



Writer's Guide





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Tips for Effective & Productive Writing

What makes a writer successful? Is it fame and fortune? For some, yes – that is the meaning. For others, it is simply the badge of honor that comes with being a published author.

Most of us write for joy, expression, and a sense of self-worth and purpose. We want to express our stories (whether they are actual stories about our lives or from our imagination). Do not focus on being an overnight success or best-selling author – concentrate on writing a great story, presenting it professionally to as many audiences as possible, and let fortune take its course. The happiest authors understand that publishing is not done with the sole goal of monetary reward– it is done for pride, self-satisfaction, and the desire to leave a lasting legacy. Indeed, financial success in publishing is rare and reserved for only the luckiest authors. However, anyone lucky enough to be a published author is happy with the gifts of accomplishment, self-satisfaction, and pride at the very least!



Good Writing

All writing is good if it is your genuine expression or imagination –just keep writing. Some have excellent vs. bad grammar, style, etc., but this does not matter – a good story is a good story regardless of grammar and spelling – these can be corrected. Just keep writing!



Establish a “Do Not Disturb” Zone If You Need To

Some people need complete solitude to write, and others can write on a crowded airplane. If you need dedicated space, tell your family and seize it. If that isn't possible, many people find that a great pair of noise-canceling headphones can give you complete peace – even in a crowded house. Tune everyone else out!



He Who Hesitates Is Lost

Don't make excuses not to write – just do it. Don't hesitate to run stories and thoughts by friends and family before putting pen to paper for a particular chapter or passage. Find out what they think of your characters and storyline – don't be too proud to ask for direction and seek criticism. Early feedback is critical. Nothing is worse than writing a book and then doing a complete rewrite because no one read it. If you're a first-time author, this is a lifesaver!



Keep a Notepad

A notepad next to your bed is handy – write down any thoughts or ideas you have during the night or when you wake up in the morning (or dictate them into your phone and transcribe them later). And don't forget, inspiration can strike you at any time. Make sure you have an easy way to capture those epiphanies – you'll be surprised how fast they slip your mind if you don't take notes then and there.



Set Weekly Deadlines

It's prudent to create a goal for yourself. Some people prefer word count goals, and others page goals. The bottom line is to set a short-term objective, so you don't fall behind. This also lets you celebrate the small wins, boosting your confidence that this can be done! You'll still be able to gauge how much more you have, and it gives a benchmark to shoot for every week. Plus, the more weekly goals you meet, the closer you are to meeting your commitment to shipping this to your publisher on time.





The Agony of Writer's Block

Are you stuck (the dreaded "writer's block")? Just keep writing. It is better to write ten pages and discard most of them than to write nothing. Most authors write and rewrite passages repeatedly – you are not alone if you do this. Write anytime! Dictate into your phone or tablet. Write or dictate while at the gym, on the bus, or in your leisure time. There are a million opportunities to write – don't make excuses! Let your thoughts flow freely. You can always edit them later. It is better to have words on a page and later remove some than to have none.

If you find yourself staring at the same page for a long time, walk away. Take a stroll around your neighborhood, go to the gym, a movie, or any- where, but change your scenery and return to it later. Just like the saying "a watched pot never boils," so too will a watched page never write itself!

Mind Bender Exercise 1

If you're still stuck, use word association to help you see patterns and use words you may never have thought of. One trick is to pick a random word out of the dictionary. Then try to see unconventional uses for that word or how that word somehow relates to what you're trying to write.

For example, take the word "screen." Beyond the typical usage of it, how can that connect, or dare we say, mesh with what you're trying to say? It's the framework of our language and singular definitions that people can often get stuck in a pattern when writing. The holes in your story can be filled with unique verbiage by just looking at a word or situation through another window.

Don't suffer from functional fixedness; see things in a different light. We don't want to throw shade, but hopefully, you noticed some simple words that we related to the word "screen" in these last two paragraphs. See if you



How to Get the Best Out of Yourself

Do you have a rhythm for writing? Some people are very scheduled and regimented with their writing; others simply write when ideas come to them.

There is no right or wrong – just write. Whatever system works for you is the best system in the world! But try to stay committed. And if you can be consistent – try to establish a pattern, or at least develop a cadence when writing. Every other day or every third day. Scheduling time can often help block other things that may interfere with your creative process. Stay dedicated to whatever pattern you’ve established. It creates a habit, and habits become rituals. Rituals soon become completed manuscripts!

Set goals for yourself. This will keep you on track and prevent your book from taking two years to complete. To help you stay on track, we’ve created printable templates for you. You’ll find them at the end of this guide.

Use Your Past Experiences – Visualize places you have been, people you have met, and events that impacted you or others to help your writing be as descriptive as you need it to be. The colors you remember, smells you recollect, sounds you recall – these can all assist you with scene description and lead you down a path to excellent writing.

Don’t Try to Write Like Someone Else- Be yourself and write the way your mind naturally leads you to write. Don’t try to imitate someone else’s style – the best writing comes from authenticity.

Mind Bender Exercise 2

Think of events or stories you've witnessed – the best stories come from within but embellish! What might have been a simple story about the time someone backed into your car could become either a harrowing experience that led you down a dark path or a hilarious situation that you still regale people with at parties.

We like to say it's not the story, it's the storyteller. Exaggerate, use hyperbole, and play the "what could have happened if" game. These are great ways to add punch to even an everyday occurrence.

Mind Bender Exercise 3

Stream of consciousness – a lot of us learned this in high school. It may have been called "free-writing" when you grew up. You have five minutes, start with a blank page, and just write (or type) whatever comes to mind.

William Faulkner did this every day. His *The Sound and Fury*, considered a masterpiece by many, employs the narrative style of stream of consciousness in several chapters.

While we don't think most authors will want to publish their random thoughts, we believe it's a great way to elicit some good ideas for your book. Let your brain loose, you'll be surprised what you come up with. Think of it as author meditation!

More Tips for Getting Started

Still not sure how to get started? Here are some other deas to jumpstart your writing skills:

- Find writing groups in your area. There are usually several writing groups in big cities and at least one or two even in smaller burgs. If you can't find an in-person writing group, there are plenty on Facebook and other social media platforms. Look for groups and clubs, and you may even find a simpatico group with the genre you're working with.
- Take a creative writing class. Many writing courses are available at local community colleges, high school extension courses, or community centers.
- Read and write daily. Stephen King says he does this 4-6 hours a day.
- Go to book clubs. This forces you to read a variety of books, some maybe you wouldn't read on your own. This widens your perspective of writing styles and allows you to grow as a writer.

What is scaring you? Is it the fear of being criticized? Is it the fear of not finishing? The fear of success? Many writers dream of getting published for years and then fear sets in once the opportunity presents itself. This is the final test, they think. It is not – the final hurdle will be whether you achieve your goal of getting published. If you manage to accomplish that – the next step would be to get your book professionally published and made available to readers everywhere. Then you have succeeded and achieved what you wanted to. Whether your book is commercially successful from this point forward is irrelevant – you did what you set out to do – to become a published author! Remember, you're only a writer until you become published. Only then are you an actual author. It is a feat that is never attained by most people – be proud – be very proud! Be courageous.

Mind Bender Exercise 4

Play the “What If” Game – Once you have developed your characters and your story outline, play what if this happened – what would occur with your character and story universe? This expands your initial thoughts about what the story and characters are all about. It may provide impetus to go in another direction or may confirm your original story development is on point.

Example of this game:

Your main character is a loner. But what if that character gets married? How would that expand your story? How many additional characters would that generate? Could one of those characters be an antagonist you hadn't planned on? Fun, right?



The Importance of Writing a Good Hook

The Age of Instant Gratification - Many experts will tell you that because of today's instant gratification and how books are sold online with readers only looking at the sample pages, there is now a real need to capture your audience quickly. Otherwise, readers might not purchase your book at all. The best way to do that is the tried-and-true opening lines or "hook."

Shock and Awe – One great way to suck your readers in involves something so shocking or intriguing the reader has to know what happens next. You need only to look at the Bible, the most sold book in the world, to see how this can work: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light." How can one not be dragged into what happens next?

Ok, so maybe the Bible isn't your type of opening hook. How about Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness..." We dare you to put the book down after that opening hook.

Start in Medias Res – This is a widespread practice of beginning a story by plunging readers into a critical situation that is part of a related chain of events. It can start in a moment of confusion, intrigue, mystery, or some other jolting fashion. And yes, this is typically more than a one-line opener. The story can unfold, or the author can bring you back on the journey before you reach the opening destination by explaining how you got here. Either way, all will be clarified after this captivating opening, which works like a charm.

A recent example of medias res usage is in the best-selling book *Little Fires Everywhere* by Celeste Ng, which starts with: “Everyone in Shaker Heights was talking about it that summer: how Isabelle, the last of the Richardson children, had finally gone around the bend and burned the house down.” Oh my, that’s going to pull us in! Not just us, it pulled in millions of readers as well. Why did she do it? And why is she the “last of the Richardson children?” What happened to the others?

Use Humor – So it’s tough to write humor and be effective. But as an opening, it can set the mood, storyline, or establish a character quickly. We know who and what we’re going to get in this book! And it doesn’t have to be a comical book to use this literary device. Take the *Catcher in the Rye*, an all-time masterpiece by J.D. Salinger, which is more about establishing the character than really humor for humor’s sake.

“If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you’ll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don’t feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth.”

The story then develops, and the ending points back to this storytelling/letter-writing idea Salinger started with. He establishes a constantly recurring theme. Holden is tired of all the pointless and petty things humans do between birth and death, and he cannot see the point of life.

Catcher in the Rye is more satire than funny, you think? How about this one from author WH Manville's book, *Breaking Up*: "I don't know how other men feel about their wives walking out on them, but I helped mine pack." Get the point here? Humor can create or set the tone for the entire work. Tread carefully.

Foreboding and Tension – Depending on the genre, this can work well. A mystery, adventure, or thriller can start with a murder or a body being found. Have you seen the *Law & Order* TV series in the last 30+ years? The same concept applies. This technique helps the new author develop the story chronologically. First, introduce the murder, then take the reader on a literary journey throughout the rest of the book, using the main characters as tent posts to figure out whodunnit.

A perfect example of a foreboding and tension combined opener was, *I Know What You Did Last Summer*, by the late author, Lois Duncan. She hit the nail on the head with the opening line, "The note was there, lying beside her plate when she came down for breakfast." Oh, you'll read on.

Mood Tone Setter – Like the humor technique – the mood-setting writing device will quickly transport the reader into the literary milieu. In short, it will tell the reader this is the kind of book you are about to read. The first sentence of a novel doesn't necessarily need to focus on your protagonist or a central character. George R. R. Martin's *A Game of Thrones* is a good example. It starts with dialogue, "We should start back,' Gared urged, as the woods began to grow dark around them. 'The wildlings are dead.'" Obviously, danger is afoot. Read on, my fellow book lover, read on.

Perhaps an even better example of what you're about to get into as a reader is George Orwell's *1984*, "It was a bright cold day in April, and all the clocks were striking thirteen." As a reader, you understand that something is amiss. Yes, we're in the same environment, but something isn't adding up. The clock striking 13? Is that number on purpose – it's unlucky in most cultures. Something ominous is happening. Let's go on this ride and see what happens next!

The Path to Getting Published



Legacy Publishing

In the old days (15 years ago), there was only one route for an author to get published: beg one of the legacy publishers (most are gone now) to consider your book for publication. While a handful of these publishers remain, the odds of them reviewing your book and considering it for publication are close to zero. Most will return the book to you with a warning that they “do not review unsolicited manuscripts,” while others will not even have the courtesy to return your book. These few remaining legacy publishers tend to publish only those books that they know are virtually guaranteed to sell well (i.e., famous authors with a proven track record of previous book sales). There is no harm in trying to submit your book to these companies, as long as your expectations are realistic, and you understand the odds you face.



Pure Self-Publishing

This is an excellent option for authors who are talented writers but need help in particular areas like professional editing, typesetting, page layout, cover design, illustrations for children’s books, publicity, printing, distribution and formatting of books into eBook and even getting an audiobook narrated. Very few people have all these resources at their disposal, but if you are fortunate enough and can organize and project manage all these things, this route is for you.

By going this route, you are not just the author but also the seller, printer, editor, and marketer. So you are a writer and businessperson rolled into one. There are services that can help you find each specialty, so you don’t have to do it all. It takes

a lot of work and organization, however – finding a printer, applying to the various distribution outlets to list your book for sale, converting it to an eBook or audiobook if you wish to sell digital editions (which you should, since these editions make up a considerable portion of sales), but the big advantage is you get to keep almost all of the royalties if you go this way (and you retain complete creative control and ownership).



Hybrid Self-Publishing

A hybrid (or independent) self-publisher is usually willing to review your book. There is no guarantee that they will accept it for publication, but they will give you a fair chance. If your book is accepted, a hybrid publisher will, for a fee, handle the management and take your book from rough manuscript to finished product available in major retail outlets and online. Essentially, a few of these hybrid publishers can handle all services listed in the “pure self-publishing” option above. The responsibility of finding and managing the various publishing services transfers from you with the pure self-publishing mode, to the hybrid publisher. But, like most things, you have to pay a fee for this white glove service. The great thing about this option is that you get the high-quality finished product and full-scale worldwide distribution typically only seen from legacy publishing while keeping complete creative control, complete ownership, and a majority of the royalties!

How and What to Send to Publishers

01 A Completed Manuscript

We recommend you never send a publisher an incomplete manuscript. In fact, we don't think you should even try calling a publisher until your manuscript is ready. This accomplishes two things. First, it shows the publisher you're a serious author who has dotted all the I's and crossed all the T's. Secondly, publishers won't look at incomplete manuscripts. They don't want treatments or a synopsis. A summary of your story is not adequate and should never be sent! Be complete, prepared, and organized, and the likelihood of publishing success is much greater!

02 Send Proper Format

A Microsoft Word file is preferable to a PDF, but a PDF is acceptable for an initial review. A Word document will eventually be needed for editing, assuming the publisher offers editing services. We recommend you only use a publisher that will use The Chicago Manual of Style or another nationally respected English style guide. Your publisher should be able to point out major editing errors in your manuscript. Thus, a Word document is the easiest to work with.

03

How to Send

The best way to send a manuscript is to utilize your publisher's website. Do they have an easy-to-use upload system that you can drag and drop? This ensures you still have your manuscript, and they have a copy to review, edit, and move forward with the process once you feel comfortable with them. Another common way to submit your manuscript to your publisher is via email. Like the upload depository, this provides you and your publisher a copy of the same manuscript from which to work. Finally, you could send a hard copy via mail or courier services. We don't recommend this because the Post Office is not the most reliable, the time lag is longer, and there's a greater risk of your manuscript being lost. We only recommend you send something in the mail if you keep the original and send a copy. But remember that snail mail will delay the review process. NEVER send your only copy to a publisher!



Top 10 Dos and Don'ts (A Recap)

Dos

1. Try to write daily or set a schedule/location and cadence.
2. Write towards a total word count and deadline and have a weekly word count goal. Your weekly plan nicely cascades to your final objective, a finished manuscript!
3. Celebrate the small goals that will motivate you to complete your manuscript on time.
4. Read. Not just what you like, but what others might select in a book club. Expand your horizons.
5. Utilize your past experiences and those of others. Then exaggerate if necessary to make it even more interesting.
6. Use mind-bender games to bring out the writer in you. This will help you unblock the fear of the blank page.
7. Be ready to take notes as inspiration strikes at odd times. Be organized with them.
8. The most challenging part of writing a book is the beginning, middle, and end. So why not establish a great opener to grab your readers' attention?
9. You're a writer, not a designer or marketing genius. Find a publisher that does the heavy lifting after your manuscript is complete.
10. Only submit a completed manuscript to your publisher. No summaries. A digital document like a Word document or PDF is preferred. Be sure to keep your master copy!

Don'ts

1. Don't be afraid – one step, then the next.
2. Don't get caught up in the grammar and syntax and lose the flow of your story and character development. Focus on your story idea, and don't keep starting over.
3. Don't try to write like someone else. Be yourself and write the way your mind works.
4. Don't let writer's block stump you. Use the tricks and tips mentioned here to get past it all.
5. Don't let others interfere with your writing cadence. Establish a routine. If it's too difficult to work in a quiet setting, use noise-canceling headphones to get the job done.
6. Don't worry about perfection on the first pass. Get your ideas on paper. Develop your story and your characters. Then you can go back and revise, edit, and tweak.
7. Don't expect to get picked up by a legacy publisher. They are dinosaurs, and likely won't even read your manuscript. There is a new paradigm shift – hybrid publishing – and that is to your advantage.
8. Don't send an incomplete manuscript or a synopsis of your book to a publisher. You will get nowhere, and it indicates a lack of professionalism.
9. Don't forget to include the value of your time in deciding which option to choose. Some options will require more work on your part, others offer more handholding which alleviates a lot of “busy work” for you.
10. For the love of everything you hold dear, don't send your only manuscript copy in the mail! The preferred method is either a publisher's digital Dropbox or an emailed copy.

Writing Goals

I want to write about: _____

Genre: _____

Target finish date: _____

Writing schedule: _____

Goals: _____



Chapter Outline

Title: _____

Chapter #: _____

Chapter's Purpose: _____

Chapter's Hook : _____

Summary: _____

Goal: _____

Conflict: _____

Resolution: _____



Key details for each scene (you can have 1 scene or up to 24 scenes)

Scene ____ : _____

Scene ____ : _____

Scene ____ : _____

Scene ____ : _____

Scene ____ : _____



Word Count Tracker

Month of: _____ Word Count Goal: _____

Date	Daily Goal	Time Started	Time Finished	Words Written	Goal Met?
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
11					
12					
13					
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19					
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21					
22					
23					
24					



Word Count Tracker

Date	Daily Goal	Time Started	Time Finished	Words Written	Goal Met?
25					
26					
27					
28					
29					
30					
31					

