

The 12 Best Writing Tips From Your Favorite Authors

How to be Creative, Beat Procrastination,
Find Your Style, Structure Stories, Plot,
and Develop a Routine

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*"It's the possibility of having a dream
come true that makes life
interesting." — Paulo Coelho*

Are you curious what most writers advice is to aspiring
writers?

I love to dive into the habits and routines of other writers and dissect how they go about their craft.

In the last few months, I've read many books on writing, (writing) biographies, and books on creativity. I read and watched a lot of interviews with famous writers too.

I've collected twelve of the — in my opinion — most profound and interesting tips on the writing process. With these tips, I'm sure you could bring your writing and creativity to the next level.

Are you scared of leading a creative life? Take comfort in the words of Elizabeth Gilbert and Steven Pressfield.

Stephen King and Haruki Murakami will explain to you how to write for yourself first and find your style.

J.K. Rowling can teach you how to structure your story, Ayn Rand how to plot it and Kurt Vonnegut will teach you how to build great characters.

Oh, and the advice most given by famous authors? Paulo Coelho and others will tell you.

1. Paulo Coelho: What's a Story?

"I believe that every human being on this planet has at least one good story to tell his neighbor." — Paulo

Coelho

Coelho believes all people are creative and are inspired constantly. We can't argue with that, can we? The difference is, only some people have the *tools* to express what's inside them and *dare* to share it.

We can all tell a story or anecdote from something we've experienced. A writer, however, uses his gift to tell that story in a compelling way and share it with the world.

Coelho references Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges when he explains what a story is. "*There are only four stories: a love story between two people, a love story between three people, a struggle for power, and the journey.*" I know what you're doing now, you're categorizing the latest stories you've encountered. I did it too, and it fits. I've applied it to [my short stories](#) and it fits.

But how do you tell that story? Coelho mentions Brian Aldiss, a British Science Fiction writer who said: "*There are two types of writers: those who make you think and those who make you dream*". I've never really thought of this before, but I guess I try to make people think about certain issues in my fiction writing.

When I think about *The Alchemist*, however, Coelho did something magical: he did both. At least for me. I dreamed away with the main character and his journey. I

also dreamed and thought about my own journey in life. What I wanted and how to get there. Stories are truly powerful.

The last thing I want to mention in this part about storytelling is something I've come across in the advice of many writers like [Stephen King](#), [J.K. Rowling](#), and [Kurt Vonnegut](#) among others.

"Above all else, the writer has to be a good reader." — Paulo Coelho

If you want to understand storytelling, you have to read a lot. If you want to understand how to tell a story, you have to read a lot. I've never studied literature or English, but I have read piles and piles of books. I truly believe that because of this, I understand how to tell a story.

More tips from Paulo Coelho:

[7 Lessons on Writing and Creativity by Paulo Coelho](#)

[Paulo Coelho's Writing and Creativity Tips Collected](#)

medium.com

2. Elizabeth Gilbert: Have the

Courage to be Creative

“Do you have the courage to bring forth the treasures that are hidden within you?” — Elizabeth Gilbert

In order to conjure up the courage to be creative, you must realize that living a life that is driven more strongly by curiosity than fear is a great one.

Start analyzing the things you're afraid of in pursuing your creative endeavors.

List ways in which you might be afraid to live a more creative life. For me this was:

- Afraid to be rejected/criticized/ridiculed/misunderstood/ignored
- Afraid somebody else already did it better
- Afraid my work isn't politically, emotionally or artistically important enough to change anyone's life
- Afraid I didn't have the right training or degree (I studied business no less!)
- Afraid of being exposed as a hack/fool/narcissist

But there is a saying: *“Argue for your limitations and you get to keep them”*. So please don't.

Don't demand too much of the outcome of your creative

endeavors.

Fear will always show up, especially when you create because with creativity you enter the realms of an uncertain outcome, which fear hates. Know that it doesn't go away. The less you fight it, the less it fights back, according to Elizabeth Gilbert.

Gilbert: "The results of my work don't have much to do with me. [...] Recognizing that reality — that the reaction doesn't belong to you — is the only sane way to create.

Maybe I won't always be successful at my creativity, but the world won't end because of that."

The best way for me to ignore my fears is to write for myself first. And it's true, the more you expose your work to others, the more confident you become. The only problem is we'd like to experience that before we even begin. Alas, that's not possible.

If you love doing it, find the courage.

If you're still afraid, start with approaching someone you trust first to read your story, listen to your jokes, hear you sing or anything else done with your creativity.

More tips from Elizabeth Gilbert:

[**Create Better Art by Following the**](#)

[Lessons from Elizabeth Gilbert](#)

[Eat, Create, Love. Five lessons from the book Big Magic.](#)

[medium.com](#)

3. Steven Pressfield: How to Beat Procrastination

“Procrastination is the most common manifestation of Resistance because it’s the easiest to rationalize. We don’t tell ourselves, “I’m never going to write my symphony.” Instead we say, “I am going to write my symphony; I’m just going to start tomorrow.”— Steven Pressfield

The most pernicious aspect of procrastination is that it can become a habit. We don’t just put off our lives today; we put them off till our deathbed.”

It’s not until we sit down and actually do the work that we are able to create. **We create by doing, not by dreaming of doing.** Sounds simple, right?

Then why is it often so damn difficult to do this? Why do we rather occupy ourselves with mundane tasks or mindless scrolling just not to create? Why do we resist it so much?

FEAR. Fear of failure, fear of producing something unworthy.

If we fail, we create an opportunity to learn. If we create something unworthy, we have exercised. Next time we just need to increase the weights.

By doing, we can change our lives. We can create whatever we want. There's no right moment. There's just doing.

How to overcome procrastination in terms of writing:

- **Set goals:** How many articles do you want to produce per month, per week? How many words do you have to write per day to finish the first draft of that 80,000-word novel?
- **Schedule:** Calculate and allocate your work according to your goals. Break them into weekly and daily goals. Carve out time in your calendar. Get up earlier if you have to — especially if you are “writing on the side”. Writing first thing in the morning has enabled me to consistently produce at least 1,000 words per day.
- **Measure:** Have you succeeded, did you reach your weekly and monthly goals? If not, what can you

improve to actually attain them?

- **Celebrate:** Reached your goal? Celebrate. Relax. Go out. Have fun. Live.

More tips from Steven Pressfield:

[4 Ways to Conquer Resistance, Procrastination and Fear in Writing](#)

[Lessons From the War of Art by Steven Pressfield](#)

[medium.com](#)

4. Stephen King: Write for Yourself First

*“When you’re writing a story, you’re telling yourself a story. When you rewrite, you’re taking out all the things that are not the story.” —
Stephen King*

Write with the door closed, rewrite with the door open.

Stephen actually learned this lesson himself from his boss and editor John Gould at his job writing for Lisbon’s Weekly Newspaper.

Don't let anyone or anything interfere while you first channel and write down your story. Let it come to you on its own without judgment, without even looking through a particular lens. Be objective. Then, when you've finished the first draft of any story, it's time to put on some different glasses and rewrite with an open mind.

More tips from Stephen King:

[12 Lessons on Writing by Stephen King](#)

[What I Learned from Reading the Master of Suspense's Memoir](#)

medium.com

5. Haruki Murakami: How to Find Your Style

"You must use the language you're most capable in to your advantage, turn it into a weapon and describe the things which appear to you most clearly, using the words that suit you best." — Haruki Murakami

When Murakami started his writing, he disliked his Japanese prose and felt something was off. He then decided to write in English, but he was far from fluent. Now he had to use only the words at his disposal to express what he wanted, he found this a very efficient method. This is how his style and rhythm was created.

He realized he didn't need to use difficult words or styles to say what he wanted to say. I couldn't agree more with his findings. Recently, I've [published an article about how you can optimize your writing toolbox](#). Language, grammar, and style are a part of that toolbox.

Use the words that you know and tell a story the way you would tell yourself or a friend. Especially when writing a first draft, don't stress about your vocabulary or grammar. You can polish later.

Haruki Murakami is a type of writer who writes for himself first, *"you can't please everyone, so better please yourself."* This is true for me as well. And as long as I am enjoying it, I continue. Besides, if I enjoy it, there's a reason to believe that there might be others out there who might do too.

More tips from Haruki Murakami:

[Haruki Murakami's Lessons on Writing and Leading a Writer's Life](#)

["The world seems dull, but in fact, it's filled](#)

[with magical and mysterious rough gemstones. The novelist is equipped...](#)

[medium.com](#)

6. Charles Bukowski: On Inspiration and Creativity

"I figure if I can't write under all circumstances, then I'm just not good enough to do it." — Charles Bukowski

Bukowski's: "So You Want to Be a Writer?"

If you want to be a writer or do anything creative, Bukowski has a clear message to you: *"if it doesn't come bursting out of you in spite of everything, don't do it."* It's blunt, but he has a point doesn't he? You must love creating completely, no matter what.

Bukowski is a no-nonsense writer. He doesn't talk about inspiration or muses.

"The writing arrives when it wants to. There is nothing you can do about it. You can't squeeze more writing out of the living than is there. Any attempt to do so creates a panic in the soul, diffuses and jars the line."

But fear not: we don't have to wait for inspiration to strike in order to write. Even Bukowski wasn't superhuman. In another interview, he says the following: *"Even though I had no story in my mind, you sit down, you type the first line, and it just goes. But mostly, you can't force it. Somebody told me once of somebody who writes eight hours a day. Now that stuff's gotta be bad. That's pure panic. Too much."*

I can relate to what Bukowski is saying here. When I don't feel inspired but want to stay in my habit of writing every day, I want to avoid starting. It's like postponing to go to the gym, even though you know you feel better afterward. But when I sit down and type that first line, it comes. And often it's good enough to keep the story flowing. I can always polish later.

*"The diffusion of talent usually occurs among writers in their twenties who don't have enough experience, who don't have enough meat to pick off the bone. **You can't write without living and writing all the time is not living.** Nor does drinking create a writer or brawling create a writer, and although I've done plenty of both, it's merely a fallacy and a sick romanticism to assume that these actions will make a better writer out of one."* — Charles Bukowski

I especially like the line I made bold here. You have to live

and experience life in order to write. **Only then can you figure out what it is you want to say to the world.**

When Bukowski was asked to give advice to novice writers and poets, he says: *"He should stay the hell out of writing classes and find out what's happening around the corner."*

More tips from Charles Bukowski:

[Maverick Writer Charles Bukowski's Lessons on Writing and Living](#)

["Old writer puts on sweater, sits down, leers into computer screen and writes about life. How holy can we get?" —...](#)

[medium.com](#)

7. Ernest Hemingway: Setting Healthy Writing Goals

Hemingway: "The most important thing I've learned about writing is never write too much at a time... Never pump yourself dry. Leave a little for the next day. The main thing is to know when to stop. Don't wait till you've written yourself out. When you're still going good and you come to an interesting place and you know what's going to happen next, that's the time to stop. Then leave it alone and don't think about it; let

your subconscious mind do the work.

The next morning, when you've had a good sleep and you're feeling fresh, rewrite what you wrote the day before. When you come to the interesting place and you know what is going to happen next, go on from there and stop at another high point of interest. That way, when you get through, your stuff is full of interesting places and when you write a novel you never get stuck and you make it interesting as you go along."

I don't have much to add to this other than the fact that this really works. Leave some of your juice at the table for the next day. It will help you get back in quicker and without the devil called procrastination blocking your creative energy. You have a starting point every day.

Hemingway tried to produce a certain amount of words per day. If you have read any of my articles, you've noticed that this piece of advice has been given by countless talented and successful authors. Hemingway was beyond happy when he produced 1000–2000 words a day, but he knows it was not always possible. He stated that he would even be happy with 600 or 300 words which were well done.

So, don't be so hard on yourself with your writing goals. I aim to produce 1,000 words per day, but this doesn't happen every day. Writing 300 words is still

progress!

More tips from Ernest Hemingway:

[Ernest Hemingway's Lessons on Writing](#)

[7 Tips to Improve Your Writing and Creativity](#)

writingcooperative.com

8. Anne Lamott: The Shitty First Draft

"You need to start somewhere. Start by getting something — anything — down on paper. A friend of mine says that the first draft is the down draft — you just get it down. The second draft is the up draft — you fix it up. You try to say what you have to say more accurately. And the third draft is the dental draft, where you check every tooth, to see if it's loose or cramped or decayed, or even,

God help us, healthy.” — Anne Lamott

I love to just go with it. Whenever I have my daily appointment with my muse, I just type. I don't care about spelling, grammar or prose. I only care about the story that comes out and the journey my characters are being taken on. YOU JUST NEED TO GET SOMETHING DOWN ON PAPER. You can fix it in a second draft (and a third, fourth, etc.). Polish later.

In the book, Anne talks about perfectionism as the voice of the oppressor. Perfectionism can be your enemy when you get lost in the details. It is your obstacle in finishing the first draft. It can get in the way of playful writing. Make a mess, clean up later. You'll be more likely to discover interesting new directions and insights with your story and characters if you let loose. And hey, your first draft is just for you. So only please yourself as your first reader.

More tips from Anne Lamott:

[7 Lessons Learned About Writing from Bird by Bird by Anne Lamott](#)

[Lessons About the Craft, the Basics and the Creative Process of Writing](#)

9. J.K Rowling: How to Structure Your Writing

*“Yes, I plan a lot and usually in **table form**. In the case of the present novel, I had the idea for the plot in 2013, but its undergone huge revisions since then.” — J.K. Rowling*

Rowling is known for being a thorough planner. When I read “[Harry Potter: A Journey Through a History of Magic](#)”, a whole new world opened up to me. In the book, one of her tables is shared for “The Order of the Phoenix”.



Image for post

From the book "Harry Potter: A Journey Through a History of Magic", Bloomsbury.

The planner in me jumped from joy. This is what I needed for my novel too! Simple and elegant. **I keep referring back to it in order to keep up with the plot points of my story.**

Another interesting thing about J.K. Rowling's writing habit is that she prefers to write in longhand first and then types up her story afterward.

This sounds so romantic, but I've found it's not for me. I like the fact that **I can edit as I write.** To move words around, copy, paste or delete.

I use [Scrivener](#) to write my novel. It's a great tool to organize the mess in my head. Ideas, chapters, characters, places, research and everything else are structurally organized in one document. Bye-bye Word. (To be fair: I still use Word for blog posts and short stories).

The only time I manually write is when I write down ideas, but I must say I prefer to use digital apps for this too.

More tips from J.K. Rowling:

[8 Lessons on Writing by J.K. Rowling](#)

[J.K. Rowling's Writing Tips and Tricks Collected](#)

[medium.com](#)

10. Ayn Rand: How to Develop a Good Plot

"A plot is the purposeful progression of events. Such events must be logically connected, each being the outgrowth of the preceding and all leading up to the final climax. I stress

the words events because you can have a purposeful progression of ideas, or of conversations, without action. But a novel is a story about human beings in action.” — Ayn Rand

Devise obstacles for your character. According to Rand *“the worse you can make it, the better dramatically”*.

“The essence of plot structure is: struggle — therefore, conflict — therefore, climax. A struggle implies two opposing forces in conflict, and it implies a climax. The climax is the central point of the story, where the conflict is resolved.” — Ayn Rand

Stories reflect on aspects of our own lives. Nothing ever goes the way we want it. Something always gets in our way. Who or what gets in the way of your main character? What hurdles do they need to overcome to get from point A to B? I don't mean going from place A to B (although you can do this of course). I mean how do they get from state A to B? Conflict between characters creates progress in a story.

Plot-theme

“The plot-theme is the focus of the means of

presenting the theme.” — Ayn Rand

I'd never heard of this prior to reading the book. However, it makes sense. The plot functions as a means to carry out your theme and in essence what it is you have to say. The plot-theme is an action in relation to your theme.

Again, Rand gives the reader two examples of plot-themes:

- For *Atlas Shrugged*: the mind on strike.
- For *Les Misérables*: the struggle of an ex-convict to avoid the persecution of the police.

“The plot-theme is the central conflict that determines the events of a plot. It is the seed enabling you to develop a whole plot structure.” — Ayn Rand

The best way to formulate your plot-theme is to look for a central conflict that you want to present in your story. Look for one that's not merely one-sided, it must be complex enough to make constructing a story possible. Above all, there must be a conflict of values. An example she gives is for *Notre Dame de Paris*: the priest being in love with a gypsy dancer.

The Climax

“The climax is that event or development within a story where all the struggles of the characters are resolved. Naturally, it comes near the end; how near

depends on the nature of the story.” — Ayn Rand

The climax of your story should resolve the central conflict you presented. It should resolve all conflicts, don't leave anything open. You must examine the final choices of your characters and their consequences. Sometimes, you can dive into the consequences of your resolutions too. As a way to conclude your story. Rand suggests you should figure out your climax first when you construct your plot. (She is definitely a fan of “outlining” or “plotting”).

More tips from Ayn Rand:

[5 Lessons on Writing by Ayn Rand](#)

[Ayn Rand's writing tips on theme, plot, characterization and style.](#)

[medium.com](#)

11. Kurt Vonnegut: How to Build Great Characters

“When I used to teach creative writing, I would tell the students to make their characters want something right away—even if it's only

a glass of water. Characters paralyzed by the meaningless of modern life still have to drink water from time to time.” — Kurt Vonnegut

This is perhaps one of his most famous quotes. It's great advice on [developing characters](#).

Think about it. You want something at this very moment too. Hopefully to continue reading this article. We constantly want something in life. Since characters are designed to portray human beings in stories, they should too. Plus it creates incentives for them to move along in the story. It advances the plot.

Vonnegut: “Be a sadist. No matter how sweet and innocent your leading characters, make awful things happen to them—in order that the reader may see what they are made of.”

Now you can go in many directions with this. Any Game of Thrones fan knows that the author George R.R. Martin has awful things happen to his lead characters. However, going through trials, pain and grief will show a reader what a character is made of.

People relate to (certain) kinds of pain because we all suffer from time to time. And reading allows us to shortly escape into the mind of someone else and see

the world through a different lens than our own, only to grow from it.

Vonnegut: "Every sentence must do one of two things-reveal character or advance the action."

This one is pretty self-explanatory but perhaps Vonnegut's best tip on writing out there. It's a great tool to edit your story too. Cut out the stuff that doesn't advance the story.

More tips from Kurt Vonnegut:

[Kurt Vonnegut's Lessons on Writing And Life](#)

[5 Lessons on Writing and 5 Lessons on Life From a Creative Genius](#)

[medium.com](#)

12. Ray Bradbury: How to Develop a Writing Habit

"How to climb the tree of life, throw rocks at yourself, and get down again without breaking your bones of your spirit." — Ray Bradbury

Bradbury states he wrote at least a thousand words a day every day from the age of twelve on. *"For ten years I wrote at least one short story a week, somehow guessing that a day would finally come when I truly got out of the way and let it happen."*

I've come across this piece of advice in many forms. Most notably from [Stephen King](#) too. When I first read it a little over half a year ago, I've applied it immediately. This has proven to be one of the most important writing habits I've followed up on. It's resulted in a huge spike in my output.

Of course, you must be willing to write something down which is imperfect. Cram it down and see your story move forward.

Because of this, I'm now at about 60% of my novel, hitting at least 100,000 words already. (I know, I have to do some serious cutting... but it's Fantasy after all).

Bradbury: "I'm accustomed, you see, to getting up every morning running to the typewriter, and in an hour I've created a world. I don't have to wait for anyone. I don't have to criticize anyone. It's done. All I need is an hour, and I'm ahead of everyone. The rest of the day I can goof off. I've already done a thousand words this morning; so if I want to have a two or three-hour lunch, I can have it, because I've already beat everyone."

This is it. This is me too. The accomplishment felt at 8.30

in the morning is immense. I've written 500–1,000 words before my workday begins!

Naturally, I don't manage to write every day (I'm human), but I usually hit six days a week. That's about 4,000–6,000 words a week! That's half a chapter.

Bradbury: "For I believe that eventually quantity will make up for quality. Quantity gives experience. From experience alone can quality come. [...] To fail is to give up. But you are in the midst of a moving process. nothing fails then. All goes on. Work is done. If good, you learn from it. If bad, you learn even more. Work done and behind you is a lesson to be studied. There is no failure unless one stops. Not to work is to cease, tighten up, become nervous and therefore destructive of the creative process."

More tips from Ray Bradbury:

[Ray Bradbury's Tips on Writing and Creativity](#)

[5 Lessons from 'Zen in the Art of Writing'](#)

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