

Learn to Love Writing

How do you feel about writing? If you are like many people, you don't feel very good about it. Why do you think that is? Did you get a bad grade from a past teacher that made you not want to try anymore? Do you think the rewards for good writing are lacking? Or, are you stressed about following all the "rules?" All of these are reasons to become disenchanted with writing, but not enough to stop writing altogether.

Why not consider a different approach? What steps would you take if the key to good writing was contained in one simple idea that anyone can do? Would that make you want to take five minutes each day to try to make your writing better? What if you could improve your skills and convey any ideas that you wanted?

The answer isn't mysterious. The magic word and the key to better writing is "practice." Just by doing fun writing exercises (that you may be doing anyway), you can create writing pieces that will help you improve your abilities.

Techniques

Journal Writing—Journaling is a form of self-expression that millions take advantage of on a daily basis. Journaling is easy to do and creative as well. What you write could explain anything from what you did that day, to how those events made you feel, to ideas for your future, to venting frustrations about life. In some cases, people rely on journals to help them remember what they did a week ago and even to remember what the state of the world was at the time of the writing (for example, take the heroic diary of Anne Frank). Best of all, a journal is personal. It's up to you whether you share the ideas or feelings you write down with anyone else.

Free Association Writing—Free writing is a timed activity that is writing as much as possible in a two- to 10-minute time span. You are encouraged to write down anything. You may get a few good ideas or you may get junk, but at least you are writing and letting your ideas come out freely without anyone judging them as right or wrong. Free writing is used frequently by writers who have a "block" where they cannot think of what to write. It is an exercise that opens the mind and welcomes new ideas. If free writing is troubling at first, simply write down a phrase that you repeat until you can think of something else to say. Try starting out with "I don't know what to write, I don't know what to write . . ." and eventually you may surprise yourself with a great idea!

Writing on an Artifact—Rather than rely on an idea you have constructed through your own life, find an object that you can look at and write about it. You can explore this object any way you want. For example, write about a trophy. You can describe what it looks like, what it feels like in your hands, what it may have felt like to win it, or create a story around the trophy. This can be a fun exercise for you to do in a group. It's interesting to listen to how different each person's views can be about one simple object.

Refrigerator Bag—The refrigerator bag allows you to make a story out of random objects placed in a paper bag. This is another creative activity that you can share with friends. Place ten objects in a bag. Then, bring them all out to share with a group. Use these objects as elements in a story. You can create a character's name or an imaginary place out of one object or use them all in their own real form. For example, a salt shaker can resemble Mr. Salty Shaker or be a condiment that is actually secret diamonds disguised as salt. The possibilities are endless and completely up to you. The only rule: use all ten objects and have fun.

Magazine/ Commercial List—Flip through a magazine and stop on random pages. Close your eyes and point to a word on that page. Write that word down, flip to another page, and find another random word. After you have compiled a list of 20 different words, try making sense out of them and compose them into a few sentences. You can make a funny story or a quick piece of prose, as well as strengthen your vocabulary by learning new words that you may not have used before. You also can listen to commercials or television shows. After hearing one word, write it down and flip to the next channel. With this activity, you are incorporating writing into activities you normally do for relaxation.

Where Will I Be in a Year?—This is a unique form of letter writing—writing to yourself. Compose a letter to yourself in the future, say in a year. Acknowledge where you will be in your life, what you will be doing, and what you hope to do beyond then. Seal the letter in an envelope and put it in a place where you will remember to find it in a year or give it to someone who will give it to you later. This activity helps you plan for your future and can be really humorous when you open your letter and find that what you wrote is the exact opposite of where you are.

Free Verse Poetry—In free verse poetry, you can temporarily forget the rules of writing poetry that you were taught (haiku, sonnet, acrostic, etc.) and simply rant about an idea that makes you mad, happy, or feel anything. Free verse can be as long or short as you want and can be made up of lines of many different lengths. Try making stanzas that alternate between a word,

a phrase, or a group of words to make each line different. Write about anything you want! A rant can be controversial, fluff, or something that deeply moves you. Don't be afraid to let all your feelings out. Read it aloud, even if to yourself. Poetry is meant to be both heard and read.

Writing Lyrics—Much like free verse poetry or a rant, writing song lyrics can be a fun challenge, especially if you are musically inclined. Create a number of verses and a chorus (a repeated phrase you can insert between each verse) about any topic that interests you. Try listening to a song from your favorite musician for inspiration. Another tactic you might take is coming up with music to which to set your lyrics. Turn the singer's voice down on a song and imagine different words. If rap is your thing, envision speaking your lines to the beat, creating your own melody. Music is simply poetry that fits a rhythm of music.

Your Acceptance Speech—Writing a speech for an award is a difficult task. For which category of life would you like to be recognized? Why? Who would you thank? Who or what made it possible? This gives you the opportunity to practice speech writing and to set a goal for yourself. Are you accepting an Academy Award, Pulitzer Prize, or a trophy for being a Number 1 aunt? All of these concepts involve pursuing something and doing your best to achieve it. So, why not be prepared and start forming your acceptance speech now?

Write Garbage—Write something you intend to throw away. This can be a secret note to a crush telling him or her how much you like them, an angry response to a company about a malfunctioning product, or a letter to your parents begging them to let you do something you couldn't dream of them letting you do. Be convincing and say how you feel about the situation. Read it over when you are done. Do you still want to throw it away?

The Art of Reading—"Good readers make good writers." Take time to read a good book, whether it's one your teacher suggests, a book version of your favorite film, or a book written by your favorite author. Reading enables you to develop your vocabulary and helps to strengthen your stylistic ability to write creatively.

Writing Tips

- Improving your writing is an ongoing process. Keep a notebook. This gives you a place that you can write down all your ideas, as well as go through them to monitor your progress.

- Exercise your writing skills often so you can maintain strength in your words. Think of writing exercises like sports practice. You will only get better through practice and you need to keep working at it to maintain good skills.
- Be as brief or as long as you want in your individual pieces. Don't worry about how long your page is getting or how quickly you have said what you wanted to say. Writing exercises have no length boundaries and nobody ever said good writing has to come in small or big packages. It can be any size.
- Ignore your hang-ups with punctuation, spelling, and grammar while writing. View your writing as a draft. If you write a piece that you are proud of and want others to see, polish it yourself or ask your teacher to go over it with you before submission.
- Stay on the lookout for essay and poetry contests at your school or in the local paper. Check the Internet for places you can submit good work or read aloud at an open mike night at the local coffeehouse or a party. Don't be afraid.
- Talk about writing. Find anyone who will listen when you want to share or talk about a piece on which you are working. Find a family member, friend, or teacher to discuss what is going on with your work and get their opinions.
- Don't set limits on work; you can develop your writing into anything you want. Don't automatically dismiss it as bad. You may come back to it and see the potential.

Need More Reasons to Write?

When in doubt, listen to celebrities. Below are a few quotes about writing from famous people who think writing is important.

"I think I did pretty well considering I started out with nothing but a bunch of blank paper." —Steve Martin

"To me, the greatest pleasure of writing is not what it's about, but the inner music that words make." —Truman Capote

"The writer is one who, embarking upon a task, does not know what to do." —Donald Barthelme

"I admire anybody who has the guts to write anything at all." —E. B. White

“The beautiful part of writing is that you don’t have to get it right the first time, unlike, say, a brain surgeon.” —Robert Cormier

“Successful writers are not the ones who write the best sentences. They are the ones who keep writing.” —Bonnie Friedman

“Writers get to treat their mental illnesses every day.” —Kurt Vonnegut

“I always write about my own experiences, whether I’ve had them or not.”
—Ron Carlson

“I wrote from a sense of need. I needed something to do. You can’t just sleep all day long.” —Snoopy

Conclusion

It’s important to learn to like writing because it is something you do every day. Writing really isn’t a chore when you look at it from the perspective that it may be fun and something you *can* do.

Contact Information

If you have ideas you would like want to share, please contact Kerry Jones at jonesk551@arcadia.edu.

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