

How to Write

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Like Charles Bukowski once said, “so you want to be a writer?”. It is believed that a writer is a person who can turn mundane things into the most wonderful concepts with just a flick of a pen. At least hopeless romantics claim so. There is not only one definition of what a writer is; the same way there is not only one way of describing what happiness or love are. Some things are just too personal to be put into words. Ironically that is what a writer’s job involves: verbalising the most intimate of feelings, turning them into something most people can relate to. But that is only a small glimpse of what it takes to be a writer.

Contrary to popular belief, the first step in becoming a writer is to write. The established writer Neil Gaiman once stated that he “learned to write by writing”. But, what is writing? According to the Cambridge Dictionary, writing is “the activity of creating pieces of written work, such as stories, poems, or articles”. That much we can all agree on, that is the easy part. The problem arises when one tries to begin writing. There is nothing more heartbreaking than sitting at a desk with a brilliant idea in one’s mind, staring at a painfully empty sheet of paper. That is the first, and sometimes last, obstacle in a writer's journey. It would be nice to say that, once the writing process has begun, then the rest of the voyage takes place on calm waters, but that would simply be lying. When the ship has sailed there is no guarantee that it will not sink; in other words, nothing can assure that your work will not be bad.

So, what makes a piece of writing “good”? If you ask an academic, you will receive a big list of “do’s and don’ts” that will cover all aspects of writing, from punctuation to how it should be organised. In that setting it is pretty easy to divide works into “good” and “bad” piles. But if you were to ask a common person, a simple reader, what makes a piece of writing “good” you will receive different answers that will range from “it has no grammar mistakes”, “it can be read fluently” or simply “it was entertaining.” So defining what a good writing is can be as bothersome as describing what a writer is. Maybe the answer has been in our hearts all along. However, there is something that most writers and their dazzling pieces of work have in common: failure.

Therefore, are you as bad as the best? It is not all roses on a writer's path; the success and eternal glory that everyone seems to focus on is just the tip of the iceberg. One has to bear in mind all the hard work, tears and sweat that are needed in order to become a writer. Of course, not everyone undergoes the same path, if you know the right people things will be much easier but, in most cases, failure is a vital part of a writer’s history. Roald Dahl was told by an English teacher that he was never going to succeed; Dr. Seuss' first book was rejected twenty seven times; publishers were reluctant to publish J. R. R. Tolkien’s books; Margaret Mitchell’s “Gone with the Wind” was rejected thirty eight times before it was published; and the list goes on

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and on. Were their writings not good enough? Were they not talented enough to be considered writers?

The truth is there is no right answer to the question of how to write or what you need to do in order to become a writer. The only thing that is in fact certain is that you will have to start by creating bad writings, building awful stories, and forming nonsensical sentences. Only then will your creations evolve into something somewhat acceptable. And still you will have to continue pushing yourself. Writing is troublesome, and being a writer involves extremely careful thinking. There will be days where you will find yourself stuck with an empty piece of paper, unable to organize words in the right way, and ready to drop everything and call it quits. Do it. Call it quits. But try again the next day bearing in mind that, like poet Alfred Lord Tennyson once said, "tis better to have written and deleted than never have written at all". Because that is the only recipe for proper writing, and no one can help you cook but yourself. Unfortunately, the only way to write effectively and to be a writer is by writing.