

10 Books That Will Make You a Better Writer

And how they made me better.

[Shaunta Grimes](#)

You have 2 free member-only stories left this month.

Photo by [Kyle Gregory Devaras](#) on [Unsplash](#)

There are books that I really think anyone who wants to be a writer should own.

Read them with a pencil in your hand, so you can mark them up. Keep a notebook handy so you can take notes on the things you really need to implement in your work.

And then (this should go without saying) implement them.

If you learn from Stephen King that your work probably has too many adverbs, open your manuscript, search for -ly words, and see if you can get rid of most of them.

If you learn how to write strong verbs from Renni Browne and Dave King, open your manuscript, search for -ing verbs, and make most of them stronger.

You get my point. Every book on this list is full of things to teach you. Learn from them and then go forth and write

better.

[On Writing](#) by Stephen King

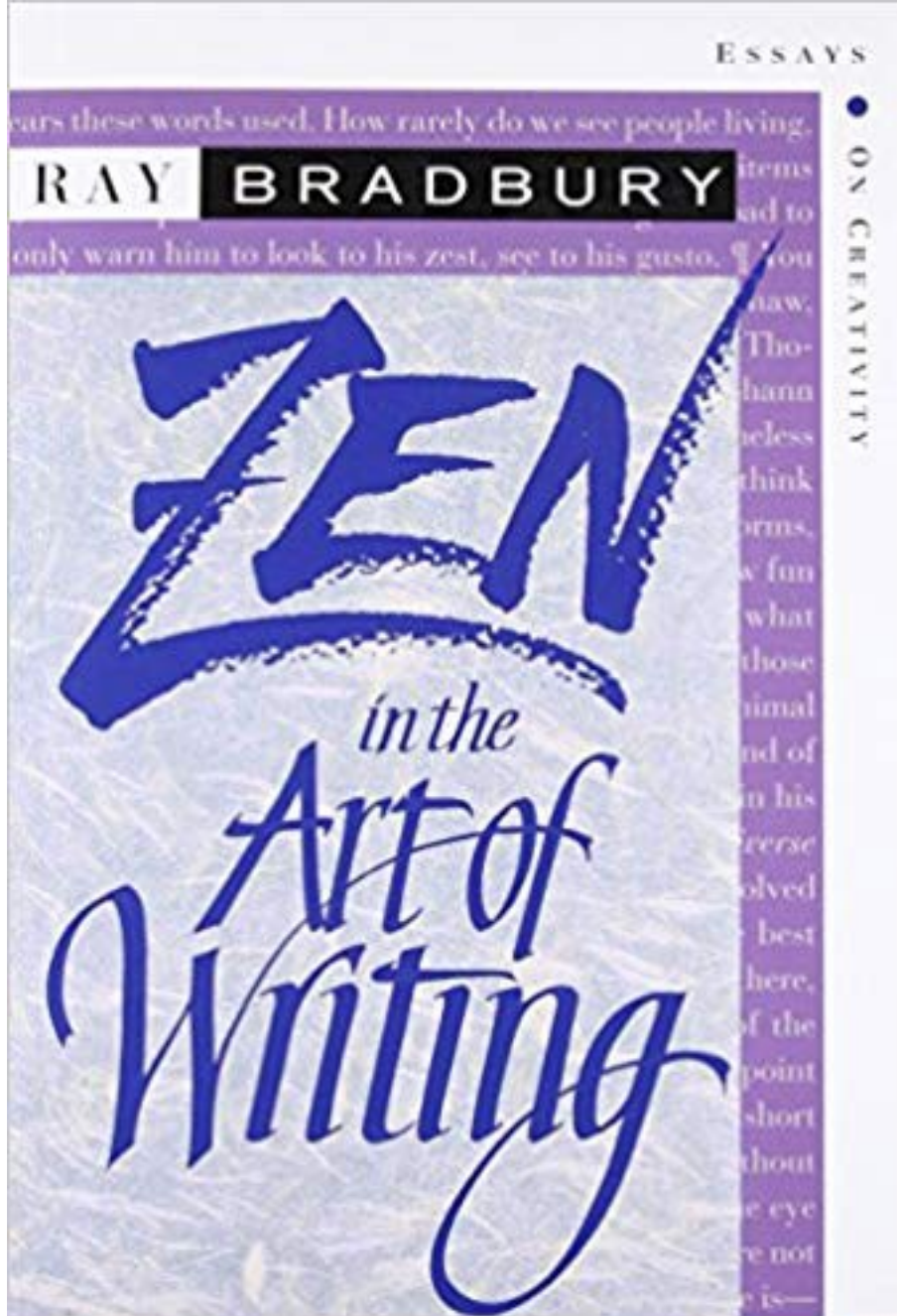
I'm pretty sure *On Writing* is at the top of just about every list of books for writers. It's there for good reason.

Stephen King's slim book is half memoir, half manual.

Both halves are full of advice that will make you a better writer, if you let it.

How it made be a better writer: Stephen King describes a talented writer as someone who writes something, sells it, and uses the money to pay a bill. He helped me to demystify what it means to be a writer, which gave me the confidence to try. Also, there's a section where you can see his editing process that's really helpful. There's also a lot in this book about work ethic.

[Zen in the Art of Writing](#) by Ray Bradbury



I've read this book half a dozen times and I always get something out of it. It's a collection of essays, so you can read just one if you want to. Each one is like sitting down with Bradbury and having him share what he knows with you. How incredible is that?

How it made me a better writer: By far my favorite part of this book is Bradbury's advice to aspiring writers. It boils down to write a lot, read a lot, and learn a lot. Also, watch a lot of movies.

The Writer's Journey by Christopher Vogler

Vogler's book is all about story structure and why we love the stories we love. He dissects classic and popular stories and shows how they fit into a three act structure. It was a game changer for me.

How it made me a better writer: It gave me a deep understanding of how stories are put together and taught me about the beats my stories need to hit. I think most writers, especially if they're big readers, know this stuff intuitively. Having it laid out makes it so much more clear.

Self-Editing for Fiction Writers by Renni Browne and Dave King

Every chapter in this book covers a specific topic. Everything from story structure to dialogue to verb choice. If you take it chapter-by-chapter and implement all of the lessons in your own work, it's like a master class in self-editing.

How it made me a better writer: After I wrote my first novel in 2004, I spent an entire year using this book and going through my whole manuscript over and over, putting what I was learning into action. This book took my writing to another level. And it stayed there. Trust me, after fixing a thousand bad dialogue attributions or weak

verb structures, you won't make the same mistakes in your next novel.

[Just Write! Here's How](#) by Walter Dean Myers

I saw Walter Dean Myers speak at the Vegas Valley Book Festival a few years ago and got to hear from him about his 'pre-writing' process. Myers wrote for children and was a huge advocate for children's literature, so it makes sense that his book on writing is for kids. Trust me, though, you'll get a lot out of it, too. In fact, I think the fact that it's written for kids makes it even better. It pares everything back to just what's important.

How it made me a better writer: This book really cemented for me how important planning my stories is. His 30 scenes exercise was especially important to me.

[The Teenage Liberation Handbook](#) by Grace Llewellyn

Grace Llewellyn's book was written for teenagers who are fed up with school. It's designed to help them talk to their parents about unschooling and, failing success at that, how to take their learning into their own hands. It changed everything I knew about education — for my kids, but also for myself.

This book is out of print, but so worth getting your hands on.

How it made me a better writer: Llewellyn advises going to a library and checking out the children's section for books on subjects and people that interest you. This is some of the best advice I've ever heard. She also helped me to embrace the idea of being an autodidact. Education doesn't have to end when you're 18 or 22 or 24 or ever. She taught me to unschool myself and that has definitely informed my writing.

[The Creative Habit](#) by Twila Tharp

I love everything about this book. If you have any desire to live a more creative life, you must read it.

How it made me a better writer: Tharp's book is all about making creativity a habit. She taught me that I don't have to wait for a muse or the right moment to write. And she has this exercise involving a banker's box that helped me to realize that more goes into my writing than I thought.

[Steal Like an Artist](#) by Austin Kleon

Austin Kleon calls himself an artist who writes. Every time I read his newsletter or pick up one of his books, it's like a booster shot of creative inspiration. Steal Like an Artist is

one of the best books about creativity on the market.

How it made me a better writer: Kleon reminds creatives that we have a whole world full of work to inspire us. He reminded me to really dig into the work of the authors I love. Last year this book gave me the idea to read a story from Ray Bradbury's short story collection every day and it was like a shot in the arm of inspiration.

A Novel You Really Love

It doesn't matter what book you chose, although I encourage you to pick a book in a genre that you want to write. Pick something you're familiar with, that you're not reading for the first time. Read it again, with a pencil in hand. Try to figure out why this book moves you. What is it about it that works so well? How does the character approach things like character and plot? How about craft-level things like transitions and dialogue? Use a novel you really love like a master class.

How it made me a better writer: One of the most important things I learned to do in my MFA program was read like a writer. I learned to read deep and see the mechanics behind the story. This has definitely made me a better writer.

A Novel You Hated

Same idea, only inverted. Choose a book you didn't enjoy.

Maybe something you put down and didn't pick up again. Maybe something you *had* to read in school, but really did not enjoy. And then read it like a writer, with a pencil in your hand. Why are you turned off by it? What do you want to avoid in your own writing?

How it made me a better writer: Again, as part of studying writing and literature, I had to read some books that I didn't really enjoy. A few that I really hated. Reading them deeply helped improve my writing by teaching me about the kind of writer I want to be. This exercise is how I know, for instance, that story is the most important thing to me. Characters matter a lot, but without a strong story, the book falls flat for me.

Shaunta Grimes is a writer and teacher. She is an out-of-place Nevadan living in Northwestern PA with her husband, three superstar kids, two dementia patients, a good friend, Alfred the cat, and a yellow rescue dog named Maybelline Scout. She is the author of [Viral Nation](#) and [Rebel Nation](#) and the upcoming novel [The Astonishing Maybe](#). She is the original [Ninja Writer](#). Follow her on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).