saves him from the banality of
seeing and hearing what everybody else has always seen and heard is his God-given
infirmities. They bestow on him his own obstinate vision, which is his self in action,
making these new shapes of life.

--Sean O'Faolain

Lines, verses, even stanzas come to me at odd moments—perhaps the best when I'm
swimming. Swimming frees the mind. There's something about the rhythm of
swimming—or running—the body is occupied, the mind is free. Lines come to me,
too, in sleeping-waking moments.

The only conscious thing about writing poetry is the veto of some of these lines. It's
veto, veto, veto.

--Robert Penn Warren

The utmost a writer can hope is that there may survive of his work a fraction good
enough to be drawn upon later, to uphold or to embellish some ancient truth restat-
ed or some old delight reborn.

--Rudyard Kipling

He who writes prose builds his temple to Fame in rubble; he who writes verses
builds it in granite.

--Bulwer-Lytton

Write without pay until somebody offers pay. If nobody offers within three years,
the candidate may look upon this circumstance with the most implicit confidence as
the sign that sawing wood is what he was intended for.

--Mark Twain

Every writer is a man with one deaf ear and one blind eye, who is possessed by a
demon and unteachable by anybody but himself; a man who only half hears and half
sees the world about him because for half his time he is absorbedly listening at the
keyhole to his own Demon, examining with fascination his primordial Shadow.
From this inner absorption comes his ruthlessness; his egoism; his readiness to
make use of anybody, even his dearest and nearest, to serve his pen; his insistence
on reshaping everything that he thus half sees and half hears in accord with his in-
ner self; and his endless curiosity mingled now with sympathy, now with an almost
blind hatred for other writers, who are, meantime, also eavesdropping on their own
Demons and Shadows.

--Sean O'Faolain
You can make yourself a more imaginative writer by being constantly analytical, critical and appreciative while reading.

--John Stahr

If those who've grown accustomed to making their living by putting words on paper are fearful that the electronics age is sounding a death knell to that art perhaps they can be comforted a bit by the thought that even the best of speeches and commentaries that come into our consciousness via the ear have been ‘put on paper’ first.

--John Stahr

If the writing is honest it cannot be separated from the man who wrote it. It isn’t so much his mirror as it is the distillation, the essence, or what is strongest and purest in his nature, whether that be gentleness or anger, serenity or torment, light or dark. This makes it deeper than the surface likeness of a mirror and that much more truthful.

--Tennessee Williams

In the writing of every book or poem or play there are two crucial moments. One comes when the author puts down the first few words, and the other when he starts the last page. The tone of the concluding sentences is even more important than the beginning for it will surely help to determine his readers’ judgment of the whole, and sometimes these words are among those which remain most clearly in their memory.

--Gilbert Highet

The process of composition is, in one degree or another, a movement toward meaning. The writer (like any artist) is not a carpenter who builds the chicken-coop according to a blue-print. If the carpenter has a blue-print he knows exactly what kind of chicken-coop will be forthcoming. But the writer, no matter how clear his idea or strong his intuition of the projected work, can never know what it will ‘be’ or ‘mean’ until the last word is in place—for every word, every image, every rhythm participates in the ‘being,’ and the ‘being’ is, ultimately, the ‘meaning.’ And the reader is made to share in this process.

--Robert Penn Warren

Writing isn’t hard; no harder than ditch-digging.

--Patrick Dennis

I don’t believe you can write about anything, or in any fashion, even the fantastic, without drawing deeply on your own experience.

--Wallace Stegner
The novelist has nothing in common with the journalist in his relationship to material. He is seeking something more important to him than reality. In the creation of character he may borrow from the people around him an attribute, a mannerism or a turn of phrase; but the character will not take wing, or give him any satisfaction, until he has animated it with some element, however obscure, of his own personality.

--John le Carre

A writer needs to know the strength of Simple words, the effectiveness of few words, the power of the unsaid word.

--Norma R. Youngberg

The first responsibility of the creative writer is to his language and to his technique, because only through these can the creative impulse itself find its realization. His second responsibility is to his own freedom to use his language as he must. He must be free to rebel, and in a profoundly basic sense every real writer is a rebel.

--Mark Schorer

Why do we write? Leaving aside the personal compulsions, and to start with the obvious, I'd say that any novelist must have a point of view which he feels he must put forward, and I suppose the problems of any novel will usually be the current problems of the novelist himself.

--Mary Stewart

The most frequent deficiency is the failure of the writer to organize his material logically. The editors of The Reader’s Digest have an expressive term for this fault; they say the article ‘doesn’t march.’ Instead, it hops from one phase of the subject to another and then, confusingly, back again to a previous sequence, and the transitions are bad or non-existent. As a result, the story doesn’t make much sense.

--Ben Hibbs

No two writers tell a story in exactly the same way, because their styles are different....two writers may have the same idea, but their writing will depend on their personalities, their knowledge, their feelings, their past experiences....All of these elements contribute to what we call style.

--Edward H. Jones, Jr.

Anybody who has in him one sentence that can mean something to somebody else should write it down.

--Rod Steiger
Much more than confession or catharsis, creative writing often constitutes a kind of self-analysis. When the writer dredges up the contents of his unconscious and transmutes them into literature, he is not restricted to getting it off his chest. He may begin to see his deepest conflicts in perspective, to work through and resolve his fundamental problems. Even though it is not his conscious intention, his writing may serve the end of personal development.

--Harvey Mindess

A novel is a prodigious experience for the writer. It is a possessing embryo which consumes the imagination and drains the mind. But it also nourishes and replenishes even as it seeks the materials for its own needs. Thus it becomes a process of growth and change for the novelist himself. And he hates to let it go, not only because of the painful joy of creative work, with its continuity and uninterrupted purpose, but because he feels what he has done can be made better and he does not want it ever to get beyond reach.

--Norman Cousins

If you write purely and your style’s good enough, you can establish a communion between yourself and the reader that can be found in no other art. And this communion can continue for hours, weeks, years.

--Norman Mailer

A book that is worth writing, that you really care about, is only partly made. You may be able to make all the parts hold neatly and strongly together, as a carpenter does a good job on a box; but from the very beginning—perhaps even before you think of writing a story at all—the story must grow. An idea grows in your mind as a tree grows from a seed. The idea of the story is a seed, and it grows with the slowness of natural growth.

--Philippa Pearce

The idea of a story springs from your experience, from what you have seen and heard and done and felt and thought, going back for weeks, months perhaps yearns perhaps even to the day you were born. So you would often find great difficulty in saying exactly where an idea sprang from; it is much easier to mark its growth—its gaining in strength and in size and its branching out.

--Philippa Pearce

At least two experiences are shared by every serious writer. The first is the yearning or determination to write his heart out in one big book, a book that would fulfill itself and himself. The second is the dread of finality—as represented not only by his difficulty in knowing when a book is finished, but by his reluctance to part with it even after he has managed to end it.

--Norman Cousins
Fiction differs from fact...in that it is an ‘imaginative fashioning, whether with or without intent to deceive.’ It is life as it ought to be. It is not enough for the writer to recount what actually happened. He will probably use actuality as the springboard, but from then on his imagination must guide him to a logical conclusion—not the anti-climax of too much reality.

--Katharine C. Turner

I advise everyone who asks about the career of writing to get himself all the books he can carry before he buys a typewriter. Library cards are more important than pencils. Read everything, I say. Good books, bad books, hard books, easy books, underground books, popular books, square books, hip books—never stop reading and you will become a fortiori a writer.

--Harry Golden

Let a man dig with passion into a subject he knows something about and you become his companion, his partisan, on the instant. The subject doesn’t matter: The writer may be mad about oysters, or skindiving, or gorillas in their natural state, or perhaps even thermodynamics. So long as he knuckles down to the one, two, threes, the actual mechanics of dealing with a pursuit you thought you couldn’t care less about, you care.

--Walter Kerr

Every man’s profession, or pleasure, becomes irresistibly inviting the minute it’s made concrete, detailed, explicit. The human mind leaps at the opportunity to function freshly, in alien terrain, when it is given fundamentals to chew on—and whenever the stage takes advantage of this far from idle curiosity, it magnetizes an audience into a pop-eyed little group virtually holding its breath over the dissecting table.

--Walter Kerr

You stand among people at a party where a man wants to talk. You listen. Perhaps it’s not very good. You keep on listening, and then you take out a notebook and jot down something to remember.

When all the stories get inside, your head resembles one of those IBM machines which assembles facts and figures, sorts them out, and returns them to you added, multiplied, divided, and subtracted. Your private IBM machine assembles characters, and in much the same way delivers itself of a novel. The characters you have met in different places become acquainted and develop into participants. Your individual stories get together and form the big story. Characters and story then join and become a book aching to be born.

--Jesse Stuart
Do not write a novel unless your head is bursting with its birth pains. If your mind is crammed with a host of aggravating characters who find themselves in conflict either with each other or with you, the novel is ripe and you will not find relief until you get it on paper.

--Jesse Stuart

I’d rather fail by trying to do something new, something unheard of, than repeat myself for an entire career.

--James Dickey

An entertainer who merely confuses and bores can hardly expect to receive applause. Serious novelists, I am aware, don’t want to be thought of as entertainers. But they will either amuse their patrons or be dismissed. After all, if King Lear’s jester hadn’t been funny, he would not have been allowed to deliver all those wise remarks.

--Cecil Hemley

It seems to me that the novel can still be saved if the novelists want to save it. To do so, however, will require a certain humility upon the part of the writer. The first thing he must do is to acquire respect for his audience....The really great artists of the past were always able to adapt themselves to their audiences and create their masterpieces within the limitations set by the times.

--Cecil Hemley

To write a page-turner that matters beyond the simple story is certainly the ultimate goal of realistic writers.

--Susan Shreve

Children have little patience with digression from the matters at hand. I have learned a lot about structure from the high expectations of an audience of children.

--Susan Shreve

If the characters aren’t warm and vivid, nothing else will work. If they are, the story will take care of itself.

--Anton Myrer

If you want to be treated seriously as a writer, you’ve got to put something of yourself, some flavor of personal emotion, into what you write.

--Julian Symons

Writers are so interested in messages they’ve forgotten how to tell a story.

--Isaac Bashevis Singer
I assume that readers are burdened, harassed and furiously distracted. Some of the greatest forces in American life are directed upon them. In plain words, everyone competes for their attention: politicians, journalists, people with something to sell. My strongest wish is not to waste their time or impose upon them.

--Saul Bellow

When the characters are speaking, and I allow them to speak in their own rhythms and nuances and their own voices, they seem to find the right words.

--Joyce Carol Oates

The goal of writing is to keep a beleaguered line of understanding which has movement from breaking down and becoming a hole into which we sink decoratively to rest.

--William Carlos Williams

When an artist starts out on a work of art, he has set himself some definite artistic problems that he is out to solve. He selects his characters, his time and his place, and then finds the particular and special circumstances which can allow the developments he desires to occur naturally, developing, so to say, without any violence on the artist’s part in order to compel the desired issue, developing logically and naturally from the combination and interaction of the forces the artist has set into play.

The world the artist creates for this purpose may be entirely unreal...but there is one absolute demand we are entitled to make: This world in itself and as long as it lasts must be plausible to the reader or to the spectator.

--Vladimir Nabokov

I don’t revise much when I write fiction; it usually works or it doesn’t the first time through.

--John Sayles

You know that fiction, prose rather, is possibly the roughest trade of all in writing. You do not have the reference, the old important reference. You have the sheet of blank paper, the pencil, and the obligation to invent truer than things can be true. You have to take what is not palpable and make it completely palpable and also have it seem normal and so that it can become a part of the experience of the person who reads it. Obviously, this is impossible and that is probably why it is considered to be valuable when you are able to do it. But it is impossible to hire out or contract to be able to do it, as to hire out to be an alchemist.

--Ernest Hemingway
I read everything I write out loud before I do the final typing, because my ear is a lot better than my eye.

--John Sayles

You write with energy at the beginning of life, with the experiences you are living. You put them down on paper immediately without going through an intermediary stage....Then when you are 50 you have learned how to write, you don't have that energy anymore, but you have achieved a technique, you have learned how to write in your head before you put it on paper.

--Carlos Fuentes

When writers of fiction deal with themes, have ideas, write about matters of life and death, they should never forget that the most important thing is to partake of life with relish, to reduce, compress, and distill it, and between the covers of a book, with compassion and with truth, to fashion out of words and life something durable that did not exist before.

--Burke Davis III

The primary job of a writer is to be a good storyteller; tell it with humor, tell it with rousing fun and tell it with romance.

--Marilyn K. Dickerson

My desire to write stems at least partially from a need to make order from chaos and to seek a meaning lurking in the constant onslaught of daily experience.

--Carole Morgan

I write because I love to read. I love the research that goes into good historical novels. I love taking something quite intangible, like an idea, and giving it shape and color, choosing its voice and the way it moves, creating a personality that both loves and hates, and then sitting at my typewriter and watching what happens to it.

--Wendy Lozano

There are two basic tensions in biography. One occurs when you're taking someone whom you don't know, from a strange century or a strange place, and you're trying to make him familiar and recognizable. You do that by putting the person in the context of the familiar, shared life we all know: the social life, the life of getting ahead in the world and making a living, and so on. So in one way you're trying to make the person you're writing about comprehensible in terms of your own experience. But on the other hand what you're trying to do at the very same time is to make that person, especially if he or she is a highly creative person, seem unique, even mysterious and spooky. So you've got to manage these two challenges simultaneously.

--Justin Kaplan
Once in a while, your hand will write a sentence that seems so true you do not know where it came from.

--Norman Mailer

Writing is an escape from a world that crowds me.

--Neil Simon

I like being alone in a room. It’s almost a form of meditation—an investigation of my own life. It has nothing to do with ‘I’ve got to get another play.’

--Neil Simon

When I go to work in the morning I read the newspaper first. I don’t have the slightest idea of what I’m going to do. I’m in this meditative mood. It’s like being on a high board, looking down to a cold, chilly pool. Then I give myself a little push. The water isn’t as cold as I thought.

--Neil Simon

I don’t think anyone gets writer’s block. I think fear takes over.

--Neil Simon

The novelist’s main concern is with character....He must take liberties with his subject, plunge off into the void, in order to satisfy his own creative needs.

--William Styron

Every novelist has something in common with a spy: he watches, he overhears, he seeks motives and analyzes character, and in his attempt to serve literature he is unscrupulous.

--Graham Greene

I write by ear, always with difficulty and seldom with any exact notion of what is taking place under the hood.

--E. B. White

I don’t consciously draw on people or settings from my personal experience. When I do, my imagination stops working, and it’s dull when I put it down on paper.

--Stephen R. Donaldson

I go my own way, do the best I can, writing mainly to please myself. But it is on the assumption that there is an audience out there somewhere, made up of people pretty much like myself, or at least of people who think and feel like me.

--Edward Abbey
A writer writes as a painter paints—because he or she has to. Most need very little encouragement where discipline is concerned.

--Joan Kahn

I start out with an idea, either something that has happened or something in the ‘what-if’ category. Sometimes ideas come, like a log from the bottom of a river.

--Andre Dubus

Outlines are artificial, because you are saying that the story has to run a certain way. When you outline, your story is dead. Writers never know how their stories will end. There comes a moment of discovery, when you know how things are going to go.

--Andre Dubus

A writer should discover something when he writes, and so should the person who is reading his work.

--Andre Dubus

In nonfiction writing...you must go beyond merely describing what your subject or topic is—you must decide what your attitude toward it is, and further, what specifically you have to say about it that hasn’t already been said.

--Martin Russ

In my drive to write, there was the great dream of glory, of being a first-rate writer. I didn’t want money and fame. I only wanted to say what I thought was important....If I had not set my sights on being great, I would not even have been good today. No one promised me anything. There was never any assurance of my talent nor that anyone would read one line that I would write. There was nothing that I could have for the asking. I had to earn it.

--Katherine Anne Porter

Beginners sometimes ask me how a novel is written, the answer to which is: any way at all. One knows only when it is finished, and then if one is at all serious, he will never do it the same way again.

--Thomas Berger

I think fine old movies are great for a writer to look at and ponder over. They’re basic story technique, which applies to any fiction: quick and sure characterization, hang out a story line, stay tight to it, and keep out of the way. Those movies packed in the fans because the writers knew how to grab, entertain, excite—and how to keep things moving. I’ve learned from them and know I can learn a lot more.

--Robert Twohy
The realm of the writer eludes even the swiftest and the most responsive camera lens...the rapport between a reader and the page in which he has chosen to interest himself is one of those mysterious and powerful forces that keeps the world from flying to pieces.

--John Cheever

Through long apprenticeship, I learned about sentences and paragraphs. The only talent I have is that if I described a chair in a paragraph, I think I could make the reader stay to the end of that paragraph.

--James A. Michener

I have a terrific compulsion to communicate. I'm very careful about the construction of a narrative....I'm never easy until the structure falls into place. That is a matter of art--something I learned from music and painting and good literature.

--James A. Michener

Freedom in writing comes from following rules. The rules of verse form—fourteen for the sonnet, a measured five for the cinquain, etc.—offer challenges that nudge expression into being, that free the writer to look for, find, and express a subject in an individual and unique way.

--Riley Hughes

The secret of great prose style is the sound, echoing in the back of the reader's mind. Clarity is a virtue; but sound and association fix overtones of emotion and grace into the written word as a hurricane drives straws into a wall.

--Willard R. Espy

Good writers are monotonous, like good composers. Their truth is self-repeating....They keep trying to perfect their understanding of the one problem they were born to understand.

--Alberto Moravia

What the best storytellers know...is where to begin.

--Karla Kuskin

I would say that I like to have a certain amount of time alone every day. I don’t take any communication, no telephone calls. Just solitude. There’s a need. And solitude is not just because you’ve got a job on your hands. Solitude is blankness that makes accidents happen.

--Robert Penn Warren

Writing is not a full-time occupation.

--Ernest Hemingway
The writer...not only reaches deeply into the hearts of men, but he also illuminates their minds and liberates their spirits. The writer does not offer solutions. This is not his role. But he offers men courage by revealing to them dimensions they had not known were theirs.

--Kay Boyle

I write five or six character ideas, and study four or five of the processes that combined to build a nation--religion, industry, cultural trends—and follow them through each era; then I weave the elements together as though I were making a basket. They say my books are educative, but that’s not my purpose. I’m just doing exactly what I want to do: to reveal the impact of people on history, and vice versa.

--James A. Michener

Besides poverty, poetry offers you a kind of purity. Since you usually can expect no earthly reward—money, fame, the things other artists get—if you write poetry, you have to do it for love.

--Roger Bergman

I think symbolism happens of its own self, flowing out of something so deeply buried in your consciousness and past experience that you’re not even aware of any symbols; and I think that’s true of most writers. I’m certainly not aware of them until I see them later on. They just come of themselves. So you don’t say, ‘I’m going to have the flowering Judas tree stand for betrayal,’ though, of course, it does when you look back on it.

--Katherine Anne Porter

Correspondence courses, writers’ schools, etc., are probably useful but all the authors I know were self-taught. There is no substitute for living.

--Arthur C. Clarke

All fictional personages are to some extent created from the recollection or observation of living people by the author, for otherwise people in novels and short stories would have slight resemblance to human beings.

--Erskine Caldwell

All the characters one needs for a lifetime of novels are sitting quietly hunched over their beers waiting for someone to care enough about their lives to ask.

--Michael Jahn

Everybody has talent, if they dig away at it. I believe writers shouldn’t think of themselves as too important, or special. Obviously, there are geniuses, but most of us writers have got to look and listen very carefully and, with tremendous care, make our object.

--Nell Dunn
I think a writer writes more out of what he doesn’t intend than from what he does.
---David Plante

It happens sometimes that a writer begins with a short story and turns it into a novel. But it happens sometimes that when I read a novel I say to myself how good it would be if it were a short story.
---Isaac Bashevis Singer

In writing about serious themes, one has to deal with those moments of juncture where there is conflict. This is perhaps the tragedy of being a writer—that one deals with people at moments of conflict and crisis.
---Joyce Carol Oates

I am conscious of certain unwritten rules when I write for children. I think of a single story, not several as I tend to with adult books, a story whose events affect primarily the hero, just one hero. And as a result of these events, the hero changes. Grows up, really. This is not substantially different from the considerations I have in writing an adult book. I simply think of a book for children in terms of a single point of view and issue and resolution.
---Susan Shreve

There are three points of view from which a writer can be considered: he may be considered as a storyteller, as a teacher, and as an enchanter. A major writer combines these three—storyteller, teacher, enchanter—but it is the enchanter in him that predominates and makes him a major writer.
---Vladimir Nabokov

Everything we write is autobiographical, in a sense. The writer lives all the lives she writes about, and that may be the reason we write at all—to live more than one life.
---Lee Smith

It is always a mistake to extract fictional ideas and attempt to turn them into a nonfiction statement. If I have to make a statement I would hope I would not have to write a novel to do it. In most good fiction, instructions on behavior are of the simplest kind: Try to be kind and try to be good.
---John Irving

We are living in an era of particularly well-crafted creative work, whether fiction or poetry. More good work is being done by more gifted writers than ever before.
---Joyce Carol Oates
In a conflict between style and grammar, style usually wins, and properly so. Grammar rules describe the normal, the expected. For the most part, you should try to write normally and acceptably. But if you need the unexpected for special effect—a forceful jolt to your readers, a sudden twist—break the usual patterns. The ‘mistake’ will call attention to the point you wish to emphasize; if it is deliberate and effective, it’s not a mistake at all.

--Jane Walpole

I always forget how important the empty days are, how important it may be sometimes not to expect to produce anything, even a few lines in a journal....The most valuable thing we can do for the psyche, occasionally, is to let it rest, wander, live in the changing light of a room, not try to be or do anything whatever.

--May Sarton

A regimen is absolutely crucial to a writer of fiction. Much of a writer’s inspiration derives from this: You write—and find you have something to say.

--Wright Morris

As any journalist knows, the trick is to give the reader the impression that all knowledge on a given subject is at your fingertips.

--Joseph Epstein

You’re supposed to look into other hearts to write....If you look only into your own heart, chances are that you’ll write only one book.

--Leslie Epstein

A freelance writer (possesses) both his freedom and a lance. He knows the reason he doesn’t write short stories as good as Chekhov’s is simply that he doesn’t write so well: Not that he lives in the wrong century or society, not that his politics or education are wrong. The limits placed on him are solely within himself, and so he knows that, as long as he lives in decent health, a chance exists that he may break past those old limits to new capacities, that a book will seize his imagination that nobody on earth has yet conceived of, and that his tongue will finally be free to speak freely, as never before.

--Edward Hoagland

Those of us who choose to tell stories...are, before we are anything else, entertainers. Our task is to take people out of themselves for a few hours, a few days, a few weeks, to take that reader to places that he has never been, in the company of people he will never meet.

--Pete Hamill
A biographer is a storyteller...who may not invent his facts but who is allowed to imagine his form.

--Leon Edel

The writer seeks and then must deal with empty time, in which conscious activity has to be related to writing, limited, so the subconscious can finish doing what it is doing and reveal the nature of the next few lines.

--Kit Reed

I worked on (my memoirs) while I was riding the bus. When I went to the Brooklyn Museum, I wrote on the subway. In the library on 40th Street off Fifth Avenue. In all the cities when I was on the road. In London when I filmed ‘Nasty Habits.’ I never knew how I would pull it all together. It was a mess. Note pads. I used different pens, different colored ink for each section so I’d know where I was. I had a purple pen to write one, a shocking pink for another.

--Anne Jackson

In the imaginative effort that lies behind a good story, there is no difference between writing for children and for adults.

--Paula Fox

If you were a carpenter, it would be no good making a chair, the seat of which was five feet up from the floor. It wouldn’t be what anyone wanted to sit on. It is no good saying that you think the chair looks handsome that way. If you want to write a book, study what sizes books are, and write within the limits of that size. If you want to write a certain type of short story for a certain type of magazine you have to make it the length, and it has to be the type of story, that is printed in that magazine. If you like to write for yourself only, that is a different matter—you can make it any length, and write it in any way you wish; but then you will probably have to be content with the pleasure alone of having written it. It’s no good starting out by thinking one is a heaven-born genius—some people are, but very few. No, one is a tradesman—a tradesman in a good honest trade. You must learn the technical skills, and then, within that trade, you can apply your own creative ideas; but you must submit to the discipline of form.

--Agatha Christie

Novels, because they don’t cost as much to produce as films, permit a great variety of experimentation. In the last ten or twenty years, American novelists alone have produced more in the way of innovation and inspiration than ever before in the history of literature.

--Joseph Heller
Pictures in the writer’s mind and the emotions he feels are transformed through his arm and hand into black marks on white paper. The marks, which mean nothing in themselves, are then converted by the eye of the reader into pictures in his own mind and a stimulus for his emotions. Very much the same emotions and pictures, if the black marks are in the right arrangement, although each person’s interpretation of the same book is slightly different.

--Monica Dickens

Opening oneself up to all experiences is the essence of writing. Tapping that deep feeling and not being afraid to say what you feel. For me, even a car accident and being stranded...is a subject for a poem....The opening of the mind to all experience is really finding the poet inside of you.

--Sandra Hockman

Fiction is a kind of deception, a sleight of hand and mind. The silks come out of the sleeve, the enameled box opens to disclose a dove, the pea appears under the right shell (or in the middle of the right word). If the writer does his job well enough, if his perceptions are defined with enough precision and fitted well enough together so that the seams don’t show, the illusion is complete. The reader enters a separate reality.

--Donald Zochert

The story must come first. (Children) must want to turn the page. And as you tell them that good story, never be afraid that anything will be too hard for them, because nothing is.

--Madeleine L’Engle

I think every writer wants to answer the questions: Who am I? What am I doing here? What is the world about? What sense can I make of everything? And I feel you begin to answer these questions when you write what you want to write. If you’re lucky, it also sells....You have to believe in what you’re writing.

--Anne Roiphe

I think most writers will agree that writing gets harder instead of easier. We tend to bite off ever bigger mouthfuls. As a result, writing becomes more complex and challenging.

--Alvin Toffler

I began writing my first novel in little notebooks on the train....And then I started making a little bit of money out of (my writing). I also found it obsessive. I found while sitting at my desk that I thought of very little else apart from my book and I quickly knew that I was giving to writing the best part of my life, that the ordinary routine that I was living was really just there to support it.

--David Cornwell
I try to have a couple of books and a TV show in progress simultaneously. I write in a cork-lined room and have two books pinned to the wall at all times. When I hit a snag on one, I go on to another.

--Theodor Seuss Geisel

Good talk in a novel is a pleasure rather like a fresh breeze blowing across the terrace of a charming outdoor cafe. I certainly don’t mean to depreciate it. On the other hand, good talk is a rather ephemeral joy, occurring somewhere below the level of art. Brilliant talk, in which characters turn themselves inside out or achieve a kind of apotheosis, is something else again. There are writers who can give you a pretty clear idea of the human predicament by means of a page or two of dialogue.

--Anatole Broyard

Journalism is very good training, because you are forced to write every day. Even though you were writing journalese, even though you were writing in cliches a lot of the time, it was great discipline.

--Leon Edel

I get up around nine and, after a glass of hot water mixed with herbs, try to work immediately while I’m still near to my dreams and intuitiveness, before I’ve had to think whether to put on a blue frock or a green, or go out and buy tomatoes. When I’m caught up in the spell of a story, I think it becomes my happiest time. I want to induce a trance-like situation, but very lucid. I write out loud. I say the words. Very often I’ll get up from the table because the telephone is ringing, and I can’t find it.

--Edna O’Brien

One mark of an unsure writer is that he seems to tire quickly of the word say, and to feel that he must turn to a synonym: ‘I’m going for a walk,’ said Tom. ‘So am I,’ averred Dick. ‘You can come with me, then,’ rejoined Tom. ‘Okay,’ Dick stated. It isn’t always that the words are misused, but rather that they become conspicuous by their very variety, their needless variety.

--Theodore M. Bernstein

Most writers enjoy only two brief periods of happiness. First, when what seems a glorious idea comes flashing into mind, and secondly, when a last page has been written and you have not yet had time to consider how much better it all ought to have been.

--J. B. Priestley
I refuse to write (a short story) unless it has a good strong plot. I also take so long to complete them because with the first draft I invariably find things have gone wrong everywhere and I need at least three weeks just to get the first page right. Hemingway taught me to keep rewriting. He said you just keep on doing it until it’s as near perfect as possible.

--Roald Dahl

The writer of fiction, at his/her best, is a true artist. The novel is the culmination of his art. It cannot die as long as the need for self-expression lives. That need is universal. The artist reflects his/her time and transcends it. He works with his own experiences, emotions, visions in order to plumb the depth of his humanity, causing his reader to exclaim: ‘this is how it truly is, this is life.’

--Silva Tennenbaum

A writer must be a strangely divided creature. First he works with blind enthusiasm—then casts a cold, cold eye on what the enthusiasm brought forth. The cold and critical eye is just as necessary and just as much a part of writing as the enthusiasm.

--R. V. Cassill

In the fiction of young men and women, emotions are at war with the way things are. In the fiction of older men and women, emotions have been brought to a truce. Inner negotiation stabilizes the drain of energy. Wanting more yields to taking less.

--Webster Scott

You get to be a writer by getting ready. Create a rich, immediate, usable past that compels you to write.

--William Saroyan

Even in literature and art, no man who bothers about originality will ever be original: whereas if you simply try to tell the truth (without caring twopence how often it has been told before) you will, nine times out of ten, become original without ever having noticed it. The principle runs through all life from top to bottom. Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it.

--C. S. Lewis

The writer of fiction is quite as serious, quite as conscientious, and quite as wholeheartedly a worker toward truth as the laboratory bacteriologist. Don’t commit the elementary and unjustifiable mistake of thinking that he does anything by chance or for the sake of fashion or applause or sensation or scandal. Don’t, above all, think that he is ever unaware of what he is doing, or does anything idly. If he is a serious artist...the every scene he imagines and every word he writes it with is a deliberate step toward a deliberate end. It is, too, the choice of his skill, of his mastery.

--Bernard De Vote
I wish to honor...the freelance writer. To lay claim to that status, he or she must genuinely earn his keep through writing. He must have no institutional connection with university, newspaper, foundation, or other organization that furnishes him a regular paycheck and a pension upon retirement. Groupless, he pays higher rates for insurance than the employed. He has no fringe benefits and no company secretary to type his letters and make his airline reservations. No union represents him to management and tides him over in hard times. Even the IRS makes him wait two years before he can deduct moving costs, for the self-employed must be watched carefully. The freelance writer accepts these inconveniences in order to work unswayed by the conventions and subtle influence of any institution. Having myself succumbed to the beckoning of a university position after three years on my own, I would like to express my admiration for the independence of spirit that keeps most freelance writers afloat and uninstitutionalized in our midst. We must not let the breed perish.

--Roger Shattuck

To tell others what he sees, feels, and thinks about himself and the world, the writer makes a world of words to inform readers about his discoveries ‘out there’ and his inner responses to these discoveries. That world of words is a representation of his observations, feelings, and thoughts, and it is through that world of words alone that readers understand what the writer knows. It is also through the world of words that readers test the writer’s perceptions against their own experience in the world.

--Robert Bain and Dennis Donovan

In the expression ‘good writing’ or ‘good style’ the word ‘good’ has usually meant ‘beautiful’ or ‘proficient’—like a good Rembrandt or a good kind of soap. In our time it has come to mean honest as opposed to fake. Bad writing happens when the writer lies to himself, to others, or to both...Bad writing may be proficient; it may persuade us to buy a poor car or vote for an imbecile, but it is bad because it is tricky, false in its enthusiasm, and falsely motivated. It appeals to a part of us that wants to deceive itself.

--Donald Hall

From Homer to the present, the need to tell it like it is is a line of descent of both fiction and nonfiction, the skeptics among the listeners being the first to recognize that fiction is a form of artful lying....The major problem of craft is how ‘to take...a reader in.’ How to make fiction, that is, true-to-life.

--Wright Morris
By the phrase ‘contemporary narrative’...I mean the most difficult, disciplined 
painstaking form of the craft of storytelling--where the imagination must deal with 
facts as they come, raw and bleeding and unsorted, with episodes which the master 
must weave together to tell us of the action the way it really was. In this art form 
the story is made splendid by the writer’s own understanding of men, of how their 
actions fit together when they were happening.
--Theodore H. White

Writing eight hundred or so pages of sentences will teach a young writer a great 
deal about English prose, but if it’s all towards one novel, he will learn considerably 
less about making characters, managing narrative pace, working subplots against 
main plots—that sort of thing—than he will be attempting a number of narrative 
pieces.
--John Barth

It makes good sense to have published a few things here and there in magazines 
just to have some credentials with which to approach a book publisher.
--John Barth

It seems that the very nature of our work is the work of picking up rocks and look-
ing at the life that’s hidden....In doing that, we illuminate what has not been, illu-
minated and spread the light around a little bit.
--Grace Paley

The job of a writer is that of a gravedigger, to dig up what normal people have 
buried. People spend their time burying pain and love.
--Mary Hood

Writing is a matter of craft and know-how yes, but also a matter of tenacious faith. 
And closely related to faith—perhaps rising from it—are all those virtues of 
courage, hope, steadfastness of intention, caritas—love for the word, for the charac-
ters, for the process, the journey itself.
—Unknown

I am an obsessive rewriter, doing one draft and then another and another, usually 
five. In a way, I have nothing to say, but a great deal to add.
--Gore Vidal

A writer is a person who writes. You don’t wait to write until you have something to 
write about. As long as you’re of normal intelligence and all your senses are func-
tioning...you have all the material which you need. You don’t think before you write. 
Writing is thinking because it’s the arrangement of words, and words are the only 
possible medium of thought.
--John Braine
The whole (creative) process is a mystery, in all the arts....You may have all the technique in the world, but you can’t strike that spark without some mysterious extra blessing—and none of us knows what that blessing really is. Not even the writers who talk the most can explain it at all.

Who knows where the ideas come from?

Who knows what happens in that shadowy part of the mind...where the creative imagination hides? Who knows even where the words come from, the right rhythm and meaning and music all at once? Those of us who make books out of the words and ideas have less of an answer than anyone. All we know is that marvelous feeling that comes, sometimes, like a break of sunshine in a cloud-grey sky, when through all the research and concentration and slog—suddenly you are writing, fluently and fast, with every sense at high pitch and yet in a state almost like trance. Suddenly, for a time, the door is open, the magic is working; a channel exists between the page and that shadowy cave in the mind.

--Susan Cooper

The ‘task’ of my novels is to give the reader a jolt which could lead to a recognition, to a judgment, a new attitude. Hence I try to make my prose as unobtrusive as possible, the language direct and easy, to facilitate the reader’s entry into the arena where the shock is to take place. The reader is to be moved from the waiting room into the examination room, so to speak. Once you are there, a shock: you are mortal, you’re vulnerable, you’re not protected—yet, you survive. It should be a joyful feeling, the awareness of being alive. At least you now have the knowledge—which is better than the assumption of strength—and the peace and promise of the ‘happy ending’—all, quite likely, not true.

--Jerzy Kosinski

You must never wait for inspiration before you write. It isn’t that inspiration doesn’t exist, but it comes only with writing. I’ve never met any writer who waited for inspiration.

--John Braine

None of us springs full blown from the head of Zeus. We’re all a part of the flow of a river of life. If you know the past you can fit in and flow along with the river.

That’s true of writing and painting. And not just the arts. A good stone mason has to know how earlier stone masons worked in order to be good at his craft.

--S. J. Perelman

In a short story you’re always writing toward an ending; you’re always closing a short story off. With a novel you’re right in the water and you swim with it.

--Elizabeth Cullinan
I've always thought of lyric writing as a craft rather than an art. It's so small...the average lyric has maybe 60 to 80 words, so each word counts for a great deal. Now, any novelist or short story writer takes as much care as he can with each individual word, but they are not as important as in a lyric, not even as important to a playwright because each lyric line is practically a scene in itself. If there are 56 lines in a song, this is like 12 scenes in a play, and if one word is off, it's like an entire section of the scene.

--Stephen Sondheim

I have never plotted anything on paper. I do my plotting in my head as I go along, and usually I do it wrong and have to do it all over again. I know there are writers who plot their stories in great detail before they begin to write them, but I am not one of that group. With me plots are not made; they grow. And if they refuse to grow, you throw the stuff away and start over again.

--Raymond Chandler

Writing is a pleasure, of course. At the inception of each novel or story, the first flash of the work in its entirety gives the writer a wonderful exhilaration. And it is in that burst of enthusiasm and hope that the writer sets to work. But from then on, that is precisely what it is: work. And somehow, through the grueling days and weeks and months, the writer must hold to that original conception. And it is the dim memory of that first idea which does carry the writer through—that and the occasional bursts of good writing and the pleasure of watching the people in his or her story spring to life. Finally, when the writer has finished and knows that every effort has been bent to the realization of that original ideal, the writer may be said to be truly happy.

--William C. Knott

To depict someone's appearance is not necessarily to describe the person. It is when exterior details are linked to his behavior and his inner life that we begin to know a man. And sometimes we do not need to have a very clear visual picture drawn for us at all, because it is what a person does that reveals him.

--James D. Houston

Try not to become so interested in fancy phrases and dramatic language that you begin to write...flowery passages so obviously artificial, insincere, and roundabout that they annoy the reader....

Euphemisms are part of flowery language. Today we call the undertaker a ‘mortician’... ‘a grief therapist.’ The former janitor or custodian is now ‘a disposal engineer!’

--William Folprecht
I can’t make characters out of nothing. I take someone, start writing about him, and then things get out of hand. The original character gets lost somewhere. You know the old math puzzle: take a number, add something to it, multiply it by something, subtract, divide by something else and so on. That’s what I do when I write fiction, although I often forget what the original number was.

--Lore Segal

I discovered a long time ago that writing of the small things of the day, the trivial matters of the heart, the inconsequential but near things of this living, was the only kind of creative work which I could accomplish with any sincerity. As a reporter, I was a flop, because I always came back laden not with facts about the case, but with a mind full of the little difficulties and amusements.

--E. B. White

No writer who’s any good at all would sit down and put a sheet of paper in the typewriter and start typing a play unless he knew what he was writing about. But at the same time, writing has got to be an act of discovery. Finding out things about what one is writing about.

--Edward Albee

I realize how very old-fashioned I am as a dramatist to be so concerned with classic form but this does not embarrass me, since I feel that the absence of form is nearly always, if not always, as dissatisfying to an audience as it is to me.

--Tennessee Williams

I type with my back to the window—always have. Can’t afford to be distracted all the time by looking out the window.

--Hal Borland

I find if I put plain paper in the machine, all ready for the final copy, I'll do it better than if I'm using yellow paper for a draft. You expect more of yourself then.

--Hal Borland

In a really good novel, the reader is seduced into having a dream—the novel’s story—more real than the room he’s reading in. The moment the writer accidentally makes the reader wake up—by some technique that too clearly calls attention to itself, or by some obvious lie (like oversimplified characterization), or by intrusive preachiness, the novel goes sour.

--John Gardner

If what I’m writing does not matter, deeply, to me, why should it matter to a reader?

--Michael J. Arlen
The novelist must become deeply involved in the lives of the characters of his or her novel. This involvement does not end during ‘off’ hours: his creations are inevitably with him twenty-four hours a day. They become an integral part of his or her life as long as the story is being written, and this involvement/identification begins well before the actual words are put onto paper and lasts well beyond the point at which the actual writing is finished.

--Howard Greenfield

Writing for children does not always, or even usually, require the author to take a child’s-eye view. The mark of the tenth-rate story for children is often a creaking attempt to get down to child level, like an uncle on hands and knees playing games on the carpet. It is ineffectual and undignified. Children, on the whole, prefer adults to behave as adults, and to talk to them as adults talk. Yet the story of family life, which can be weighed by the child against his own experience in a way that the fairy tale or adventure story cannot, does require of its author a lively sense of what it is like to be a child in a family.

--Eleanor Estes

Tell your story as succinctly as you can, then cut it by a third. If you think it cannot be done, take a novel you enjoyed and compare it page by page with the Condensed Books version. That will show you it can be done, and often to advantage.

--Frederick Forsyth

Storytelling is a matter of genetic hunger. All the world’s not a stage for sensitive natures mooning about intent. Things do happen. There are efforts made. There are successes and failures. The ultimate thing is what people do, not what they think they do.

--Robert Crichton

People who are not writers probably think that writers write to tell a story, or to deliver a message or something like that. Not true. The impulse is altogether different. It is an attempt to capture on paper those curious moments when the world seems suddenly transparent, when smoke hangs immobile in the sky, when some homely smell (like soap or toothpaste or even a sealed cedar closet full of mothballs) suddenly delivers a cascade of forgotten memories from childhood.

--Erica Jong

Any novelist gets a great deal of himself into all of his characters, although he usually starts by trying to describe something else and does get a great deal of other people mixed into these characters. Perhaps to say that he ends up describing himself would be an over-simplification. The blood and nerves of the characters have to come from the writer’s emotions and frustrations. My system has always been to try to do it objectively.

--John Dos Passes
The art of letters, though highly developed grammatically, is still in its infancy as a technical speech notation: for example, there are fifty ways of saying Yes, and five Hundred of saying No, but only one way of writing them down.

--George Bernard Shaw

To be not only a best-seller in America but to be really beloved, a novelist must assert that all American men are tall, handsome, rich, honest, and powerful at golf! that all country towns are filled with neighbors who do nothing from day to day save go about being kind to one another; that although American girls may be wild, they change always into perfect wives and mothers; and that, geographically, American is composed solely of New York, which is inhabited entirely by millionaires of the West, which keeps unchanged all the boisterous heroism of 1870; and of the South, where every one lives on a plantation perpetually glossy with moonlight and scented with magnolias.

--Sinclair Lewis

Man will not merely endure, he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he, alone among creatures, has an inexhaustible voice but because he has a soul, a spirit, capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance. The poet’s, the writer’s duty is to write about these things.

--William Faulkner

The genuine creator creates something that has a life of its own, something that can exist and function without him....With the noncreative it is the other way around: in whatever they do, they arrange things so that they themselves become indispensable.

--Eric Hoffer

Everyone’s got to be different. You can’t copy anybody and end up with anything. If you copy, it means you’re working without any real feeling. And without feeling, whatever you do amounts to nothing.

--Billie Holiday

In the creative state a man is taken out of himself. He lets down as it were a bucket into his subconscious, and draws up something which is normally beyond his reach. He mixes this thing with his normal experiences, and out of this mixture he makes a work of art.

--E. M. Forster

Talent is that which is in a man’s power. Genius is that in whose power a man is.

--James Russell Lowell
I want to write, but more than that, I want to bring out all kinds of things that lie buried deep in my heart.

--Anne Frank

There is no iron that can enter the human heart with such stupefying effect as a period, placed at the right moment.

--Isaac Babel

The imagination must be fed constantly by external nature....The most imaginative men always study the hardest, and are the most thirsty for new knowledge.

--John Ruskin

Everyone is a thief in his own craft.

--Dutch Proverb

There is at bottom only one problem in the world and this is its name. How does one break through? How does one get into the open? How does one burst the cocoon and become a butterfly?

--Thomas Mann

I hope you take things easy. I failed because I worked too hard. I let myself be driven by that foul witch, an uneasy conscience, which is only another name for Fear—who is the demon of all life, and the great source of almost all its crimes and criminals. Since I came to New York I have taken things easily, never worked at anything a moment longer than I was interested in it that is the secret—never interest yourself in anything you don’t care about. This is not the rule for conduct, but it’s the rule for arts, and for artists in their work.

--J. B. Yeats

Joy is but the sign that creative emotion is fulfilling its purpose.

--Charles Du Bos

Editors are unaccountable in their judgments.

--George E. Woodberry

On the whole, I have found editors friendly and pleasant, but unpredictable and uncertain and occasionally embarrassing in their desperation. So seldom do they get what they think they want that they tend to become incoherent In their insistent repetition of their needs. A writer does well to listen to them, but not too often, and not for too long.

--Jerome Weidman
The young artist has to observe in his own way and keep it an absolute secret from those around him until he can work it into his own books.

--Sir Robert Sitwell

An editor would classify ‘What we want is humor’ as a piece of cooperation on his part. It seems to him a perfect division of labor. After all, nothing remains for the author to do except to write.

--Heywood Broun

All over-expression, whether by journalists, poetic novelists, or clergymen, is bad for the language, bad for the mind; and by over-expression I mean the use of words running beyond the sincere feeling of writer or speaker or beyond what the event will sanely carry.

--John Galsworthy

Only a person with a Best Seller mind can write Best Sellers; and only someone with a mind like Shelley’s can write Prometheus Unbound. The deliberate forger has little chance with his contemporaries and none at all with posterity.

--Aldous Huxley

The artistic sense of perfection in work is another much-to-be-desired quality to be cultivated. No matter how trifling the matter on hand, do it with a feeling that it demands the best that is in you, and when done look it over with a critical eye, not sparing a strict judgment of yourself.

--Sir William Osler

I’m like a beachcomber walking along the shore of invention, picking up things and wondering what kinds of structures they could make. I want it to be an interesting structure, not a ramshackle, beachy thing. The imagination is like the sea, full of things you can’t see but can possibly harvest and use.

--Peter Dickinson

I believe the crucial thing for a writer is the ability to make up coherent worlds.

--Peter Dickinson

The strokes that are needed to define a three hundred page novel are much broader than those required to create a solid piece of art in ten to twelve pages. The strokes in the short story must be more delicate—there are fewer bristles in the brush. A novel requires skill with a house-siding brush while the short story is more like a water color, in which each stroke must be accomplished skillfully and definitively in a small amount of time.

--Shannon Ravenel
First to see, then to cause others to see exactly what the writer saw—that is the object of all writing.  
--Riley Hughes

There are only two ways to learn to write—read, write.  
--Mark Medoff

If you don’t have to write, by all means go into other work; the frustration and rejection are not worth enduring unless one is unequivocally committed.  
--Mark Medoff

I have very, very little to start with. The way I start is maybe with a phrase that just rings in my ear, maybe a sort of idiotic phrase that stays with me, or maybe a very simple image, or a sort of feeling, and maybe in the process of writing, the phrase or the image or the feeling disappears, or gives way, and you’re not left at the end with the thing that instigated it.  
--Deborah Eisenberg

Most writing consists of siphoning out useless pre-story matter, cutting and cutting and cutting, what seems to be endless rewriting, and what is entailed in all that is patience, and waiting, and false starts and dead ends, and really, in a way, nerve.  
--Deborah Eisenberg

I cannot write without the controlling rhythm of poetry. I’ve tried writing novels and they’re terrible. There’s no movement in them.  
--Louis Simpson

A gift for revision may be a developmental stage that comes along somewhat later, in one’s mid-20’s, say; most people may not be particularly good at it, or even interested in it, until then.  
--Nora Ephron

Word processors make it possible for a writer to change the sentences that clearly need changing without having to retype the rest, but I believe that you can’t always tell whether a sentence needs work until it rises up in revolt against your fingers as you retype it.  
--Nora Ephron

As long as you’re revising, the project isn’t dead. And by the same token, neither are you.  
--Nora Ephron

Clarity is the politeness of the men of letters.  
--Jules Renard
I have never written for any other reason than to earn a living. I am a public enter-
tainer who sees his first duty as the need to entertain himself.

--Richard Condon

A novelist must arouse the emotion of a reader—whether it’s laughter or tears or
tension....If I can scare my reader and keep him turning the pages, I have succeeded
in my craft.

--Stephen King

Good biographers combine the arts of the novelist, the detective work of the histori-
an, and the insights of the psychologist.

--Jean Strouse

If there is one thing better than the thrill of looking forward, it is the exhilaration
that follows the finishing of a long and exacting piece of work.

--Alec Waugh

I am not sure that there ought not to be a second version of every essay, in which
the writer could say some of the things he intended to say when he sat down to
write the first one.

--Robert Lynd

The problem in art is a problem of translation. Bad authors are those who write
with reference to an inner context which the reader cannot know.

--Albert Camus

He is the true enchanter, whose spell operates, not upon the senses, but upon the
imagination and the heart.

--Washington Irving

What is conceived well is expressed clearly,
And the words to say it with arrive with ease.

--Nicolas Boileau

Every man speaks and writes with intent to be understood; and it can seldom hap-
pen but he that understands himself might convey his notions to another, if, content
to be understood, he did not seek to be admired.

--Samuel Johnson

Where two people are writing the same book, each believes he gets all the worries
and only half the royalties.

--Agatha Christie
We all draw a little and compose a little, and none of us have any idea of time or money.

--Charles Dickens

Every great writer is a writer of history, let him treat on almost any subject he may.

--W. S. Landor

Imagination is the eye of the soul.

--Joubert

We are, in truth, more than half what we are by imitation. The great point is to choose good models and to study them with care.

--Lord Chesterfield

Imitation is suicide.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

There is a difference between imitating a good man and counterfeiting him.

--Benjamin Franklin

No man was ever great by imitation.

--Samuel Johnson

I have never met an author who admitted that people did not buy his book because it was dull.

--W. Somerset Maugham

Fiction is not a dream. Nor is it guess work. It is imagining based on facts, and the facts must be accurate or the work of imagining will not stand up.

--Margaret Culkin Banning

Fiction is to the grown man what play is to the child; it is there that he changes the atmosphere and tenor of his life.

--Robert Louis Stevenson

Plots are no more exhausted than men are. Every man is a new creation, and combinations are simply endless.

--Charles Dudley Warner
Inventors and men of genius have almost always been regarded as fools at the beginning (and very often at the end) of their careers.  

--Dostoevsky

Let no one say that I have said nothing new; the arrangement of the subject is new.  

—Blaise Pascal

Divine fires do not blaze each day, but an artist functions in their afterglow hoping for their recurrence.  

--Ned Rorem

Just as appetite comes by eating, so work brings inspiration, if inspiration is not discernible at the beginning.  

--Igor Stravinsky

The intellectuals’ chief cause of anguish are one another’s works.  

--Jacques Barzun

The land of literature is a fairy land to those who view it at a distance, but, like all other landscapes, the charm fades on a nearer approach, and the thorns and briars become visible.  

--Washington Irving

Beware of the man of one book.  

--St. Thomas Aquinas

Nothing is said now that has not been said before.  

--Terence

If we steal thoughts from the moderns, it will by cried down as plagiarism; if from the ancients, it will be cried up as erudition.  

--Charles Caleb Colton

Immature artists imitate. Mature artists steal.  

--Lionel Trilling

The job of the novelist and the playwright is to entertain... and to entertain and to convince you need more than clarity. You need eloquence. You need flair. You need the whole gamut of words and sentence structures—the involved and the complex as well as the bare bones simple.  

--Melvin J. Grayson
He is great who is what he is from nature and who never reminds us of others.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Be brave enough to live life creatively. The creative is the place where no one else has ever been. You have to leave the city of your comfort and go into the wilderness of your intuition. You can’t get there by bus, only by hard work and risk and by not quite knowing what you’re doing. What you’ll discover will be wonderful. What you’ll discover will be yourself.

--Alan Alda

If you would create something, you must be something.

--Goethe

The way you define yourself as a writer is that you write every time you have a free minute. If you didn’t behave that way you would never do anything.

--John Irving

A writer’s life is his crucible. First you draw on your own experience. When you have drained your own experience or have stopped experiencing in quantity, you must draw on the experience of others through observation and research. Research is vital.

--Paddy Chayefsky

If it works, copy it.

--Tony Schwartz

I would recommend against the adoption of any one style of prose, regardless of what that style might be. We must resist the blandishments of those who argue for the light touch or humor or humility or totally disarming candor. Each style has its place and time but none is right for every place and time. William Faulkner wrote his World War I fiction in staccato sentences. Later, when he was writing the Yoknapatawpha County books, he employed a more languorous style more in keeping with that setting.

--Melvin J. Grayson

It is not strange that remembered ideas should often take advantage of the crowd of thoughts and smuggle themselves in as original. Honest thinkers are always stealing unconsciously from each other. Our minds are full of waifs and estrays which we think our own. Innocent plagiarism turns up everywhere.

--Oliver Wendell Holmes
Works of imagination should be written in very plain language; the more purely imaginative they are the more necessary it is to be plain.

--Samuel Taylor Coleridge

When Shakespeare is charged with debts to his authors, Lander replies, ‘Yet he was more original than his originals. He breathed upon dead bodies and brought them into life.’

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Take the whole range of imaginative literature, and we are all wholesale borrowers. In every matter that relates to invention, to use, or beauty or form, we are borrowers.

--Wendell Phillips

The only reward to be expected for the cultivation of literature is contempt if one fails and hatred if one succeeds.

--Voltaire

The life of writing men has always been...a bitter business. It is notoriously accompanied, for those who write well, by poverty and contempt; or by fatuity and wealth for those who write ill.

--Hilaire Belloc

Long sentences in a short composition are like large rooms in a little house.

--Shenstone

If with water you fill up your glasses,
    You’ll never write anything wise;
For wine is horse of Parnassus,
    Which hurries a bard to the skies.

—Thomas Moore

It is one thing to purloin finely-tempered steel, and another to take a pound of literary old iron, and convert it in the furnace of one’s mind into a hundred watch-springs, worth each a thousand times as much as the iron. When genius borrows, it borrows grandly, giving to the borrowed matter, a life and beauty it lacked before.

--Unknown

Clear writers, like clear fountains, do not seem so deep as they are; the turbid look the most profound.

--Walter Savage Landor
There’s no wound deeper than a pen can give,  
It makes men living dead, and dead men live.  

--John Taylor

No one can write decently who is distrustful of the reader’s intelligence, or whose  
attitude is patronizing.

—E. B. White

It is a fact that few novelists enjoy the creative labour, though most enjoy thinking  
about the creative labour.

--Arnold Bennett

Writing is an adventure. To begin with, it is a toy and an amusement. Then it be-  
comes a mistress, then it becomes a master, then it becomes a tyrant. The last  
phase is that just as you are about to be reconciled to your servitude, you kill the  
monster and fling him to the public.

--Winston Churchill

Literature is an occupation in which you have to keep proving your talent to people  
who have none.

--Jules Renard

You must remember that a writer is a simple-minded person to begin with and go  
on that basis. He’s not a great mind, he’s not a great thinker, he’s not a great  
philosopher, he’s a storyteller.

--Erskine Caldwell

Often while reading a book one feels that the author would have preferred to paint  
rather than write; one can sense the pleasure he derives from describing a land-  
scape or a person, as if he were painting what he is saying, because deep in his  
heart he would have preferred to use brushes and colors.

--Pablo Picasso

The man of letters loves not only to be read but to be seen. Happy to be by himself,  
he would be happier still if people knew that he was happy to be by himself, work-  
ing in solitude at night under his lamp.

--Remy de Gourmont

Mostly we authors must repeat ourselves—that’s the truth. We have two or three  
great moving experiences in our lives—experiences so great and moving that it  
doesn’t seem at the time that anyone else has been caught up and pounded and daz-  
zled and astonished and beaten and broken and rescued and illuminated and re-  
warded and humbled in just that way ever before.

--F. Scott Fitzgerald
I never could understand how two men can write a book together; to me that’s like three people getting together to have a baby.

—Evelyn Waugh

I never desire to converse with a man who has written more than he has read.

--Samuel Johnson

A writer’s problem does not change. He himself changes and the world he lives in changes, but his problem remains the same. It is always how to write truly and, having found out what is true, to project it in such a way that it becomes a part of the experience of the person who reads it.

--Ernest Hemingway

There is only one trait that marks the writer. He is always watching. It’s a kind of trick of the mind and he is born with it.

--Morley Callaghan

If I didn’t know the ending of a story, I wouldn’t begin. I always write my last line, my last paragraphs, my last page first.

--Katherine Anne Porter

Writing every book is like a purge; at the end of it one is empty...like a dry shell on the beach, waiting for the tide to come in again.

--Daphne du Maurier

 Literary success of any enduring kind is made by refusing to do what publishers want, by refusing to write what the public wants, by refusing to accept any popular standard, by refusing to write anything to order.

--Lafcadio Hearn

Great editors do not discover nor produce great authors; great authors create and produce great publishers.

--John Farrar

I went for years not finishing anything. Because, of course, when you finish something you can be judged....I had poems which were rewritten so many times I suspect it was just a way of avoiding sending them out.

--Erica Jong

I have not wasted my life trifling with literary fools in taverns as Jonson did then he should have been shaking England with the thunder of his spirit.

--George Bernard Shaw
For a dyed-in-the-wool author nothing is as dead as a book once it is written....She is rather like a cat whose kittens have grown-up. While they were a-growing she was passionately interested in them but now they seem hardly to belong to her—and probably she is involved with another batch of kittens as I am involved with other writing.

--Rumer Godden

I am a born novelist, for the things I imagine are more vital and vivid to me than the things I remember.

--Ellen Glasgow

Anyone can be an author; the business is to collect money and fame from this state of being.

—A. A. Milne

If writers were good businessmen, they’d have too much sense to be writers.

--Irvin S. Cobb

A man really writes for an audience of about ten persons. Of course, if others like it, that is clear gain. But if those ten are satisfied, he is content.

--Alfred North Whitehead

My purpose is to entertain myself first and other people secondly.

--John D. MacDonald

Anything that is written to please the Author is worthless.

--Blaise Pascal

When I write, I aim in my mind not toward New York but toward a vague spot a little east of Kansas. I think of the books on library shelves, without their jackets, years old, and a countryish teen-aged boy finding them, and having them speak to him. The reviews, the stacks in Brentano’s, are just hurdles to get over, to place the books on that shelf.

--John Updike

Writing is one of the few professions left where you take all the responsibility for what you do. It’s really dangerous and ultimately destroys you as a writer if you start thinking about responses to your work or what your audience needs.

--Erica Jong

Writing is not a profession but a vocation of unhappiness.

--Georges Simenon
In a very real sense, the writer writes in order to teach himself, to understand himself, to satisfy himself; the publishing of his ideas, though it brings gratifications, is a curious anticlimax.

--Alfred Kazin

Any writer overwhelmingly honest about pleasing himself is almost sure to please others.

--Marianne Moore

In stating as fully as I could how things really were, it was often very difficult and I wrote awkwardly and the awkwardness is what they called my style. All mistakes and awkwardness are easy to see, and they called it style.

--Ernest Hemingway

I have rewritten—often several times—every word I have ever published. My pencils outlast their erasures.

--Vladimir Nabokov

To write simply is as difficult as to be good.

--W. Somerset Maugham

The sinister thing about writing is that it starts off seeming so easy and ends up being so hard....As an editor over many years, I met hundreds of writers, and I don’t think I ever met one for whom writing wasn’t a misery. But writing does not cause misery, it is born of misery.

--L. Rust Hills

Most writers are in a state of gloom a good deal of the time; they need perpetual reassurance.

--John Hall Wheelock

I am convinced that all writers are optimists whether they concede the point or not....How otherwise could any human being sit down to a pile of blank sheets and decide to write, say two hundred thousand words on a given theme?

--Thomas Costain

Whatever our theme in writing, it is old and tried. Whatever our place, it has been visited by the stranger, it will never be new again. It is only the vision that can be new; but that is enough.

--Eudora Welty
Writers, if they are worthy of that jealous designation, do not write for other writers. They write to give reality to experience.

--Achibald Macleish

I put a piece of paper under my pillow, and when I could not sleep I wrote in the dark.

--Henry David Thoreau

This is what I find most encouraging about the writing trades: They allow mediocre people who are patient and industrious to revise their stupidity, to edit themselves into something like intelligence. They also allow lunatics to seem saner than sane.

--Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.

A part of every successful writer is, and must be, amoral. Detached. Unfeeling. As nonjudgmental as a tape recorder or camera. It is this capacity to stare at pain or ugliness without flinching, at beauty without swooning, at flattery and truth without succumbing to the lure of either, which provides the mortar, the observable details, to strengthen a story and make it a cohesive unit. This capacity I call the writer’s eye.

--Randall Silvis

The writer’s eye is not merely one sense, but every power of observation the writer possessed. It not only sees, but also smells, tastes, feels and hears. It also senses which details will paint the brightest picture, which will hint at an unseen quality, which will allow the reader to see beneath the surface of a character to the ice and fire of emotion within.

--Randall Silvis

I have learned that when I am willing to give myself away in a book, readers will respond by giving themselves away as well, and the book that I labored over so long becomes in our mutual giving something far richer and more powerful than I could have ever imagined.

--Katherine Paterson

This most of all: ask yourself in the most silent hour of your night: must I write? Dig into yourself for a deep answer. If your answer is yes, build your life around that necessity.

--Rainer Maria Rilke

I find writing very hard work. I think of every word that goes down. People write to say they loved a book so well they read it in three hours. I say, ‘Good God, all those months of work consumed in three hours!’ It’s a disappointment it goes so quickly.

--Dick Francis
Some people are natural writers, it all goes straight onto the paper. I'm not. My books may read as if they're written easily, and I hope they do, but in fact it’s nothing for me to rewrite something 15 or 16 times.

--Charles Simmons

Playwriting is an irrational act. A curious trade in which your days are spent making up things that no one ever said to be spoken by people who don’t exist for an audience that may not come. The most personal thoughts, arrived at in terrible privacy, are interpreted by strangers for a group of other strangers.

--Herb Gardner

Keep the action moving so fast that the reader never has time to stop and think, ‘This is impossible.’

--Alistair MacLean

I write to entertain and amuse. It’s very relaxing. It’s like building the Eiffel Tower from matchsticks. There’s nothing else you can do in the whole world but that. It takes your mind off everything else you’re in the middle of doing.

--Andrew P. O’Rourke

Writing 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

Wearing down seven #2 pencils is a good day’s work.

--Ernest Hemingway

Once in a great while lightning strikes, and occasionally it strikes early in the writer’s life. Sometimes it comes later, after years of work. And sometimes, most often, it never happens at all....But it will never, never happen to those who don’t work hard at it and who don’t consider the act of writing as very nearly the most important thing in their lives, right up there next to breath, and food, and shelter, and love, and God.

--Raymond Carver

With every long thing I write, there still comes a point where I have this horrible hollow feeling. I think, is this interesting to anyone but me? But then I figure, well, as long as it’s burningly interesting to me, I may be on the right track. When it starts boring me, that’s when to worry.

--Gail Godwin
A novelist’s job is to make fables from his own life. His tools are his wit, his eyes and ears, and the marks upon his own soul.  

---John le Carre

Nothing has been said that has not already been said.  

---Terence

The role of the writer is not to say what we can all say, but what we are unable to say.  

---Anaïs Nin

A writer’s mind seems to be situated partly in the solar plexus and partly in the head.  

---Ethel Wilson

The true function of a writer is to produce a masterpiece and...no other task is of any consequence.  

---Cyril Connolly

There is no way of being a creative writer in America without being a loser.  

---Nelson Algren

Our society, like decadent Rome, has turned into an amusement society, with writers chief among the court jesters—not so much above the clatter as part of it.  

---Saul Bellow

Many people who want to be writers don’t really want to be writers. They want to have been writers. They wish they had a book in print.  

---James Michener

Good writers are monotonous, like good composers. Their truth is self-repeating...They keep trying to perfect their understanding of the one problem they were born to understand.  

---Alberto Moravia

What I like in a good author is not what he says, but what he whispers.  

---Logan Pearsall Smith

A great writer creates a world of his own and his readers are proud to live in it. A lesser writer may entice them in for a moment, but soon he will watch them filing out.  

---Cyril Connolly
If, as Dr. Johnson said, a man who is not married is only half a man, so a man who is very much married is only half a writer.

--Cyril Connolly

A writer has nothing to say after the age of forty; if he is clever he knows how to hide it.

--Georges Simenon

We are all apprentices in a craft where no one ever becomes a master.

--Ernest Hemingway

Writing is a struggle against silence.

--Carlos Fuentes

Writing is making sense of life.

--Nadine Gordimer

Writing is one of the few professions left where you take all the responsibility for what you do. It’s really dangerous and ultimately destroys you as a writer if you start thinking about responses to your work or what your audience needs.

--Erica Jong

The great art of writing is the art of making people real to themselves with words.

--Logan Pearsall Smith

For me, writing is the only thing that passes the three tests of metier: (1) when I’m doing it, I don’t feel that I should be doing something else instead; (2) it produces a sense of accomplishment and, once in a while, pride; and (3) it’s frightening.

--Gloria Steinem

All writing is communication; creative writing is communication through revelation—it is the self escaping into the open. No writer long remains incognito.

--E. B. White

Incessant scribbling is death to thought.

--Thomas Carlyle

Writers don’t have lifestyles. They sit in little rooms and write.

--Norman Mailer

Writers, if they are worthy of that jealous designation, do not write for other writers. They write to give reality to experience.

--Archibald MacLeish
Why had I become a writer in the first place? Because I wasn’t fit for society; I
didn’t fit into the system.  
--Brian Aldiss

I write books to find out about things.  
--Rebecca West

I started writing because of a terribly feeling of powerlessness: I felt I was drifting
and obscure, and I rebelled against that. I didn’t see what I could do to change my
condition. I wanted to control rather than be controlled, to ordain rather than be or-
dained, and to relegate rather than be relegated.  
--Anita Bruckner

There are many reasons why novelists write, but they all have one thing in com-
mon: a need to create an alternative world.  
--John Fowles

I write in order to attain that feeling of tension relieved and function achieved
which a cow enjoys on giving milk.  
--H. L. Mencken

I have always been in a condition in which I cannot not write.  
--Barbara Tuchman

I shall live badly if I do not write, and I shall write badly if I do not live.  
--Françoise Sagan

The writer’s intention hasn’t anything to do with what he achieves. The intent to
earn money or the intent to be famous or the intent to be great doesn’t matter in the
end. Just what comes out.  
--Lillian Hellman

What I am trying to achieve is a voice sitting by a fireplace telling you a story on a
winter’s evening.  
--Truman Capote

A good writer always works at the impossible.  
--John Steinbeck

I am trying—in a good cause—to crowd people out of their own minds and occupy
their space. I want them to stop being themselves for the moment, I want them to
stop thinking, and I want to occupy their heads. I want to use language and I want
the language to reverberate and I want to use the white spaces between the lines.  
--Robert Stone
It is the function of art to renew our perception. What we are familiar with we cease to see. The writer shakes up the familiar scene, and as if by magic, we see a new meaning in it.

--Anaïs Nin

Easy reading is damned hard writing.

--Nathaniel Hawthorne

In literature the ambition of a novice is to acquire the literary language; the struggle of the adept is to get rid of it.

--George Bernard Shaw

A novelist is the only writer who can make a name without a style, which is only one more reason for not bothering with the novel.

--Robert Frost

The novelist is, above all, the historian of conscience.

--Frederic Raphael

The complete novelist would come into the world with a catalog of qualities something like this. He would own the concentration of a Trappist monk, the organizational ability of a Prussian field marshal, the insight into human relations of a Viennese psychiatrist, the discipline of a man who prints the Lord's prayer on the head of a pin, the exquisite sense of timing of an Olympic gymnast, and by the way, a natural instinct and flair for exceptional use of language.

--Leon Uris

A writer needs three things, experience, observation and imagination, any two of which, at times any one of which, can supply the lack of the others.

--William Faulkner

Real seriousness in regard to writing is one of the two absolute necessities. The other, unfortunately, is talent.

--Ernest Hemingway

An absolutely necessary part of a writer's equipment, almost as necessary as talent, is the ability to stand up under punishment, both the punishment the world hands out and the punishment he inflicts upon himself.

--Irwin Shaw
The essential condition to become a creator in the artistic domain, particularly in the novel, is to be able to enter into the skin of people.

--Georges Simenon

All you need is a room without any particular interruptions.

--John Dos Passos

I need noise and interruptions and irritation: irritation and discomfort are a great starter. The loneliness of doing it any other way would kill me.

--Anita Brookner

The actual process of writing...demands complete, noiseless privacy, without even music; a baby howling two blocks away will drive me nuts.

--William Styron

I like a room with a view, preferably a long view. I dislike looking out on gardens. I prefer looking at the sea, or ships, or anything which has a vista to it.

--Norman Mailer

The ideal view for daily writing, hour on hour, is the blank brick wall of a cold-storage warehouse. Failing this, a stretch of sky will do, cloudless if possible.

--Edna Ferber

Writing a novel, especially a long novel, is an immense act of ego. You're not only asking people to pursue your vision, you're also asking them to pay to do so—and to applaud.

--William Gaddis

There is no substitute for talent. Industry and all the virtues are of no avail.

--Aldous Huxley

Talent is a matter of quantity: talent doesn't write one page, it writes three hundred.

--Jules Renard

A writer shouldn't be engaged with other writers, or with people who make books, or even with people who read them. The farther away you get from the literary traffic, the closer you are to sources. I mean, a writer doesn't really live, he observes.

--Nelson Algren

Never write about a place until you're away from it, because it gives you perspective. Immediately after you've seen something you can give a photographic description of it and make it accurate. That's good practices but it isn't creative writing.

--Ernest Hemingway
Writing is a wholetime job: no professional writer can afford only to write when he feels like it.

--W. Somerset Maugham

You can’t want to be a writer, you have to be one.

--Paul Theroux

A writer’s material is what he cares about.

--John Gardner

Every writer has certain subjects that they write about again and again, and most people's books are just variations on certain themes.

--Christopher Isherwood

I think one writes and rewrites the same book. I lead a character from book to book, I continue along with the same ideas. Only the angle of vision, the method, the lighting, change.

--Truman Capote

Mostly, we authors must repeat ourselves—that’s the truth. We have two or three great moving experiences in our lives—experiences so great and moving that it doesn’t seem at the time that anyone else has been caught up and pounded and dazzled and astonished and beaten and broken and rescued and illuminated and rewarded and humbled in just that way ever before.

—F. Scott Fitzgerald

In all my writing I tell the story of my life, over and over again.

--Isaac Bashevis Singer

There are no dull subjects. There are only dull writers.

--H. L. Mencken

Fundamentally, all writing is about the same thing: it’s about dying, about the brief flicker of time we have here, and the frustrations that it creates.

--Mordecai Richler

You can write about anything, and if you write well enough, even the reader with no intrinsic interest in the subject will become involved.

--Tracy Kidder
I believe more in the scissors than I do in the pencil.  --Truman Capote

All I needed was a steady table and a typewriter...a marble-topped bedroom washstand table made a good place; the dining-room table between meals was also suitable.

--Agatha Christie

My schedule is flexible, but I am rather particular about my instruments: lined Bristol cards and well sharpened, not too hard, pencils capped with erasers.

--Vladimir Nabokov

Pencils must be round. A hexagonal pencil cuts my fingers after a long day.

--John Steinbeck

Like a lot of what happens in novels, inspiration is a sort of spontaneous combustion—the oily rags of the head and heart.

--Stanley Elkin

I’ve always disliked words like; inspiration. Writing is probably like a scientist thinking about some scientific problem, or an engineer about an engineering problem.

--Doris Lessing

When I sit at my table to write, I never know what it’s going to be till 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

I don’t see how anybody starts a novel without knowing how it’s going to end. I usually make detailed outlines: how many chapters it will be and so forth.

--John Barth

The last thing we decide in writing a book is what to put first.

--Blaise Pascal

About the most originality that any writer can hope to achieve honestly is to steal with good judgment.

--Josh Billings

A sequel is an admission that you’ve been reduced to imitating yourself.

--Don Marquis
Truth and reason are common to all and no more belong to him that spoke them heretofore than unto him that shall speak them hereafter.

--Montaigne

I do borrow from other writers, shamelessly! I can only say in my defense, like the woman brought before the judge on a charge of kleptomaniac, ‘I do steal; but, Your Honor, only from the very best stores.’

--Thornton Wilder

Thinking is the activity I love best, and writing to me is simply thinking through my fingers. I can write up to 18 hours a day. Typing 90 words a minute, I’ve done better than 50 pages a day. Nothing interferes with my concentration. You could put on an orgy in my office and I wouldn’t look up—well, maybe once.

--Isaac Asimov

You write by sitting down and writing. There’s no particular time or place—you suit yourself, your nature. How one works, assuming he’s disciplined, doesn’t matter.

--Bernard Malamud

I never quite know when I’m not writing. Sometimes my wife comes up to me at a party and says, ‘Dammit, Thurber, stop writing.’ She usually catches me in the middle of a paragraph.

--James Thurber

When I stop (working), the rest of the day is posthumous. I’m only really alive when I’m working.

--Tennessee Williams

Of course I base my characters partly on the people I know—one can’t escape it—but fictional characters are oversimplified; they’re much less complex than the people one knows.

--Aldous Huxley

As much as I can give of myself I give of myself. There’s no reason why not. And when I have to hide something, I let the character speak.

--Isaac Bashevis Singer

That trite little whimsy about characters getting out of hand; it is as old as the quills. My characters are galley slaves.

--Vladimir Nabokov

One doesn’t consider style, because style is.

--Robert Stone
Words are an albatross to a writer—heavy, hopeless, fateful things. One writes to make words mean something new.

--Joy Williams

For your born writer, nothing is so healing as the realization that he has come upon the right word.

--Catherine Drinker Bowen

A writer lives in awe of words for they can be cruel or kind, and they can change their meanings right in front of you. They pick up flavors and odors like butter in a refrigerator.

--John Steinbeck

Style is effectiveness of assertion.

--George Bernard Shaw

Style is everything and nothing. It is not that, as is commonly supposed, you get your content and soup it up with style; style is absolutely embedded in the way you perceive.

--Martin Amis

There is such an animal as a nonstylist, only they’re not writers—they’re typists.

--Truman Capote

Style has no fixed laws; it is changed by the usage of the people, never the same for any length of time.

--Seneca

As for style of writing, if one has anything to say, it drops from him simply and directly, as a stone falls to the ground.

--Henry David Thoreau

You don’t know what it is to stay a whole day with your head in your hands trying to squeeze your unfortunate brain so as to find a word...Ah! I certainly know the agonies of style.

--Gustave Flaubert

An author arrives at a good style when his language performs what is required of it without shyness.

--Cyril Connolly
Clear prose indicates the absence of thought.  
--Marshall McLuhan

Only presidents, editors and people with tapeworm have the right to use the editorial ‘we.’
--Mark Twain

I think of myself as a stylist, and stylists can become notoriously obsessed with the placing of a comma, the weight of a semicolon.
--Truman Capote

A story can be wrecked by a faulty rhythm in a sentence—especially if it occurs toward the end—or a mistake in paragraphing, even punctuation.
--Truman Capote

I am well aware that an addiction to silk underwear does not necessarily imply that one’s feet are dirty. None the less, style, like sheer silk, too often hides eczema.
--Albert Camus

Loneliness is your companion for life. If you don’t want to be lonely, you get into TV.
--William Styron

I find writing very nervous work. I’m always in a dither when starting a novel—that’s the worst time. It’s like going to the dentist, because you make a kind of appointment with yourself.
--Kingsley Amis

Writing is the diametric opposite of having fun. All of life, as far as I’m concerned, is an excuse not to write. I just write when fear overtakes me. It causes paralytic terror. It’s really scary just getting to the desk—we’re talking now five hours. My mouth gets dry, my heart beats fast. I react psychologically the way other people react when the plane loses an engine.
--Fran Lebowitz

When I feel difficulty coming on, I switch to another book I’m writing. When I get back to the problem, my unconscious has solved it.
--Isaac Asimov

Writers are notorious for using any reason to keep from working: over-researching, retyping, going to meetings, waxing the floors—anything.
--Gloria Steinem

Three hours a day will produce as much as a man ought to write.
--Anthony Trollope
I’m a commercial writer, not an ‘author.’ Margaret Mitchell was an author. She wrote one book.

--Mickey Spillane

If you have one strong idea, you can’t help repeating it and embroidering it. Sometimes I think that authors should write one book and then be put in a gas chamber.

--John P. Marquand

The pattern of the thing precedes the thing. I fill in the gaps of the crossword at any spot I happen to choose. These bits I write on index cards until the novel is done.

--Vladimir Nabokov

I work four hours a day and then usually early in the evening I read over what I’ve written during the day and I do a lot of changing and shifting around. See, I write in longhand and I do two versions of whatever I’m doing. I write first on yellow paper and then I write on white paper and then when I finally have it more or less settled the way I want, then I type it. When I’m typing it, that’s when I do my final rewrite. I almost never change a word after that.

--Truman Capote

I rise at first light and I start by rereading and editing everything I have written to the point I left off. That way I go through a book I’m writing several hundred times. Most writers slough off the toughest but most important part of their trade—editing their stuff, honing it and honing it until it gets an edge like a bullfighter’s killing sword. One time my son Patrick brought me a story and asked me to edit it for him. I went over it carefully and changed one word. ‘But, Papa,’ he said, ‘you’ve only changed one word.’ I said: ‘If it’s the right word, that’s a lot.’

--Ernest Hemingway

I revise the manuscript till I can’t read it any longer, then I get somebody to type it. Then I revise the typing. Then it’s retyped again. Then there’s a third typing, which is the final one. Nothing should then remain that offends the eye.

--Robert Graves

Some authors type their works, but I cannot do that. Writing is tied up with the hand, almost with a special nerve.

--Graham Greene

I always work on two things at a time. When one goes flat, I run to the other.

--Stephen Birmingham
I write slowly because I write badly. I have to rewrite everything many, many times just to achieve mediocrity.

--William Gass

In a very real sense, the writer writes in order to teach himself, to understand himself, to satisfy himself; the publishing of his ideas, though it brings gratifications, is a curious anticlimax.

--Alfred Kazin

The rules seem to be these: if you have written a successful novel, everyone invites you to write short stories. If you have written some good short stories, everyone wants you to write a novel. But nobody wants anything until you have already proved yourself by being published somewhere else.

--James Michener

If you do not write for publication, there is little point in writing at all.

--George Bernard Shaw

Great editors do not discover nor produce great authors; great authors create and produce great publishers.

--John Farrar

I don’t see how you can write anything of value if you don’t offend someone.

--Marvin Harris

Poetry has never brought me in enough money to buy shoestrings.

--William Wordsworth

The dubious privilege of a freelance writer is he’s given the freedom to starve anywhere.

--S. J. Perelman

I’ve only spent about ten per cent of my energies on writing. The other ninety per cent went to keeping my head above water.

--Katherine Anne Porter

Even if I could not earn a penny from my writing, I would earn my livelihood at something else and continue to write at night.

--Irving Wallace
Money to a writer is time to write. --Frank Herbert

Writing...is practically the only activity a person can do that is not competitive. --Paul Theroux

The best ideas are common property. --Lucius Annaeus Seneca

Why use a tub of words to express a spoonful of thought? --Unknown

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

The readers and the hearers like my books, But yet some writers cannot them digest; But what care I? for when I make a feast I would my guests should praise it, not the cooks. --Sir John Harington

We can say nothing but what hath been said. Our poets steal from Homer....Our story-dressers do as much; he that comes last is commonly best. --Robert Burton

Authors have established it as a kind of rule, that a man ought to be dull sometimes; as the most severe reader makes allowances for many rests and nodding places in a voluminous writer. --Joseph Addison

True ease in writing comes from art, not chance, As those move easiest who have learned to dance. --Alexander Pope

Next o’er his books his eyes begin to roll, In pleasing memory of all he stole. --Alexander Pope

Style is the dress of thoughts. --Philip Dormer Stanhope
The next thing most like living one’s life over again seems to be a recollection of that life, and to make that recollection as durable as possible by putting it down in writing.

--Benjamin Franklin

Nobody can write the life of a man, but those who have eat and drunk and lived in social intercourse with him.

--Samuel Johnson

Writing, when properly managed...is but a different name for conversation.

--Laurence Sterne

A pen is certainly an excellent instrument to fix a man’s attention and to inflame his ambition.

--John Adams

Create, artist! Do not talk!

--Johann Wolfgang van Goethe

Language gradually varies, and with it fade away the writing of authors who have flourished their allotted time.

--Washington Irving

There rise authors now and then, who seem proof against the mutability of language, because they have rooted themselves in the unchanging principles of human nature.

--Washington Irving

One sign of the born writer is his gift for finding (or sometimes inventing) authentically interesting language.

--John Gardner

A first-rate writer...respects writing too much to be tricky.

--Virginia Woolf

The whole game has become one of covering pages with ink, and if literature has become an industry we’re lost...We have to create literary birth control.

--Isaac Bashevis Singer

I leave out the parts that people skip.

--Elmore Leonard
A story must be exceptional enough to justify its telling. We story-tellers are all Ancient Mariners, and none of us is justified in stopping Wedding Guests (in other words, the hurrying public), unless he has something more unusual to relate than the ordinary experiences of every average man and woman.

--Thomas Hardy

Write a novel if you must, but think of money as an unlikely accident. Get your reward out of writing it, and try to be content with that.

--Pearl Buck

On the brink of my first novel’s publication I no longer feel I’m standing in the shallows of an ocean. I’m standing on the edge of a ravine, holding a pebble, ready to toss it down and see if moments later, I hear a tiny plink! Chances are, as with all who stand on ravine edges, tossing pebbles, I’ll hear nothing. But if I do, what sound could be more thrilling?

--Roy Hoffman

The most original authors...are not so because they advance what is new, but because they put what they have to say as if it had never been said before.

--Johann van Goethe

The man is most original who can adapt from the greatest number of sources.

--Thomas Carlyle

Every compulsion is put on writers to become safe, polite, obedient, and sterile.

--Sinclair Lewis

Everyone thinks they can be a writer. Most people don’t understand what’s involved. The real writers persevere. The ones that don’t, either don’t have enough fortitude and they probably wouldn’t succeed anyway, or they fall in love with the glamour of writing as opposed to the writing of writing.

--Peter McWilliams

First drafts are learning what your novel or story is about. Revision is working with that knowledge to enlarge or enhance an idea, or reform it.

--Bernard Malamud

I’ve done as many as eighty drafts of one poem...it can take me three years to finish a poem.

--Carolyn Forche

I rewrote the ending of Farewell to Arms thirty-nine times before I was satisfied.

--Ernest Hemingway
A really great novel is made with a knife and not a pen. A novelist must have the intestinal fortitude to cut out even the most brilliant passage so long as it doesn’t advance the story.

--Frank Yerby

I know it’s finished when I can no longer stand working on it.

--Bernard Malamud

If a writer’s ego ever wilts, he is ruined. It is the only thing that can sustain him through those lonely months while he is trying to piece together a book out of one recalcitrant word after another. Every morning he has to persuade himself, all over again, that putting words on paper is the most important thing in the world that he has something to say which thousands of people not only will listen to, but pay for...Only an egomaniac can believe these things, for they defy all the evidence.

--John Fischer

Literature is an occupation in which you have to keep proving your talent to people who have none.

--Jules Renard

The writer does the most, who gives his reader the most knowledge, and takes from him the least time.

--Charles Caleb Colton

The life of a writer is usually one of permanent insecurity.

--James T. Farrell

I never write—indeed, am physically incapable of writing—anything I don’t think will be paid for.

--Truman Capote

I believe the saddest news one has to give any young writer just setting out is that very few good writers are able to support themselves by their writing.

--Peter Taylor

Since writing is the worst part of being a writer this can be a very depressing experience.

--James Atlas

I’m only really alive when I’m writing.

--Tennessee Williams
It’s queer for a live human animal, endowed with intelligence, to spend waking hours of a very mortal life cooped up in a room, not talking to anybody, just scribbling words on a page.

--John Barth

The writer in America doesn’t enjoy a very exalted position; he’s really a third-rate citizen.

--James Michener

The novelist in America...is positively regarded as a kind of freak unless he retreats to the university or hits the jackpot in the mass media.

--Howard Swados

Everybody can write; writers can’t do anything else.

--Mignon McLaughlin

A writer is in the end not his books, but his myth—and that myth is in the keeping of others.

--V. S. Naipaul

There is no rule on how to write. Sometimes it comes easily and perfectly. Sometimes it’s like drilling rock and blasting it out with charges.

--Ernest Hemingway

A good writer is one who produces books that people read...so if I’m selling millions, I’m good.

--Jacqueline Susann

Every writer wants to be loved. He wants people, millions and millions and millions of people to read his book and say, ‘You are marvelous. I love you.’

--Evan Hunter

I do not think that most writers write for money alone. Good ones write mainly to please themselves and hope at the same time to please as many other people as possible.

--Merle Miller

Dismissing Dr. Johnson’s assertion that ‘No man but a blockhead ever wrote except for money,’ it is safe to say that most writers aren’t in it for the wages, fringe benefits, or short hours. There are much easier ways to make a buck and few better ways to stay poor. No. Lurking in the shadows behind every writer is the relentless spirit of the zealot. The act of writing is an act of faith; someone will be read and perhaps be changed.

--Kenneth C. Davis
The writer’s only responsibility is to his art. He will be completely ruthless if he is a good one. He has a dream. It anguishes him so much he must get rid of it. He has no peace until then.

--William Faulkner

The only reason for being a professional writer is that you can’t help it.

--Leo Rosten

The impulse to create beauty is rather rare in literary men...Far ahead of it comes the yearning to make money. And after the yearning to make money comes the yearning to make a noise.

--H. L. Mencken

Recognition is everything you write for; it’s much more than the money. You want your books to be valued. It’s a basic aspiration of the serious writer.

--William Kennedy

There are many reasons why novelists write—but they all have one thing in common: a need to create an alternative world.

--John Fowles

Don’t let pretentious literary talk fool you into believing that writers just write for themselves. Writing for yourself alone is creative masturbation. We do write to please ourselves, but basically we write to be read. Writing is not only a means of self-expression and catharsis, it is also a compulsive form of egotistical and infantile exhibitionism.

--Irving Wallace

Of the many people who contribute to the making of a book, from the sweeper at the printing plant, to the publisher in a paneled office, the worst paid, on any basis you care to name is the writer.

--James Lincoln Collier

The vast majority of novelists are still involved in an essentially uneconomical activity.

--James Monaco

Who profits from all this writing activity? The manufacturers of typewriters and typing paper, of course. And the U. S. Post Office.

--William Targ
He writes nothing whose readings are not read.

--Martial

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.

--John Steinbeck

Writers who concentrate on pleasing all the time don’t have much ultimate impact. One of the functions of an author is to arouse.

--William Styron

I don’t want to be studied in English classes; I want to be read.

--Tim O’Brien

To the man with an ear for verbal delicacies—the man who searches painfully for the perfect word, and puts the way of saying a thing above the thing said—there is in writing the constant joy of sudden discovery, of happy accident.

--Henry Louis Mencken

Really the writer doesn’t want success....He knows he has a short span of life, that the day will come when he must pass through the wall of oblivion, and he wants to leave a scratch on that wall—Kilroy was here—that somebody a hundred, or a thousand years later will see.

--William Faulkner

I always try to write on the principle of the iceberg. There is seven-eighths of it underwater for every part that shows. Anything you know you can eliminate and it only strengthens your iceberg. It is the part that doesn’t show. If a writer omits something because he does not know it then there is a hole in the story.

--Ernest Hemingway

I continue to work with the materials I have, the materials I am made of. With feelings, beings, books, events, and battles, I am omnivorous. I would like to swallow the whole earth. I would like to drink the whole sea.

--Pablo Neruda

When Shakespeare is charged with debts to his authors, Lander replies, ‘Yet he was more original than his originals. He breathed upon dead bodies and brought them into life.’

--Ralph Waldo Emerson
A writer is like a bean plant—he has his little day, and then gets stringy.

--Elwyn Brooks White

Give me a condor’s quill! Give me Vesuvius’ crater for an inkstand!...To produce a mighty book, you must choose a mighty theme.

--Herman Melville

Style...is a peculiar recasting and heightening, under a certain condition of spiritual excitement, of what a man has to say, in such a manner as to add dignity and distinction to it.

--Matthew Arnold

It is not of so much consequence what you say, as how you say it. Memorable sentences are memorable on account of some single irradiating word.

--Alexander Smith

The difference is slight, to the influence of an author, whether he is read by five hundred readers, or by five hundred thousand; if he can select the five hundred, he reaches the five hundred thousand.

--Henry Brooks Adams

The advantage, the luxury, as well as the torment and responsibility of the novelist, is that there is no limit to what he may attempt as an executant—no limit to his possible experiments, efforts, discoveries, successes.

--Henry James

Of all my verse, like not a single line; But like my title, for it is not mine. Up That title from a better man I stole: Ah, how much better, had I stol’n the whole!

--Robert Louis Stevenson

Innumerable are the men and women now writing for bread, who have not the least chance of finding in such work a permanent livelihood. They took to writing because they knew not what else to do, or because the literary calling tempted them by its independence and its dazzling prizes. They will hang on to the squalid profession, their earnings eeked out by begging and borrowing, until it is too late for them to do anything else—and what then. With a lifetime of dread experience behind me, I say that he who encourages any young man or woman to look for his living to ‘literature,’ commits no less than a crime.

--George Gissing
Although I am able to criticize wordiness and overabundance in others, I am not able practically to criticize it in myself. The business of selection and revision is simply hell for me—my efforts to cut out 50,000 words may sometimes result in my adding 75,000.

--Thomas Wolfe

Autobiographies ought to begin with Chapter Two.

--Elery Sedgwick

Everything written is as good as it is dramatic. It need not declare itself in form, but it is drama or nothing.

--Robert Frost

Talking is a hydrant in the yard and writing is a faucet upstairs in the house. Opening the first takes all the pressure off the second.

--Robert Frost

Without this playing with fantasy no creative work has ever yet come to birth. The debt we owe to the play of imagination is incalculable.

--Carl Gustav Jung

With the cost of book production ever on the rise, fewer risks can be taken; the quiet writer must defer to the shocking and outrageous.

--Nona Balakian

Academic prestige goes to those who can write in a dense style, difficult to understand, on a topic of little or no practical value.

--William O'Toole

Do you realize what would happen if Moses were alive today? He'd go up to Mount Sinai, come back with the Ten Commandments, and spend the next eight years trying to get published.

--Robert Orben

The odds against an unknown writer getting a manuscript published by simply sending it directly to a publishing house are astronomical.

--Edwin McDowell

It is virtually impossible for an unknown author to break into print through the U.S. mails with what is known in the trade as an ‘over the transom’ manuscript.

--Time
An author should try to get an agent to represent him. Selling a manuscript cold is the toughest way I know to get published. It can be done, but the odds are against the writer.

--William Targ

It’s harder for a new writer to get an agent than a publisher.

--Roger Straus

Publishers are always on the lookout for a good book. This is something to keep in mind no matter how discouraging the prospect of finding a publisher is, no matter how many rejection slips you get, and no matter how overwhelming the odds seem.

--Richard Balkin

I firmly believe that no really good, worthwhile book is going to go unpublished in this country...Even a house owned by the most profit-oriented bottom-line conglomerate has a literary image to protect; they want to publish books they can be proud of.

--Barbara Bannon

Something of real quality will be recognized somewhere, sooner or later.

--Mimi Jones

I can’t emphasize too strongly the importance of being absolutely relentless about submissions. Once you’ve got a story to the point where you think it’s worth submitting, you must submit it and submit it and submit it until someone somewhere breaks down and buys it.

--Lawrence Block

If you write one story, it may be bad; if you write a hundred, you have the odds in your favor.

—Edgar Rich
Burroughs

The true writer has nothing to say. What counts is the way he says it.

--Alain Robbe-Grillet

Some people tell me they’d like to write for ‘extra money.’ I tell them: Sell your body instead. Writing makes big demands on you.

--Erma Bombeck

Writer’s block is a misnomer and can be compared with turning off a faucet. Like the ability to write, faucets can develop problems when they’re seldom used. You get all this rust in the pipes. When you turn on the faucet, a lot of rust comes out.

--Susan Neville
So much of our time is preparation, so much is routine, and so much retrospect, that the pith of each man’s genius contracts itself to a very few hours.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

The man is only half himself, the other half is his expression.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

A sick man that gets talking about himself, a woman that gets talking about her baby, and an author that begins reading out of his own book, never know when to stop.

--Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.

Narcissus never wrote well.

--Edward Dahlberg

It is proof of high culture to say the greatest matters in the simplest way.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

The style is the man himself.

--Georges Buffon

The great writer finds style as the mystic finds God, in his own soul.

--Havelock Ellis

Style is the dress of thoughts; and let them be ever so just. If your style is homely, coarse, and vulgar, they will appear to as much disadvantage.

--Lord Chesterfield

I might say that what amateurs call a style is usually only the unavoidable awkwardness in first trying to make something that has not heretofore been made.

--Ernest Hemingway

Read over your compositions, and wherever you meet with a passage which you think is particularly fine, strike it out.

--Samuel Johnson

A period is to let the writer know he has finished his thought and he should stop there if he will only take the hint.

--Art Linkletter
A good style should show no sign of effort. What is written should seem a happy accident.

--W. Somerset Maugham

Mere elegance of language can produce at best but an empty renown.

--Petrarch

Many writers profess great exactness in punctuation, who never yet made a point.

--George Dennison Prentice

Style is a magic wand, and turns everything to gold that it touches.

--Logan Pearsall Smith

Style, like the human body, is specially beautiful when the veins are not prominent and the bones cannot be counted.

--Tacitus

A man’s style is intrinsic and private with him like his voice or his gesture, partly a matter of inheritance, partly of cultivation. It is more than a pattern of expression. It is the pattern of the soul.

--Maurice Valency

The most subtle, the strongest and deepest art—supreme art—is the one that does not at first allow itself to be recognized.

--Andre Gide

Forget your personal tragedy. We are all bitched from the start and you especially have to be hurt like hell before you can write seriously. But when you get the damned hurt use it—don’t cheat with it.

--Ernest Hemingway

Talent is a question of quantity. Talent does not write one page: it writes three hundred.

--Jules Renard

Most thinkers write badly, because they communicate not only their thoughts, but also the thinking of them.

--Nietzsche
Proper words in proper places, make the true definition of a style. --Jonathan Swift

Writers write for themselves and not for their readers. Art has nothing to do with communication between person and person, only with communication between different parts of a person’s mind. --Rebecca West

Dialogue in fiction...should be reserved for the culminating moments, and regarded as the spray into which the great wave of narrative breaks in curving towards the watcher on the shore. --Edith Wharton

No man ever yet became great by imitation. --Samuel Johnson

A great interpreter of life ought not himself to need interpretation. --John Morley

Originality does not consist in saying what no one has ever said before, but in saying exactly what you think yourself. --James F. Stephen

He has left off reading altogether, to the great improvement of his originality. --Charles Lamb

Whatever has been well said by anyone is mine. --Seneca

Amongst so many borrowed things, I am glad if I can steal one, disguising and altering it for some new service. --Montaigne

I am but a gatherer and disposer of other men’s stuff. --Sir Henry Wotton

We can say nothing but what hath been said....Our poets steal from Homer....Our storydressers do as much; he that comes last is commonly best. --Robert Burton

Borrowing, if it be not bettered by the borrower, is accounted plagiarism. --John Milton
Steal! And egad, serve your best thoughts as gypsies do stolen children, disfigure them to make 'em pass for their own.

--Richard Brinsley Sheridan

All that can be said is, that two people happened to hit on the same thought—and Shakespeare made use of it first, that’s all.

--Richard Brinsley Sheridan

It has come to be practically a sort of rule in literature, that a man, having once shown himself capable of original writing, is entitled thenceforth to steal from the writing of others at discretion.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Every great writer is a writer of history, let him treat on what subjects he may. He carries with him, for thousands of years, a portion of his times.

--Walter Savage Landor

It is not necessary to live, but to carve our names beyond that point, this is necessary.

--Gabriele d'Annunzio

Literature happens to be the only occupation in which wages are not given in proportion to the goodness of the work done.

--James Anthony Froude

Such superiority do the pursuits of literature possess above every other occupation, that even he who attains but a mediocrity in them, merits the pre-eminence above those who excel the most in the common and vulgar professions.

—David Hume

It is almost impossible for any one who reads much, and reflects a good deal, to be able, on every occasion, to determine whether a thought was another’s or his own. I have several times quoted sentences out of my own writings, in aid of my own arguments, in conversation, thinking that I was supporting them by some better authority.

--Laurence Sterne

Those writers who lie on the watch for novelty can have little hope of greatness; for great things cannot have escaped former observation.

--Samuel Johnson
Nothing is sillier than this charge of plagiarism. There is no sixth commandment in art. The poet dare help himself wherever he lists—wherever he finds material suited to his work. He may even appropriate entire columns with their carved capitals, if the temple he thus supports be a beautiful one. Goethe understood this very well, and so did Shakespeare before him.

--Heinrich Heine

Literature is full of coincidences, which some love to believe are plagiarisms. There are thoughts always abroad in the air which it takes more wit to avoid than to hit upon.

--Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.

Borrowed thoughts, like borrowed money, only show the poverty of the borrower.

--Lady Blessington

I have only made a nosegay of culled flowers, and have brought nothing of my own but the thread that ties them together.

--Montaigne

A good style must, first of all, be clear. It must not be mean or above the dignity of the subject. It must be appropriate.

--Aristotle

Often a purple patch or two is stuck on a serious work to give it a touch of color.

--Horace

The chief virtue of a style is perspicuity, and nothing so vicious in it as to need an interpreter. Words borrowed of antiquity do lend a kind of majesty to style, and are not without their delight sometimes. For they have the authority of years, and out of their intermission do win themselves a kind of grace-like newness. But the eldest of the present, and newest of the past language, is the best.

--Ben Jonson

A strict and succinct style is that, where you can take away nothing without loss, and that loss to be manifest.

--Ben Jonson

Style! Style! why, all writers will tell you that it is the very thing which can least of all be changed. A man’s style is nearly as much a part of him as his physiognomy, his figure, the throbbing of his pulse—in short, as any part of his being which is at least subjected to the action of the will.

--Fenelon
A vile conceit in pompous words expressed
Is like a clown in regal purple dressed. --Alexander Pope

All styles are good, except the tiresome. --Voltaire

The chief stimulus of good style is to possess a full, rich, complex matter to grapple with. --Walter Pater

Certainly the best works, and of greatest merit for the public, have proceeded from the unmarried or childless men, which both in affection and means have married and endowed the public. --Francis Bacon

No author is so poor that he cannot be of some service, if only as a witness of his time. —Claude Fauchet

No fathers or mothers think their own children ugly; and this self-deceit is yet stronger with respect to the offspring of the mind. --Cervantes

Next to doing things that deserve to be written, nothing gets a man more credit, or gives him more pleasure than to write things that deserve to be read. —Lord Chesterfield

There are three difficulties in authorship: to write anything worth publishing, to find honest men to publish it, and to get sensible men to read it. --Charles Caleb Colton

Writers are the main landmarks of the past. --Edward Bulwer-Lytton

Writers write because they can’t help themselves....I’m not happy when I’m writing, but I’m miserable when I’m not. --Lenora Mattingly Weber
The work of a writer is only a kind of optical instrument he offers the reader in order to permit him to discern in himself something he might never have seen without this book.

--Marcel Proust

It is hard to say what interests a child in a book. They can become fascinated by the strangest things....But in general it is probably safe to assume that a successful child’s book has many of the same elements as a successful adult book: gripping plot, interesting characters, a bit of surprise, and most important, competent writing.

--Sandra Schmidt

One is not a writer for having chosen to say certain things, but for having chosen to say them in a certain way. And, to be sure, the style makes the value of the prose.

--Jean-Paul Sartre

Each author’s quest and contribution is to say in his own way what life has said to him.

--John Mason Brown

Writing for children consists three parts of living, one part of writing. To give light to children, we must be involved in life—not shun it, nor be afraid of it, nor think we have experienced it by watching from the sidelines. We must be always seeking for truth about life, assured that we shall always be finding, but never finding all. In quietness we must search for such truth as life has to say to us. Only thus do we row reverent and teachable. Only the reverent and teachable can light they way for children.

A child’s book should be loved by its author, mulled over, slept over, rewritten, perhaps many times, so that the child reading it will know that he has come on experienced, not borrowed, truth; on wisdom, not on mere cleverness; on insight and beauty.

--Rebecca Caudill

If a writer’s style is really good, it will hang in the reader’s memory and continue to bring wonder to the mind. Style is the product of a craftsman alive to experience and to the possibilities and the obstinacies in the material he works. It is a labor of love, and like love it can bring pleasure an satisfaction.

--Sheridan Baker

Avoid depicting the hero’s state of mind; you ought to try to make it clear from the hero’s actions. It is not necessary to portray many characters. The centre of gravity should be in two persons: him and her.

--Anton Chekhov
Artistic creation, instead of removing us from the drama of our time, is one of the means we are given of bringing it closer. Totalitarian regimes are well aware of this, since they consider us their first enemies. Isn’t it obvious that everything that destroys art aims to strengthen ideologies that make men unhappy? Artists are the only people who have never harmed the world.

--Albert Camus

A playwright who writes about things that he is not connected with, or to, is not a creative writer. He may be a very skilled writer, and it may be on a very high level of craft, but he’s not going to be what I call an artist, a poet.

--Clifford Odets

We nowadays use the term creative arts, or a creative person, very loosely....In the sense that I’m using the word, he’s just a craftsman, like a carpenter. He has so many hammers, so many nails, so much dimension to fill, and he can do it with enormous skill. But the creative writer always starts with a state of being. He doesn’t start with something outside of himself. He starts with something inside himself, with a sense of unease, depression, or elation, and only gradually finds some kind of form for what I’m calling that ‘state of being.’

--Clifford Odets

The form is always dictated by the material; there can be nothing ready-made about it. It will use certain dramatic laws because, after all, you have to relate this material to an audience, and a form is the quickest way to get your content to as audience. That’s all form is. Form is viability.

--Clifford Odets

Writing for me was and is an assertion of identity. I never feel so much myself, with a great sense of relief and release, as when I stop somewhere in the midst of the daily chaos with pencil and paper. As I grew older I learned to work on top of the dining room table, despite radios blaring, telephones ringing, and people coming, going, talking loudly. It tremendously sharpened my powers of concentration, this exercise in shutting out the world. But it was a great strain on the nervous system.

--Ruth Whitman

If you take enough time to try to write poetry, and you’re serious about it, you build up an enormous linguistic skill. The poor human creature, the poet, cannot help thinking that, in a culture that rewards written things as it does the works of certain novelists, it might be possible for him to subsidize his poetry-writing out of the proceeds of a successful novel.

--James Dickey
Novelists write for countless different reasons: for money, for fame, for reviewers, for parents, for friends, for loved ones, for vanity, for pride, for curiosity, for amusement....I could fill a book with reasons, and they would all be true, though not true of all. Only one same reason is shared by all of us: we wish to create worlds as real as, but other than the world that is.

--John Fowles

You might say plot is the skeleton of a book, character development its flesh and blood, and style, its heart. Each part must make sense in terms of the whole. A good plot gives the story shape and structurally moves the action along.

--Elizabeth Gordon

Four basic ingredients for an effective novel: inspirational characters, a real-life experience on which to base the plot, a personal problem for the characters, and an ending in which the characters gain an insight about life.

--Paul Zindel

The book as a whole sees the mind and the world as inextricably fitted twin puzzles. The mind fits the world and shapes it as a river fits and shapes its own banks.

--Annie Dillard

All the authors I know were self-taught.

--Arthur C. Clarke

There is no substitute for living; as Hemingway wisely remarked, ‘Writing is not a full-time occupation.’

--Arthur C. Clarke

Plot is hard. And beginnings. I love to do ends, and I love revision. Once I’ve got a good solid story foundation, revision is just so much fun, like rearranging furniture.

--Carolyn Chute

If you write a poem to persuade others to believe or not to believe or to act in such and such a way, if you’re trying to convert them to a political cause, you’re using poetry as a tool, and poetry resents being so employed. What one tries to do always is to convey the intensity and the truth of one’s passions and one’s thoughts. Some will listen and perhaps it will be of help to them in changing their own lives and their own hearts, but the poem cannot deliberately set itself out to do that.

--Stanley Kunitz

Writers must be free not only to please but to displease. Isn’t that in the Constitution? We have to feel free to displease sometimes.

--Brian W. Aldiss
I do a lot of rewriting while I'm writing. I get up early, and when I finish four or five hours of writing, I take a little rest. I look at it in the afternoon, and if I don't throw up, I do some more revising. It's a constant process.

--Robert Ludlum

Creating the effect of spontaneity in writing is one of the most difficult and artificial things you can do. Writing is artificial by its very nature—you're taking sounds and converting them into symbols on a page. To make that transference from one sense to another and reinvest the words with vigor and rhythm and spontaneity is quite a feat.

--Tom Wolfe

Writing, or any form of artistic endeavor, is not just expression, it's communication. When a writer stops being truly interested in communicating something, and is only aiming a expressing something, well, they can express themselves by going out to the street corner and hollering.

--Raymond Carver

I went neurotically through the whole gamut of contortions to avoid the writing: oversleeping day after day, going through an elaborate ritual of writing out on a slip of paper at night 'I will not oversleep.' Then morning would come, the alarm would go off, and I'd think to myself that this note-writing business was silly—a symptom, in fact, of my need for more sleep. Finally, I'd get up and say to myself that I'd sit down to write just as soon as I read the paper. Around 2:00 P.M., when I still hadn't written a word, I'd set the alarm for a half hour later and tell myself it was okay to do anything I wanted for the next half hour....

Sometimes I would actually begin writing. And when it was going well I can remember literally jumping up and down with excitement, thinking to myself how easy it was. Then the next day the battle would start all over.

--Dick Cavett

A safe rule is, the first wording is always the best.

--Dick Cavett

Everywhere I go I'm asked if I think the university stifles writers. My opinion is that they don't stifle enough of them. There's many a bestseller that could have been prevented by a good teacher.

--Flannery O'Connor

I believe more in the scissors than I do in the pencil.

--Truman Capote
Novelists are better off than playwrights. You can’t boo a bad book. Or if you do you run the risk of being regarded as eccentric.

--Peter Ustinov

The novelist is a shaman who is offering his experience for the use of the rest of the tribe.

--Russell Hoban

Few novelists enjoy the creative labor, though most enjoy thinking about the creative labor.

--Arnold Bennett

They can’t yank a novelist like they can a pitcher. A novelist has to go the full nine, even if it kills him.

--Ernest Hemingway

I never decided to be a writer; I never decided to have brown eyes.

--Steve Allen

When words are scarce, they’re seldom spent in vain.

--Shakespeare

Style, after all, rather than thought, is the immortal thing in literature.

--Alexander Smith

It is style alone by which posterity will judge of a great work, for no author can have nothing truly his own but his style.

--Isaac Disraeli

A man’s style is his mind’s voice.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

The style of an author should be the image of his mind, but the choice and command of language is the fruit of exercise.

—Edward Gibbon

Form is the Golden Vase where in Thought, that fleeting essence, is preserved to Posterity.

--Anatole France

To copy beauties, forfeits all pretence
To fame—to copy faults, is want of sense.

--Charles Churchill
Next o’er his books his eyes began to roll,
In pleasing memory of all he stole;
How here he sipp’d, how there he plunder’d snug,
And suck’d all o’er like an industrious bug.

--Alexander Pope

What is originality? It is being one’s self, and reporting accurately what we see and are.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Originality, I fear, is too often only undetected and frequently unconscious plagiarism.

--Dean W. R. Inge

There are very few precocious writers. There are precocious poets, precocious mathematicians...but literature is so dependent on experience, as well as remarkable gifts, that a person isn’t likely to have seen enough until he or she is about thirty, and then begins to understand what love affairs are like, or how you respond to death, or whatever.

--Kurt Vonnegut

Being a writer is something like being a priest. You can’t make a go of it if you don’t have the calling, and if you have the calling, it keeps calling until you answer.

--Steve Sohmer

(How to write a play.) You do a lot of writing to figure out what the play’s about and throw out three-quarters of it; then you write it again and look at it and find out what that play’s about and throw out three-quarters of it; then you write it again.

--David Mamet

I think there’s a story in this...you wait long enough and there’s a story in anything!

--Lady Elaine Fairchild, *Mister Roger’s Neighborhood*

I tell my students there is such a thing as ‘writer’s block,’ and they should respect it. It’s blocked because it ought to be blocked, because you haven’t got it right now.

--Toni Morrison
If you would not be forgotten as soon as you are dead, either write things worth reading or do things worth writing.

---Benjamin Franklin

A successful book cannot afford to be more than ten percent new.

---Marshall McLuhan

One man is as good as another until he has written a book.

---Benjamin Jowett

You lost it if you talk about it.

---Ernest Hemingway

For a country to have a great writer is to have another government.

---Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

Every man is a borrower and a mimic; life is theatrical and literature a quotation.

---Ralph Waldo Emerson

When a man can observe himself suffering and is able, later, to describe what he’s gone through, it means he was born for literature.

---Edouard Bourdet

It has come to be practically a sort of rule in literature that a man, having once shown himself capable of original writing, is entitled thenceforth to steal from the writings of others at discretion.

---Ralph Waldo Emerson

Any writer, I suppose, feels that the world into which he was born is nothing less than a conspiracy against the cultivation of his talent—which attitude certainly has a great deal to support it.

---James Baldwin

The story of your life is not your life, it’s your story.

---John Barth

Those who write clearly have readers, those who write obscurely have commentators.

---Albert Camus
If a law were passed giving six months to every writer of a first book, only the good ones would do it.

--Bertrand Russell

It is my ambition to say in ten sentences what everyone else says in a whole book—what everyone else does not say in a whole book.

—Friedrich Nietzsche

Find enough clever things to say, and you’re a Prime Minister; write them down and you’re a Shakespeare.

--George Bernard Shaw

The hardest thing to do is to write straight honest prose on human beings. First you have to know the subject; then you have to know how to write. Both take a lifetime to learn, and anybody is cheating who takes politics as a way out. All the outs are too easy, and the thing itself is too hard to do.

--Ernest Hemingway

The discipline of the writer is to be still and listen to what her subject has to tell her.

--Rachael Carson

Style is knowing who you are, what you want to say, and not giving a damn.

--Gore Vidal

There’s nothing so wonderful as having constructed something perfectly arbitrary, without any help from anybody else, out of pure delight and self delight, and then find that it turns out to be useful to a few others. You have it both ways, if you’re lucky: you do exactly what you want to do, and then it turns out that people are grateful to you for providing them with some sort of emotional machine.

--Richard Wilbur

We can say nothing but what has been said...Our poets steal from Homer.

--Robert Burton

I found it reassuring to read last week that S. J. Perelman once faithfully copied the style of Ring Lardner, since for years I have been trying to copy the style of Perelman.

--Pierre Berton

There be two kinds of writers, my son; to wit, those who write for money and get it, and those who write for money and don’t get it.

--T. W. H. Crosland
Writing is a dog’s life, but the only life worth living.

--Gustave Flaubert

At this time I had decided the only thing I was fit for was to be a writer, and this notion rested solely on my suspicion that I would never be fit for real work, and that writing didn’t require any.

--Russell Baker

Talent alone cannot make a writer. There must be a man behind the book.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Who wants to become a writer? And why? Because it’s the answer to everything. It’s the steaming reason for living. To not, to pin down, to build up, to be astonished at nothing, to cherish the oddities, to let nothing go down the drain, to make something, to make a great flower out of life, even if it’s only a cactus.

--Enid Bagnold

I’m a character writer. I have to begin with people. I always know my characters, exactly what they look like, their birthdays, what they like for breakfast. It doesn’t matter if these things don’t appear in the book. I still have to know them.

--S. E. Hinton

The various media encourage young people to accept one of two simplistic approaches to the world—smug complacency or cynical despair. We, as writers for young people, must provide alternatives to these extreme approaches.

--P. J. Petersen

I would urge young writers not to be too much concerned with the vagaries of the marketplace. Not everyone can make a first-rate living as a writer, but a writer who is serious and responsible about his work and life, will probably find a way to earn a decent living, if he or she writes well.

--Bernard Malamud

I think that the glory of being a writer is that everything is relevant. I don’t do ‘research’; I’m just being all the time, and paying attention. That’s what a writer does, on the whole: pay attention to the world.

--Susan Sontag
Why I write...sheer egotism. Desire to seem clever, to be talked about, to be remembered after death, to get your own back on grown-ups who snubbed you in childhood.

--George Orwell

The crime novel at its best, and perhaps merely at its better, is a form of fiction like any other, and not some lesser order of escapist literature fit only to pass empty hours with. There are certainly other forms of the novel that are accepted into the mainstream by critics and not damned off and made to flow alongside in separate channels. To cite a few: the academic novel...; the novel of the love affair...; and the macho-challenge novel. Why should they be accepted and the crime novel be rejected?

--Bruce Cook

Living with my own teenagers taught me that I must not write down to my readers; I must write up to them.

--Betsy Byars

In a very real sense, the writer writes in order to teach himself; to understand himself, to satisfy himself; the publishing of his ideas, though it brings gratifications, is a curious anticlimax.

--Alfred Kazin

Writing a first draft is like ice fishing and building an igloo, as well as groping one’s way into a pitch-dark room or overhearing a faint conversation, or having prepared for the wrong exam or telling a joke whose punch line you’ve forgotten....Rewriting is a second, third, nth chance to make something come right, to fall graciously into place. One has to learn to respect the misgiving that says, This still doesn’t ring true, and to go back down into the mine again and to poke around for the missing ore.

--Ted Solotaroff

Most of my stories, if not all of them, have some basis in real life. That is the kind of fiction I’m most interested in. I suppose that’s one reason I don’t have much respect for fiction that seems to be game playing.

--Raymond Carver

I believe with Horace that literature should instruct and entertain, which is what I try to do. I have a lot of fun exploring other cultures, learning fresh points of view, and I think my writing should be used to promote understanding between groups. Many of these so-called underclass kids wouldn’t drop out of school if they could read authors from their own background. That’s what saved me.

--Ishmael Reed
Revision is mostly turning loose the editor in one’s self, a caretaker who tinkers and straightens out and tidies up and has a steadier hand.

--Ted Solotaroff

For me everything is dangerous, everything is tentative, nothing is certain. I think the writing of fiction involves enormous anxiety and enormous risk. And I want fiction always to situate us in the psychic and literal spot where life is most difficult, most dangerous, most beautiful.

--John Hawkes

I do find writing a very painful process—I think it’s the hardest work in the world. It’s like having arthritis; it’s a little pain every day, and you have to press on.

--Tom Wolfe

Most children under the age of ten will react creatively to the best works of a truly creative person, but too often adults sift their reactions to creative picture books to their own experience. And as an editor who stands between the creative artist and the creative child, I am constantly terrified that I will react as a dull adult.

--Ursula Nordstrom

Get used to the process of rejection. There are very few professional writers who have never had a rejection slip. Don’t let it bother you. All you have to do is sell your book to one person who’s in a position to buy it.

--Bill Pronzini

Writing a mystery involves fictional ‘real’ people caught in fictional ‘real-life’ situations. Mysteries have to be logical. You can’t play tricks on the readers. Every action of every character has to have a purpose.

--Douglas Kiker

I made a rule for myself that I would have to be brave, and if something was embarrassing—and I’m very easily embarrassed—so what, it had to be put down, I had to write it.

--Caroly Forché

(Write as though)...you are writing a letter to a dear friend....And this is a dear and close friend, real—or better—invented in your mind like a fixation. Write privately, not publicly; without fear or timidity, right to the end of the letter...so that your true friend will read it over and over, and then want more enchanting letters from you.

--Muriel Spark
Until the raw ingredients of a pudding make a pudding, I shall never believe that the raw material of sensation and thought can make a work of art without the cook’s intervening.

--Edith Wharton

(A writer reads incessantly)...because words on a page, whether written by himself or by others, are the central obsession of his life.

--Paul Horgan

Clever plots satisfy authors more than readers.

--Ken Follett

I see myself primarily as an entertainer....sure the stories I’m interested in writing contain some of what I believe, what’s important to me. And if my readers decide to take a lesson from what I’ve written, that’s a bonus. But as long as they get caught up in the story and have a kind of adventure, I feel I’ve succeeded.

--Tom Clancy

Until we know the motives out of which people are acting, we don’t have people at all, only cipher, characters with names but no flesh and blood.

--Harry Crews

If a farmer can write about somebody killing somebody in a turnip patch and make it work, why not! You don’t have to be a judge or a lawyer with courtroom expertise to write a good mystery.

--Joan Kahn

If I want to convince, I write an essay; if I want to meditate, I write a poem.

--Carolyn Forché

If I’m writing about an ordered universe, I write an ordered novel. If I’m talking about a tension between order and disorder, I write a novel in which the form expresses that tension. But always I’m using the tool of language to dig a hole. Other people sometimes use the tool of language to chew on.

--John Gardner

I believe that you write best what you know about, from your own life experience. And of course as a writer, I am an observer: I watch, I think. But I don’t run out of the room at dinner parties to take notes about what I’ve just overheard.

--Dominick Dunne

What it comes down to, for a writer, is to discover for himself how he sees the world.

--Paul Horgan
The act of writing, after all, is an act of detachment and differentiation. It compensates you with the feeling of having transcended the given life, where your possibilities seemed to be no more than the sum of your predicaments.

--Seamus Heaney

Part of becoming a writer is the desire to have everything mean something.

--Louise Erdrich

A good mystery has to have an ending that surprises you, but one you know is unavoidable. It should make you rethink the plot and say to yourself: ‘Of course! Of course!’ A basic ingredient of mystery writing is the element of surprise.

--Douglas Kiker

I really am writing out of the little kid in myself...That doesn’t mean I don’t overlay that with demands for logic, order, grace and control that are necessary to write a book. But it’s a voice that I trust—I don’t say to myself, ‘Would a child really say this?’

--Judith Viorst

I believe the main thing in beginning a novel is to feel, not that you can write it, but that it exists on the far side of a gulf, which words can’t cross: that it’s to be pulled through only in a breathless anguish....A novel...to be good should seem, before one writes it, something unwriteable; but only visible; so that for nine months one lives in despair, and only when one has forgotten what one meant, does the book seem tolerable.

--Virginia Woolf

One quintessential attribute in every writer is that every writer seems to be a teacher....Whether a writer has stood at the podium or has sat behind the desk, each wants to instruct others...in his or her view, which would be, ‘This is the way the world is,’ when actually fiction is merely strings of words on pages that are metaphors for what, maybe, the world looks like to certain people who write about it.

--Larry Woiwode

Facts are essential to comedy. Recognizable facts and verifiable details give the appearance of reality you need to make comedy stand up....I don’t think there’s any kind of writing more serious than funny writing—nor more difficult or demanding of more dedication and work hours.

--Max Shulman
When I'm not writing I feel absolutely useless. So much of writing is a mystery. Sooner or later somebody asks, ‘Why did you become a writer?’ I really don’t know. It was a gift. If you’re a painter or a musician or a taxi driver you just do the best you can.

--Thomas Savage

Sometimes my characters are bitchy, unfaithful, cruel, ruthless. I’ve met these people in ordinary life. I love villains. Villains provide the plot points in a novel. When good people interact, it’s boring. Put a villain or villainess in and things happen.

--Judith Krantz

Most espionage fiction of recent years bears a conscious analogy to a chess game. There is no James Bond stuff. Instead, little pawns are pushed around by their masters, and the pawns do not even see the openings. They don’t move of their own volition; they are moved.

--Newgate Callendar

I’m one of the people who think best in the morning. I like to wake up ready to go and to know that during the whole day the phone wouldn’t ring, the doorbell wouldn’t ring—even with good news—and that nobody would drop in....A the end of the day, I’d have a drink, watch the evening news...and then I can do anything I want to.

--Eudora Welty

Any writer overwhelmingly honest about pleasing himself is almost sure to please others.

--Marianne Moore

I wish I could write cheaply or popularly, because I need the money....I’m writing for rather highly educated people, and I think my writing is only going to appeal to people who have extreme sensitivity....People say, ‘Why don’t you just put a lot of sex into it?’ I don’t know how to do that; I don’t know how to go about it.

--Thomas Savage

I enjoy the emotional commitment of a novel. A nine-month commitment to characters. I laugh with them. I cry with them.

--Clive Barker

I think that every autobiography is fiction. We know that memory is absolutely inaccurate....The older we grow, the more we know that memory lies; we might even say that when a person tries most to be autobiographical, he or she lies the most.

--Larry Woiwode
People say writing is so tough. To me, it’s the most marvelous life in the world. I’m my own actor, director, stage manager. What a sense of power!

--Robert Ludlum

The creative power which bubbles so pleasantly in beginning a new book quiets down after a time, and one goes on more steadily. Doubts creep in. Then one becomes resigned. Determination not to give in, and the sense of impending shape keep one at it more than anything.

--Virginia Woolf

A writer has to become a voice. The identification with readers has to be a strong bond. No one is advertising positions for authors, novelists, or playwrights. It’s a job you have to do by yourself.

--Leon Uris

In spite of occasional moods of disgust, in spite of periods of laziness and exhaustion which break in upon my work, in spite of the more than modest way in which I live, I know that I have found fulfillment. I have an object in life, a task, a—let me be frank and say a passion. The trade of authorship is a violent, and indestructible obsession.

--George Sand

The writer who possesses the creative gift owns something of which he is not always master—something that at times strangely wills and works for itself....If the result be attractive, the World will praise you, who little deserve praise; if it be repulsive, the same World will blame you who almost as little deserve blame.

--Charlotte Brontë

Everything I have ever done is easier than research or writing.

--Fawn M. Brodie

One must avoid ambition in order to write. Otherwise something else is the goal: some kind of power beyond the power of language. And the power of language, it seems to me, is the only kind of power a writer is entitled to.

--Cynthia Ozick

The way I work best is to be entirely alone. And during that period your characters are really the only people you can have a conversation with, because no one else is there, and the world you’re creating becomes a real world, and the rest, what is supposed to be the most solid and best known, is really only shadows. It’s a kind of heightened reality.

--Jeanette Winterson
I write down everything, everything! Otherwise why should I write?
   --Marie Konstantinovna

I write because, exacting as it may be to do so, it is still more difficult to refrain, and because—however conscious of one’s limitations one may be—there is Always at the back of one’s mind an irrational hope that this next book will be different: it will be the rounded achievement, the complete fulfillment. It never has been: yet I am still writing.
   --Iris Origo

Writing is like crabgrass: You have to keep weeding it.
   --Elyse Sommer

The best phrase, anecdote, ideas always come after publication.
   --Elyse Sommer

Cure for writer’s block: write anything—a shopping list, a letter to a friend—and before you know it, you’ll be back on a creative high.
   --Elyse Sommer

There’s no such thing as a satisfied writer.
   --Elyse Sommer

To think of a story is much harder work than to write it...to think it over as you lie in bed, or walk about, or sit cozily over your fire, to turn it all in your thoughts, and make the things fit—that requires elbow-grease of the mind. The arrangement of the words is as though you were walking simply along a road. The arrangement of your story is as though you were carrying a sack of flour while you walked.
   --Anthony Trollope

I do consider life a story—every life. Some lives are dull, some dramatic; some appeal, some do not. Yet once a biographer has collected the facts, it is not a matter of coaxing up a story; it is a question of perceiving the story line that is already there.
   --Jean Fritz

Writers have one great strength. They can sit down and generate their own employment and determine their own fate to a great extent by the degree of their disciplines, their guts, and their talents.
   --Fay Kanin

Writing is so difficult that I often feel that writers, having had their hell on earth, will escape all punishment hereafter.
   --Jessamyn West
Keep in mind that there’s no right way of writing. There’s only our way.

--Milton Lomask

A freelance writer is often tempted, for the sake of immediate financial gain, to turn out work that goes against every standard he has set himself. In the long run this is the greatest of follies, for it can cripple him permanently as the kind of writer he set out to be.

Remember that there are many roads to success in writing, and it is psychologically bad for a writer to praise the one of his choice and condemn many of the others.

--Frank Belknap Long

It’s hell on your body: There’s nothing physical about writing, and no one likes to sit still. And it’s hell on your soul. You need to isolate yourself from others, and no one likes to be alone for long stretches of time.

--Kurt Vonnegut

Writing...is too demanding, too hard, too painful to do for any other reason other than love. The question is why I love something that’s so demanding, hard and painful? Maybe because of all these things, I sure know I’ve done a day’s work when I get up from the typewriter.

--Judith Guest

Read.
Write.
Rewrite.
All three. Forever and ad nauseum. And then some more.

--Joe Gores

Don’t quit. It’s very easy to quit during the first ten years. Nobody cares whether you write or not, and it’s very hard to write when nobody cares one way or the other. You can’t get fired if you don’t write, and most of the time you don’t get rewarded if you do. But don’t quit.

--Andre Dubus

Don’t stop because you’ve hit a block. Finish the page, even if you write nothing but your own name. The block will break if you don’t give in to it. Remember, writing is a physical habit as well as whatever you want to think it is—calling, avocation, talent, genius, art.

--Isabelle Holland

Writing = ass in chair.

--Oliver Stone
Write for fun.
Write to share ideas.
Write to share feelings.

--William Wharton

If I were a plumber, I'd be out five days a week laying pipe and fixing drains. I'm a writer, so five days a week (sometimes seven or eight) I lay words down on paper and try to fix them into stories.

--Jean Brody

I needed to find my way to write. I need about six hours of uninterrupted time in order to produce about two hours of writing, and when I accepted that and found the way to do it—then I was able to write.

--Robert B. Parker

Writing should be like breathing. You don't think about breathing, you just do it. I write every day, including all holidays and weekends—for at least two hours a day.

--William F. Nolan

I decided early on that I was going to be a writer and that whether I succeeded or failed, I was still going to be a writer. That is, I decided that, for me, it would be preferable to be a failed writer or a minor writer—some sort of footnote in the history of American letters—than to leave the dream behind.

--Joe David Bellamy

Finish the thing before you start revising. If you're working on chapter 3 and you discover that you have to go back and plant the butler in chapter 1, scribble a note to yourself and keep working on chapter 3. Otherwise, you run the risk of having 20 versions of Chapter 1—and nothing else at all.

--Marta Randall

I don’t know what I think until I see what I’ve said.

--E. M. Forster

Most people won’t realize that writing is a craft. You have to take your apprenticeship in it like anything else.

--Katherine Anne Porter

A great writer is, so to speak, a second government in his country. And for that reason no regime has ever loved great writers, only minor ones.

--Alexander Solzhenitsyn
One cannot be deeply responsive to the world without being saddened very often.  
--Erich Fromm

The dubious privilege of a freelance writer is he’s given the freedom to starve anywhere.

--S. J. Perelman

A writer is someone who always sells. An author is one who writes a book that makes a big splash.

--Mickey Spillane

The rules seem to be these: if you have written a successful novel, everyone invites you to write short stories. If you have written some good short stories, everyone wants you to write a novel. But nobody wants anything until you have already proved yourself by being published somewhere else.

--James Michener

Not yet published a writer lies in the womb...waiting for the privilege to breathe. Outside is the great, exhaling company of those who have expressed.

--Hortense Calisher

Good writing is true writing. If a man is making a story up it will be true in proportion to the amount of knowledge of life that he has had and how conscientious he is; so that when he makes something up it is as it would truly be.

--Ernest Hemingway

Writing is a suspension of life in order to re-create life.

--John McPhee

The complete novelist would come into the world with a catalog of qualities something like this. He would own the concentration of a Trappist monk, the organizational ability of a Prussian field marshal, the insight into human relations of a Viennese psychiatrist, the discipline of a man who prints the Lord’s Prayer on the head of a pin, the exquisite sense of timing of an Olympic gymnast, and by the way, a natural instinct and flair for exceptional use of language.

--Leon Uris

Before I start to write, I always treat myself to a nice dry martini. Just one, to give me the courage to get started. After that, I am on my own.

--E. B. White

The true function of a writer is to produce a masterpiece and...no other task is of any consequence.

--Cyril Connolly
I do borrow from other writers, shamelessly! I can only say in my defense, like the woman brought before the judge on a charge of kleptomania, ‘I do steal; but, Your Honor, only from the very best stores.’

--Thornton Wilder

Good writers are monotonous, like good composers. Their truth is self-repeating....They keep trying to perfect their understanding of the one problem they were born to understand.

--Alberto Moravia

Clear prose indicates the absence of thought.

--Marshall McLuhan

When I’m asked why Southern writers particularly have a penchant for writing about freaks, I say it’s because we are still able to recognize one.

--Flannery O’Connor

Whatever sentence will bear to be read twice, we may be sure was thought twice.

--Henry David Thoreau

Never write on a subject without first having read yourself full on it; and never read on a subject till you have thought yourself hungry on it.

--Jean Paul Richter

For me, the big chore is always the same—how to begin a sentence, how to continue it, how to complete it.

--Claude Simon

Anyone turning biographer commits himself to lies, to concealment, to hypocrisy, to flattery, to events hiding his own lack of understanding, for biographical truth is not to be had, and even if it were it couldn’t be used.

--Sigmund Freud

All autobiographies are lies. I do not mean unconscious, unintentional lies: I mean deliberate lies. No man is bad enough to tell the truth about himself during his lifetime, involving, as it must, the truth about his family and his friends and colleagues. And no man is good enough to tell the truth to posterity in a document which he suppresses until there is nobody left alive to contradict him.

--George Bernard Shaw

Originality is the art of concealing your sources.

--C. E. M. Joad
Only when one has lost all curiosity about the future has one reached the age to write an autobiography.

--Evelyn Waugh

Your comedy I’ve read, my friend,
    And like the half you pilfer’d best;
But sure the piece you yet may mend:
    Take courage, man! and steal the rest.

--Unknown

There are two literary maladies—writer’s cramp and swelled head. The worst of writer’s cramp is that it is never cured; the worst of swelled head is that it never kills.

--Coulson Kernahan

In other countries, art and literature are left to a lot of shabby bums living in attics and feeding on booze and spaghetti, but in America the successful writer or picture-painter is indistinguishable from any other decent business man.

--Sinclair Lewis

The literary world is made up of little confederacies, each looking upon its own members as the lights of the universe; and considering all others as mere transient meteors, doomed soon to fall and be forgotten, while its own luminaries are to shine steadily on to immortality.

--Washington Irving

What a good thing Adam had—when he said a good thing, he knew nobody had said it before.

--Mark Twain

I invent nothing. I rediscover.

--Auguste Rodin

There is nothing new under the sun.

--Ecclesiastes 1:9

Advice to young writers who want to get ahead without any annoying delays: don’t write about Man, write about a man.

--E. B. White

Self-expression is for babies and seals, where it can be charming. A writer’s business is to affect the reader.

--Vincent McHugh
There is but one art, to omit.  
--Robert Louis Stevenson

Every writer, without exception, is a masochist, a sadist, a peeping Tom, an exhibitionist, a narcissist, an injustice collector and a depressed person constantly haunted by fears of unproductivity.  
--Edmund Bergler

As for style of writing, if one has anything to say, it drops from him simply and directly, as a stone falls to the ground.  
--Henry David Thoreau

They're fancy talkers about themselves, writers. If I had to give young writers advice, I would say don't listen to writers talking about writing or themselves.  
--Lillian Hellman

There are two kinds of writers—the great ones who can give you truths, and the lesser ones, who can only give you themselves.  
--Clifton Fadiman

There is nothing more dangerous to the formation of a prose style than the endeavour to make it poetic.  
--J. Middleton Murry

Writing has power, but its power has no vector. Writers can stir the mind, but they can’t direct it. Time changes things. God changes things, the dictators change things, but writers can’t change anything.  
--Isaac Bashevis Singer

Anybody can find out if he is a writer. If he were a writer, when he tried to write of some particular day, he would find in the effort that he could recall exactly how the light fell and how the temperature felt, and all the quality of it. Most people cannot do it. If they can do it, they may never be successful in a pecuniary sense, but that ability is at the bottom of writing, I am sure.  
--Maxwell Perkins

As for my next book, I am going to hold myself from writing it till I have it impending in me: grown heavy in my mind like a ripe pear, pendant, gravid, asking to be cut or it will fall.  
--Virginia Woolf
Leonardo da Vinci was an ambidextrous workaholic. He sketched with his right hand while he wrote with his left—simultaneously!

--Executive
Speechwriter
Newsletter

Talent isn’t enough. You need what Steinbeck called a blend of faith and arrogance. When you’re young, plain old poverty can be enough, along with an insatiable hunger for recognition. You have to have that feeling of ‘I’ll show them.’ If you don’t have it, don’t become a writer.

--Leon Uris

Writing is a difficult trade which must be learned slowly by reading great authors; by trying at the outset to imitate them; by daring to be original; by destroying one’s first productions; by comparing subsequent works to recognized masterpieces and, once more, by destroying them; by crossing out whole passages; by weeping from despair; by being more severe with oneself than even the critics will be. After ten years of such arduous activity, if one has talent, one may begin to write in an acceptable manner.

--Andre Maurois

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

No bird has ever uttered note
That was not in some first bird’s throat;
Since Eden’s freshness and man’s fall
No rose has been original.

--Thomas Bailey

Originality is simply a pair of fresh eyes.

--Thomas Wentworth Higginson
Aldrich

Many a man fails as an original thinker simply because his memory is too good.

--Nietzsche

A certain awkwardness marks the use of borrowed thoughts; but as soon as we have learned what to do with them, they become our own.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson
Plagiarists have, at least, the merit of preservation.  --Benjamin Disraeli

About the most originality that any writer can hope to achieve honestly is to steal with good judgment.  --Josh Billings

Every man is a borrower and a mimic, life is theatrical and literature a quotation.  
--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Your manuscript is both good and original, but the part that is good is not original, and the part that is original is not good.  --Samuel Johnson

Publication is the male equivalent of childbirth.  --Richard Acland

The point of good writing is knowing when to stop.  --Lucy Maud Montgomery

What is a diary as a rule? A document useful to the person who keeps it, dull to the contemporary who reads it, invaluable to the student, centuries afterwards, who treasures it!  
--Dame Ellen Terry

Just as it is still in her close personal relationships that woman most naturally uses her human genius and her artistry in life, so it is still in the portrayal of those relationships that she perfects her most characteristic genius in writing.  
--Elizabeth Drew

It is a delicious thing to write, to be no longer yourself but to move in an entire universe of your own creating. Today, for instance, as man and woman, both lover and mistress, I rode in a forest on an autumn afternoon under the yellow leaves, and I was also the horses, the leaves, the wind, the words my people uttered, even the red sun that made them almost close their love-drowned eyes. When I brood over these marvelous pleasures I have enjoyed, I would be tempted to offer God a prayer of thanks if I knew he could hear me. Praised may he be for not creating me a cotton merchant, a vaudevillian, or a wit.  
--Gustave Flaubert
The brain is a wonderful organ; it starts working the moment you get up in the morning and does not stop until you get to the office.

--Robert Frost

If you were a member of Jesse James’s band and people asked you what you were, you wouldn’t say, ‘Well, I’m a desperado.’ You’d say something like, ‘I work in banks,’ or ‘I’ve done some railroad work.’ It took me a long time just to say, ‘I’m a writer.’ It’s really embarrassing.

--Roy Blount, Jr.

It was reported that the great American author Sinclair Lewis was once asked to give a lecture on writing to a group of college students:

‘Looking out at this gathering,’ he said to the assembled students, ‘makes me want to know how many of you really and truly wish to become writers.’

Every hand in the room went up. Lewis looked at them for a moment and then folded his notes and put them away.

‘If that’s true,’ he said, ‘then the best advice I can give you is to go home and write.’

And he left the room.

--The Winner’s Circle

If it works, copy it.

--Tony Schwartz

Abraham Lincoln delivered his Gettysburg Address just over 130 years ago. Look at how his words compare:

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Words</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Gettysburg Address</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bag of Lay’s Potato Chips</td>
<td>401</td>
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<td>418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average USA Today cover story</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

--USA Today

Make it a point to keep on the lookout for novel and interesting ideas that others have used successfully. Your idea has to be original only in its adaptation to the problem you are currently working on.

--Thomas Edison

Writing is 1% illumination and 99% elimination.

--Louise Brooks
Dickens sat down and wrote everything straight off. Somerset Maugham would work over one of his stories for hours and hours. Neither of them could have been any better or any worse if one had been slower and the other faster....I write everything in my head, so that when I sit down to the typewriter it's composed.

--Louise Brooks

All of us write because we have suffered some terrible humiliation and we've got to set the record straight and get even somehow.

--Louise Brooks

No author can create a character out of nothing. He must have a model to give him a starting point.

--Somerset Maugham

Scratch a novelist and you find a moralist.

--Budd Schulberg

The writer, if the work is difficult, feels alone and sometimes even abandoned. But...that which is named loneliness is probably more nearly ineffectiveness, a form of failure, or form of fear.

--William Saroyan

A professional writer is just an amateur who didn’t quit.

--Richard Bach

My speed depends on the state of my bank account.

--Mickey Spillane

A good novel tells us the truth about its hero; but a bad novel tells us the truth about its author.

--G. K. Chesterton

Some editors are failed writers, but so are most writers.

--T. S. Eliot

Authors are easy enough to get on with—if you are fond of children.

--Michael Joseph

Manuscript: something submitted in haste and returned at leisure.

--Oliver Herford

He who is most creative conceals his sources the best.

--Unknown
In creating, the only hard thing’s to begin; a grass-blade’s no easier to make than an oak.

--James Russell Lowell

All my best thoughts were stolen by the ancients.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

You can’t wait for inspiration. You have to go after it with a club.

--Jack London

For art to exist, for any sort of aesthetic activity or perception to exist, a certain physiological precondition is indispensable: intoxication.

--Nietzsche

If you can speak what you will never hear, if you can write what you will never read, you have done rare things.

--Henry David Thoreau

If you are seeking creative ideas, go out walking. Angels whisper to a man when he goes for a walk.

--Raymond Inmon

I learned...that inspiration does not come like a bolt, nor is it kinetic, energetic striving, but it comes into us slowly and quietly and all the time, though we must regularly and every day give it a little chance to start flowing, prime it with a little solitude and idleness.

--Brenda Ueland

There seems to be no physical handicap or chance of environment that can hold a real writer down, and there is no luck, no influence, no money that will keep a writer going when she is written out.

--Kathleen Norris

Masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice.

--Virginia Woolf

Life can’t really defeat a writer who is in love with writing, for life itself is a writer’s lover until death—fascinating, cruel, lavish, warm, cold, treacherous, constant.

--Edna Ferber
Sit down and 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

It has taken me years of struggle, hard work and research to learn to make one simple gesture, and I know enough about the art of writing to realize that it would take as many years of concentrated effort to write one simple, beautiful sentence.

--Isadora Duncan

Very young writers often do not revise at all. Like a hen looking at a chalk line, they are hypnotized by what they have written. ‘How can it be altered?’ they think. It has to be altered. You have to learn how.

--Dorothy Canfield Fisher

The one thing a writer has to have is a pencil and some paper. That’s enough, so long as she knows that she and she alone is in charge of that pencil, and responsible, she and she alone, for what it writes on that paper.

--Ursula K. Le Guin

Looking back, I imagine I was always writing. Twaddle it was too. But far better to write twaddle or anything, anything, than nothing at all.

—Katherine Mansfield

When creative juices flow  
Catch them with a pen  
Cause if you don’t  
You may find you can’t  
Recapture them again.

--June Shanahan

The more sins you confess, the more books you will sell.

--Ninon de L’Enclos

Writing a book is like scrubbing an elephant: there’s no good place to begin or end, and it’s hard to keep track of what you’ve already covered.

--Unknown

The best fame is a writer’s fame. It’s enough to get a table at a good restaurant, but not enough to get you interrupted when you eat.

--Fran Lebowitz