

Some Tips for New Writers

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1. Understatement is preferable to overstatement, for, as Aristotle says, overstatements tend to be tiresome. Hyperbole is an exception, but even here something to be used with great care.
2. Say only what you need to say, and do not be afraid to cut out what you have written. When it comes to writing and expressing something, less is generally better.
3. Have an ear to things like sound, rhythm and color when possible. Why not making reading more enjoyable to the reader, by this kind of literary device; if this is possible and not too great an inconvenience?
4. Consider your audience, who you are addressing, and what possible effects or ends you hope to achieve. List both if need be. If you are not quite sure whom your audience is or should be, write as though you were addressing a friend, as say in a letter, though perhaps in a more formal and less immediately familiar manner.
5. If writing a longer work, set up for your piece an outline based on the overall, logical conception +you initially bring to it; and organize notes from readings, and your own personal jottings which you have accumulated into such sections you have created. This process may need to be repeated, perhaps sections further resorted and sequenced, before you achieve a satisfactory result. Retain in mind that the outline itself is an important layer of expression; is itself a message, for which reference can indirectly be made to in particular parts of your text.
6. Find ways to improve your vocabulary, and use new words and arrangements of words to rephrase something you've already said. Keep a list that you regularly add to as new words come your way.
7. One can have a meaningful thought or feeling. Yet sometimes, since it cannot be properly expressed in a manner suitable or appropriate to our audience's understanding, it is better left unsaid. At the same time, sometimes by saying nothing we are actually saying something. Reflect then on what you are *not* saying, and know that it is possible to say what you want to say by not saying it. Also perhaps consider suggesting or implying something by creating an obvious or logical context for it.
8. Think of not wasting people's time. Don't burden them with listening to you if what you have to say is not really that important or else is better left said elsewhere and by someone else.
9. Be strict with yourself in writing down good ideas when they come to you; especially when you are lazy and don't feel like doing so. Otherwise such ideas may be lost to you forever.
10. Thoughts and sentiments which mean the same (or much the same thing) can yet be worded in either an affirmative or negative manner. This is known as litotes: as in "best drummer" versus say

“least worst drummer,” or “I love you” versus “you are the person I least dislike;” with many variations of course possible. Which form of expression you use sometimes depends on the effect you desire to achieve.

11. *Respecting music and verse.* A song is more easily written after the notated music or extemporized is composed. Crudely, but correctly put, you can just fit words into the music. However, interestingly, and in a quite different manner, a) composed and notated or b) extemporaneous music can be made to fit already written words or verse, observing at the same time that a) and b) themselves are significantly different (forms of musical construction), with there no doubt being a c), or combination of the two possible.

12. In poetry and song, something that sounds good --like a rhyme -- can justify itself; even though the meaning expressed otherwise is not terribly profound or even logical. Sound, in such instances then, is permitted to override sense in importance. Only don't think of doing this in prose. And even if it is a poem or a song seek, nevertheless, to bring meaning or sense to the rhyme say by creating an obvious, or else very suggestive, context for it. In any event, better to write with your ears than your eyes.

13. If you can describe well, you can probably write well. Also, oftentimes it is the case that someone or something is far better evoked or illustrated by using verbs (i.e. by describing that someone or something in action), rather than using adjectives or epithets.

14. Someone or something can, qualitatively speaking, mean different things to different people – even though it is the very “same” person or thing being seen, thought of, or experienced. Use this notion to create different meanings about someone or something. By the same token, say if you are writing fiction, use different people’s ideas about someone, or how they value them, as grounds for a story or a character in a story.

15. To describe or express significant feelings and or thoughts about something or someone, and to do so in harmony with the potentially wide variety of other things which might also be made reference to in the process, is what true poetry and music aspire to do.

16. (a) “What I wrote rhymes and *sounds* just right.” Yes, but you aren’t saying all that much are you? (b) “This poem really has *something to say*.” Yes, but it lacks music and rhythm.

17. Ten “Don’ts”: Affectatious, redundant, trite, hollow, cutesy, ponderous, hackneyed, untimely, deficient, excessive.

18. Writing, including very good writing, never of itself reflects or constitutes greatness; rather true greatness is revealed and made manifest in good (or very good) writing.

19. A very good writer, artist, or musician overly relies on no single audience. Rather any given audience he is capable of communicating to he can dispense with if need be (say that audience was whisked off of a moment somewhere), and yet still be able to make his point effectively to any one or number of others who think and or feel deeply.

20. Be prepared to turn verbs into nouns, adverbs, adjectives, participles, and or gerunds in order to extend the range of your phrasing. Observe, for instance, what one can do with the verb *to win*, as in: "The winner won with a winning grace and smiled winningly at his winnings."

21. With respect to both poetry and prose, if a topic is too controversial, too harsh, too sensitive, or else too personal in character to write about directly or literally (say a death), one can write indirectly about it. Metaphor, allegory, or selective wording for instance are used to serve that purpose, but there are other ways, and even more in addition than these when we take into account the possible combinations and variations created from those methods or approaches and whose only limit is the power of one's imagination. At the same time, such indirect forms of communication can (looking at the outline of the composition) be mixed and collocated with direct forms in various arrangement.

22. If you desire to be a better than good writer or poet, avoid writing merely what you think people ought to hear or will impress them. Instead, write about what is essentially and in its significance new to you; or else what, only recently, you needed to hear, discover, or learn of yourself; while taking due measure, of course, of how what you have to say might or might not be "new" to or unanticipated by others.

23. Good poetry possesses a pronounced spirit of one kind or other that is able to move the reader; similar to how good music has spirit; and a poem without spirit is usually at best little more than an academic exercise or an amusing curiosity.

24. When thoughtfully constructed and calculated, it is possible for a poem to be as dramatically stirring or exciting in its way as a good play or film.

25. Poems, particularly those of extended length, are not infrequently constructed from choice scraps and fragments of ideas the poet accumulates in his notebook; and when he feels the time is right, he weaves and synthesizes them (or a selection of them) into a harmonious and greater whole.

26. If writing and literature are trite or frivolous (as many, you will find, seem to think) then so are refined feeling and thought. And while words may only be words; and of themselves of limited value and application, when they foster and promote *better* thought and understanding they can be as or more invaluable than material goods.

27. Better poetry is a good experience put into comprehensible words; not good words *put into* the experience.

28. Initially, especially if we are feeling strongly a certain way, something might strike as a wonderful idea or just the thing to say. But be careful. In most instances if you don't provide a good context for the statement or include some remark as to its implication, you make it all too easy for readers to supply their own context and implication and which might distort or even make ridiculous what it is you mean to say.

29. As a convenient rule of thumb, though not a formal or always necessary one, a good thing written should be also be a good thing said or spoken aloud.

30. Much as words in a poem can be made to both rhyme and correspond in rhythm, meanings of words can and should similarly be made to harmonize with each other. This can be achieved either by means of logical implication and or the emotional texture of meanings.

31. Great literature is written mostly, if not exclusively, for friends; for all others who might happen to read are never be able to properly realize or estimate its true value.

32. You can say it if you feel you really need to. Only, it needs to be said in a very, very certain kind of way.

33. One's capacity for inspiration is only as large as one's heart or sense of empathy.

34. Never say – ‘it's been done before, therefore, it can't be done again.’ With imperturbable patience, hard work, courage, diligence, perseverance, and faith there are an *infinite* number of works of Shakespeare, Beethoven, or who have you that could or might yet be newly composed or created. The failure to see and appreciate this has signally diminished, if not ruined, many an otherwise talented author or artist.

35. Two lines of beauty are worth infinitely more than a page of pretension.

36. Breathing is an important part of both reading and writing inasmuch as heaves and sighs are intrinsic to the natures of thought, emotion, and our memories of these same thoughts and emotions, and for a number of ancient cultures, such as that of classical Latin, texts were originally more intended to be read aloud before a group than quietly alone at home.

37. In writing, as with any form of media or communication, *timing* (with respect to given and various contexts) may not always be all crucial, yet at the very least it provides a pungent spice, telling blow, or force of persuasion which to ignore too much serves only to reveal an author's lack of both wit and depth.

38. One could like a song or poem very much -- say with respect to its rhythm, color, and mood -- yet without necessarily caring for its message. Moreover, with some songs it is even possible to use that same rhythm, color, mood (or what have you) in a separate song or poem but which has an entirely opposite or at least different meaning. A very simple and obvious of example of this is when the lyrics to a song are changed to mean something dramatically different than the original -- as in the case of a take off or parody. Yet this same principle of transmuting certain rhythm, sounds, forms of expression and delineation in a given song or poem to suit diverse meanings or messages by no means applies only to humor or satire.

39. If you say something too bluntly or else too broadly you *sometimes* end up not saying what you actually feel or intend. For instance, a phrase like "the spirit of the season," if used without a proper context, can be vague because the word "spirit" has too general a meaning when applied to the term, "season." Not that the phrase "the spirit of the season" has *no* meaning or impact; only a more proper poet is going to find a way of expressing his idea in a manner that more specifically and forcefully imparts the meaning intended; and so, for example, might use an apt metaphor or a

reference that suggests, reflects, or implies his meaning – in preference to an expression that baldly or openly states it.

40. If you feel very strongly a certain way -- is it possible for you to write a good poem about that feeling and or why it is taking place within you?

41. Don't think so much about what you should say. Just tell it like it is -- for you are full of more eloquence than you know (when you speak truthfully.)

42. One good and salutary exercise for would-be poets is to make an ongoing point in their life of relishing and better appreciating the different virtues given individual words do or might possess – say, with regard to sounds, shades of different meanings, logical implications, or associations. Moreover, as time goes on, they should select and note down those words they especially like or take a fancy to for possible later use in a poem or song -- while careful to observe the very delicate and nice distinction that a good poem does not necessarily make for a good song; nor does good poem necessarily make for a good song.

43. While there are necessary general standards of punctuation, it is not necessary or desirable that they be ubiquitously applied, and a writer has a certain freedom in placing commas, colons, and semicolons if doing so will help better express what he is trying to say. Yet if he does find himself inordinately diverging from custom and formal usage on a frequent basis, he is well advised to do so with discretion and a mind to being able to reasonably and specifically justify his self-indulgence. Yet regardless of the approach one takes and which may be valid, conformity or looseness, it's the more exquisite or more perfect form that most matters in any case, not the prize ribbon of who decides or provides the better form.

44. A good poet knows

There are as many

Highs and lows,

Not to mention

Fast and slows,

In Life

On which to draw on

And compose

As there are

In Music

-- only more so.

And though they'll tell you

"It's all been said,"

Not all of rhythm,

Counterpoint and harmony

Has yet been heard or read.

45. A better than average poet or writer does and should have more than just one voice within them to tap into or utilize; just as a band or orchestra has so many different instruments and musicians that might be availed of to best bring out a piece of music; so that, for example, a writer might, depending on the circumstance or occasion, speak with the voice of empathy, the voice of reason, voice of humor, the voice of reverence, the voice of indignation, the voice of ardor, the voice of skepticism, etc.; yet which voices contrasted or blended together ultimately express or bespeak the one voice of the great spirit.

46. For writers who feel they lack spirit, rhythm, and conciseness in their writing and emotional thinking, read the Bible on a regular (at least once a week) basis — imbibing it, over time, like food or nourishment. There are, of course, other very good books as well for this purpose, but the Bible is an especially excellent one to start with and that you can rely on.

47. One composes or writes better about someone (or something) the more they sincerely love them (or it.) Needless to add, no liar or hypocrite truly loves.

48. A word has value measured according to the variety of potential effects it has on given listeners or readers, including the effect it has when used in conjunction with other words; which effects, in some circumstances at least, can be reasonably foreseen and anticipated. In this way, a skilled writer, as much as possible, thinks ahead of what he wants to say, and in this fashion, tries to predict the effect what he ends up actually stating will have on his reader. Some effects, for instance, that he might aim at or seek to achieve are logical inference or association, rhythm, contrast, irony, humor, color, and sound, and what affect these, in turn, can or will have on his audience.

49. Who and or what you think of as *only* one, two, or three things (as in "they are this" or "they are that") is really over a thousand things, and a good deal more. And if you actually took the trouble to think and do so, you could, say, (reasonably, justly, or scientifically) ascribe or attribute a thousand or more qualities, properties, relations, associations, or characteristics (of varying degrees of inherence, approximation, and nearness) to any given person, animal, or thing (including, among these qualities, this very *trait* of having a thousand and more aspects which a given person or thing has.) True, not all such qualities would be of equal significance or relevance. But it does go to show you how much more there is to someone than, offhand, you believe or assume you know. (And which awareness is no little benefit as a tool and creative help to artists, poets, and writers.)

50. He knows that subject best because he, as much as anyone else, *loves* it best; and consequently is all the more able to speak about or discourse on it.

51. The best artist must also be the best audience. For how else does he know what works and what doesn't? For this reason it behooves a writer to read other writers often; for by doing so he shows respect for other authors; that is, respect such as he himself would like to receive. At the same time frequent reading exercises his strength and continues his training as an audience.

52. A given word, or combination of words, may have a scent, taste or flavor, not unlike a food, drink, or spice does, and which the poet then uses to his advantage in cooking and serving up his "dish." One method to foster one's ability to sense a given word's scent or flavor is to try drinking

and savoring them, as it were, and in the process sounding them for their for their depth and breadth; depth and breadth, that is, with regard to sound, color, meaning, association, etc.

53. A given written work or piece of writing might involve the consideration of several criteria in order to make it most potent and effective. To give you one example, an essay might be written on behalf of pressing concerns of the moment, or else written with the long term and, say, posterity in mind. Now in this instance, *time frame* becomes a point of criteria that might be of great importance to a writer, and here again we see how first determining one's audience can or would help determine which approach, whether a short or a long term view (or some combination), is most appropriate. Another example of a point of criteria might be public or popular approval. One author might feel it of paramount significance that they win the acceptance of some huge majority; another, and on the other hand, desires to speak to higher truth in minds and breasts of those already possessing substantive wisdom and intelligence, and so cares less what "everybody" thinks. All such questions of criteria then and in any event will be decided as a matter of what the author seeks, and that which he seeks is typically based on or related to what he most values.

54. All questions of good and higher quality, or whether someone or something possesses good value, are determined as matters of or according to value criteria and value judgments. For without such judgment or criteria, we could never know how and whether something is of greater or lesser quality. The obvious question, therefore, a writer or any artist must ask and carefully consider is "What do I (and or others) most value?" And, naturally, this query does or may apply to form and dress as well as content and substance.

55. In the vast majority of cases, thoughts, ideas, feelings come first. Then, when a write has these ready and at hand, he collects and shapes them into the most suitable choice and arrangement of words; because it is people's thoughts, ideas and feelings he wants primarily to sound and reach; and less so some lexicon or glossary his readers carry within them.

56. Would you write a story, novel or stage play? Then you need a plot. What is a plot? Quite simply two things: 1) a conflict (or conflicts) engaged or participated in by one, two or more characters, and 2) a resolution of that conflict. No one said the resolution has to be all that believable; at least and as long as the story has something else worthwhile to offer or convey, e.g., detailed character portrayal, humor, moral reflection, suspense, etc.

Some Study Tips

1. Read blocks of subjects at a time, then various books randomly. Give yourself self a course or a mini-course in this or that subject rather than reading randomly, even if variously and extensively.
2. Mark passages in books with pencil, then later copy down those passages or write notes on them.
3. While reading, be careful to look out for passages that are of special value, while observing why such is the case, and considering different possible criteria as to value.
4. Doing logic puzzles and formal logic problems I think is very helpful because it teaches one to better see meaningful associations, comparisons, and contrasts between people, objects, etc., and which might not ordinarily occur to us.

For you who are not already so knowledgeable or so equipped, here is a useful and interesting word list at <http://dictionary.reference.com/writing/styleguide/animal.html> of names of different collections, gatherings, and groups of animals. Courtesy of "Dictionary.com." Or for the same list but in the format of a .txt file, click [here](#).

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