

Sundays with Stephen King's "On Writing"

[Scott Myers](#)

A series featuring reflections on writing from the famed writer's memoir.



Stephen King

I had not read Stephen King's memoir *On Writing* for several years when it occurred to me to do so again. While at it, why not share reflections from the renowned writer in a weekly Sunday series at Go Into The Story?

King is a prolific author. Fair to say that is an understatement. One need only glance at a roster of his [written works](#) to determine that. If any contemporary writer has earned the right to reflect on the craft, it would be King. However, that is not the motivation he had in

writing his memoir. This excerpt from the 'First Foreword' of *On Writing* explains the genesis of the book, a fateful exchange with Amy Tan, fellow writer and member of an authors' charity rock music group [The Remainders](#).

One night while we were eating Chinese before a gig in Miami Beach, I asked Amy if there was any one question she was *never* asked during the Q-and-A that follows almost every writer's talk — that question you never get to answer when you're standing in front of a group of author-struck fans and pretending you don't put your pants on one leg at a time like everyone else. Amy paused, thinking it over very carefully, and miss said: "No one ever asks about the language."

I owe an immediate debt of gratitude to her for saying that. I had been playing with the idea of writing a little book about writing for a year or more at that time, but had held back because I didn't trust my own motivations — *why* did I want to write about writing? What made me think I had anything worth saying?

The easy answer is that someone who has sold as many books of fiction as I have must have *something* worthwhile to say about writing it, but the easy answer isn't always the truth. Colonel Sanders sold a hell of a lot of fried chicken, but I'm not sure anyone wants to know how he made it. If I was going to be presumptuous enough to tell people how to write, I felt there had to be a better reason than my popular success. Put another way,

I didn't want to write a book, even a short one like this, that would leave me feeling like a literary gasbag or a transcendental asshole. There are enough of those books — and those writers — on the market already, thanks.

But Amy was right: nobody ever asks about the language. They ask the DeLillos and the Updikes and the Styrons, but they don't ask popular novelists. Yet many of us proles also care about the language, in our humble way, and care passionately about the art and craft of telling stories on paper. What follows is an attempt to put down, briefly and simply, how I came to the craft, what I know about it now, and how it's done. It's about the day job; it's about the language.

My intention is similar to the [Sundays with Ray Bradbury series](#): Each week as I re-read King's memoir, print notable excerpts at Go Into The Story to inspire our creativity and conversation about the craft.

Here are links to the individual Sunday articles as I add to them each week:

1. [This is a short book because most books about writing are filled with bullshit.](#)
2. [I believe large numbers of people have at least some talent as writers and storytellers, and that those talents can be strengthened and sharpened.](#)
3. [The pain was brilliant, like a poisonous inspiration.](#)

This is one of the most popular books on writing and I'm

excited to share it with Go Into The Story readers, excerpt by excerpt, week by week. Let's see what we can learn in our collective reading of *On Writing*.

[Stephen King's website](#)

Twitter: @StephenKing