

52 TIPS TO START WRITING LIKE A BIG DOG

“Playtime is Over.” - *Erika Parsons*

Getting started. That’s the hardest part of writing. I created this sheet to give you some practical nuggets to begin your transformation from wannabe writer to word-slinging wizard. I’m giving you one writing gem that you can use every week for the next year. So, check your self-doubt at the door and remember that you have something valuable to offer your readers. Here’s the catch...you have to write it first, so let’s get to it.

1. Set a writing schedule. Your schedule should allow for at least 30 minutes of writing everyday.
2. Say no to time suckers who want to lure you away from your writing schedule. Set your email auto responder to away and explain when you’ll next be available. Turn off your phone and put a do not disturb sign on your door!
3. Big words can make you seem intellectual, but usually they just make you look like a jerk. If a word has more than three syllables, consider a shorter word.
4. Short-term memory only lasts three minutes. Carry an old school notebook to quickly jot down ideas. And hey, if it was good enough for Hemingway...
5. Practice reading your work out loud. Record yourself and play it back if possible. This is a great editing technique to catch flaws in spelling, skipped or repeated words, sentence structure, dialogue, and rhythm.
6. Avoid jargon. If your reader feels like they are in a Marketing Meeting with Ad Men (unless that is what your prose is about), they will think you are pompous ass.
7. Need a cure for writer’s block? Write a haiku. The simple structure and low word count will get you excited and inspired. Nothing better than instant gratification.
8. Bad ideas are just undeveloped good ideas. Keep a box of bad ideas and when you get stumped, vow to evolve a bad idea into a great piece of work (even if it’s just a haiku.).
9. Do not over or under describe a person or setting. Let the reader discover it through nuances rather than being told. (See my blog: *Show, Don’t Tell.*)
10. Leave out the part of books you yourself would skip. If a paragraph isn’t giving valuable information or advancing the plot, condense, condense, and condense. Nobody likes filler.

11. Make an outline. Architecture is what paces a novel and keeps it moving. Make sure you have identified what happens in the beginning, middle, and end.
12. Write the last chapter first. You can always rewrite it later, but it gives you a clear direction to write to. This technique helps you discover holes in your story. Trust me, it works.
13. If you want to write a typical fiction book, you need to have 80,000-100,000 words. Figure out how soon you want to finish, and then determine your goals and timeline from there.
14. Get feedback from someone you trust and get it early! There is nothing worse than restructuring a whole novel around a boring protagonist after six months because you were scared to let someone read it. Hiring a writing coach is another nifty idea....just saying.
15. Grow a thick skin.
16. Get some organization. Find a process that works for you when shuffling about your notebooks, random jots, and research. Writing is a practice based on structure, so get some. I recommend downloading a free trial of Scrivener if you don't have it already.
17. Joshua Wolf Shenk said, "Have the courage to write badly." Sometimes, you'll get lucky enough to cruise through a draft once and nail it. You could also win the Power Ball. It's possible. But, usually, you'll have to revise a draft 23 times. That's perfectly normal. Don't let it discourage you—just get it done.
18. Make friends with other writers to create your own community of support. It's not an accident that the Modernists and Romantics were prolific AND brilliant. They often bounced ideas off each other.
19. If you get stuck, get up, go for a walk, or meet a friend for a drink. The worst thing you can do is just sit there staring at the page. Don't let yourself fall into that rut.
20. Avoid linear writing. Sometimes Chapter Five will write itself before Chapter Three. Respect the process and go with it. Remember that outline, I mentioned? A strong outline anchors your story to a solid foundation, but allows you the freedom to explore different directions and plot lines.
21. Create your ideal workspace, and then go there to write. Always write there. On occasion, when you are feeling stuck, switch up the environment until you are unstuck, but then go right back to your workspace. It is all part of building discipline and habit, which can only help your writing.
22. Don't forget that like anything you write (email, essay, etc.), the opening line is what draws the reader into your world. If you want the reader to stick with you, make sure you spend time on that opening line. It is your attention getter.

23. Say this phrase to everyone: “I am a writer.” Once you say it out loud, it’s easier to live it. Plus, once you declare it, people will always ask you what you’ve written. It’s deflating to have to sheepishly say, “Nothing”.
24. Normal is boring. Your weird quirks may just be what draws the reader in. Let your Freak Flag Fly!
25. Unsettle or agitate the reader in some places. Keeping your reader’s attention is never a bad thing.
26. Think twice before you use an expletive. Four-letter words have the power to wake up your writing in some cases especially in dialogue, but not in every case. Keep it classy when possible.
27. Use active voice—every piece of good writing needs action.
28. If you overuse adverbs and adjectives; it will feel like you are selling something. Use adverbs and adjectives sparingly and with purpose.
29. Don’t be afraid to kill off main characters.
30. Try free writing (writing without paying attention to grammar or structure) during your first draft. By turning off your left brain (the part that corrects errors), you are able to let your right brain run free like a doe in a field. Of course, go back and catch your edits later.
31. Write about your writing. “Huh?,” you say. “Yep,” I say. Keep a separate journal to reflect on what is working, what isn’t, and your overall feelings about your writing. This will eventually enlighten you on how to set or evolve your writing process and ritual. Plus, you’ll generate practical material to use for a blog someday.
32. Look at each paragraph you write. Circle the first word of each paragraph. How many are the same? Be sure to practice diversity when starting your sentences.
33. Play music that inspires your writing or puts you a mood that matches your setting. Remember setting is place AND time. This will help immerse you in the time and characters of your novel.
34. It might make you look like a crazy person, but I recommend that you dialogue with your characters. Practice talking to them at the bar or a casual dinner. Imagine they are sitting next to you while you drive to the grocery store. What kinds of things would you discuss? Getting to know who your characters are on an intimate level will lead to more authentic and interesting characters.
35. Read grammar and style books. If you are serious about writing, these are your sacred texts. If you can’t commit to learning about form and structure, hire a ghostwriter or hang it up. Writing is work, plain and simple.

36. If you can't write a book, write a short story. If you can't write a short story, write a blog post. If you can't write a blog post, comment on a blog. The idea is to get into the habit of writing. Start where you are and grow from there. That daily writing schedule I talked about? Yeah, I was serious about that.
37. Never write and edit in the same sitting. Always walk away from your writing for a bit before editing. Distance makes the editing go farther!
38. Add more experiences to your life. Now is the time to take that banjo class or learn to snowboard. You will open yourself up to a wider view of the world, topics, and people; thus, more to write about.
39. Play "The Grading Game" on your iPad or tablet. It's wildly addictive, it's free and it will improve your editing skills. Who doesn't like to play professor?
40. November is National Novel Writing Month. Participate by heading over to www.nanowrimo.org. NaNoWriMo is a challenge that forces you to write 50,000-word novel in one month. It also has an entire online writing group structured around it.
41. Get rid of unnecessary expressions like, "With all due respect." Anytime someone says it, in literature or real life, they are usually disrespecting you. And, avoid clichés while you are at it.
42. Write shorter sentences.
43. Don't fear bold statements. Use bold statements like "*Every* writer feels insecure from time to time" instead of wimpy ones like "*Most* writers feel insecure from time to time."
44. Get friendly with relationship words like "You," "We" and "I" to establish a connection you and your reader.
45. Choose a topic that you have a genuine interest in to give your story more heart.
46. Give your protagonist some deeply disturbing characteristics and your antagonist some irresistibly redeeming or endearing values.
47. Show me the excitement instead of using exclamation points.
48. Take the time to consider who your audience is and what you want them to feel or do from your writing. Write accordingly.

49. Semicolons are like mullets; they are hard to pull off. Don't use them unless you know what you're doing.
50. Mix it up. Add humor to a horror, and give your comedy a dose of history.
51. Make reading your new obsession.
52. Constantly study everyone around you as your on-going research project. You'll never run out of our new material for characters and plots.

Congratulations. You've taken an important step toward your new career in creative writing. Visit me at [Erika Parson School of Creative Writing](#) for more tips and writing prompts. Oh, and I'd love to hear how your book is coming along.

