

How to

Become an

Amazing Writer

How to
Become an
Amazing Writer

Write to Done

How to Become An *Amazing* Writer

Write to Done

copyright 2011

Contents

• Introduction	A
• Are You a Writer? Really?	3
• 7 Easy Ways to Energize Your Creative Writing Powers	6
• 201 Ways to Arouse Your Creativity	10
• How to Squeeze Writing Inspiration From Every Experience	27
• Zen Power Writing: 15 Tips on How to Generate Ideas...	32
• Five Ways to Build the Writing Habit	37
• Learn from the Greats: 7 Writing Habits of Amazing Writers	41
• Edit to Done: Revision and the Art of Being Concise	44
• Wordflab Surgery: How to Put Your Writing Under the Knife	48
• 5 Quick-Start Tips to Help Improve Your Writing	53
• Juicy Writing: 5 Ways to Glue Readers to the Page	58
• 10 Tips for Writing Excellence From Top Writing Bloggers	62

Introduction

It's not difficult to become an 'amazing' writer. All you need is to learn two things: how to set your innate creativity free, and how to glue readers to your page.

This book will give you the confidence to say, 'I am a writer!', and it will help you develop and nurture your creativity. Most importantly, you'll learn how to polish your writing so that you truly become an 'amazing' writer.

I'd like to thank Scott McIntyre for his wonderful work as the Editor of this book. He gleaned most of the material from the archives of Write to Done.

I hope that this book will unlock your potential.

All the best on your journey as a writer!

Mary Jaksch

Chief Editor of Write to Done



Are You a Writer? Really?

By Mary Jaksch

Hands up if you mumbled something like, “*Well, I suppose I am, but...*” or even, “*I couldn’t really call myself a writer, because...*” I admit it’s taken me a long time to say, “*I’m a writer.*”

Even after my first book *Learn to Love* was published and translated into many languages, I still couldn’t say these four simple words, “I am a Writer”. Why? Because I’m nothing like the writers I look up to. I thought of them as, well, WRITERS. And I thought of myself as a *writer*. Like, someone who writes a bit but isn’t the real deal.

Is this thought pattern familiar?

It all changed one day when I was having a conversation with my friend Steffie who was eight years old at the time. She asked me, “*What’s a writer?*”

I answered, “*A writer writes.*”

Later I realized that I had given myself the answer I was looking for. Because being a writer doesn’t mean being outstanding, fantastic, or deserving of the Pulitzer. It means that you write.

For a while, I stuck notices up in every room of my home saying: “A writer writes!” Now I’m cool with that, and love it when someone asks me what I do. I immediately say, “I’m a writer!”

I find that this simple saying is a great motivator. When I’m in a bus, or at the hairdresser, or at any other ‘inbetween’ time, I remind myself of the action that makes me what I am: “A writer writes.” I whip out my notebook and start writing. Try this mantra and see what happens!

What about you? Are you a writer?

If you can’t answer with a clear ‘yes’, what are your barriers?

About the Author:

Mary Jaksch is a published author, Zen Master, and psychotherapist. In the last few years, she's turned into a successful blogger and online entrepreneur.

She writes the blog [Goodlife ZEN](#) and is Chief Editor of Write to Done. Together with Leo Babauta of Zen Habits, she is a co-founder of the [A-List Blogger Club](#) and [A-List Blogging Bootcamps](#). Her most recent blog is [A-List Blog Marketing](#) which shows bloggers the Good Karma path to online income.



7 Easy Ways to Energize Your Creative Writing Powers

By Dean Rieck

My wife and I were driving to one of our usual restaurants a few days ago. Like most people, we fall into a daze whenever we travel along familiar roads. But about halfway there, purely on a whim, I turned onto a new street. And we both instantly perked up.

Along the way we discovered a beautiful suburban neighborhood, a quaint old bookstore, and a new restaurant where we had a fabulous meal. It turned a routine evening into an exciting adventure. These places were there all along, of course, but we would never have known about them if we hadn't tried something different.

The same is true when it comes to writing. When you're feeling like you're in a creative daze, take a new path. Do something different. That's one way to discover fresh ideas and energize your creative powers. Here are a few others:

1. Learn your craft.

You can't be truly creative in any field until you have mastered the tools of the trade. Robert Irwin, an artist and MacArthur Fellow, spent two years working up to 15 hours a day, painting the same picture over and over again in order to understand his work better. You don't have to be so extreme, but you should certainly read books, attend seminars, talk shop, keep up on your field, and get as much experience as you can. Knowledge is fuel for your creative fire.

2. Get off auto pilot.

Robert Frost once said, "The brain is a wonderful organ. It starts the moment you get up and doesn't stop until you get into the office." It's good to have formulas and rules, but we should never rely on them blindly. Question your own expertise and the advice of the experts. Stop looking for just one right answer. Don't settle for the first idea. Set aside those pet techniques now and then. Banish those clichés. Borrow good ideas from others but try out your own, too.

3. Stop avoiding failure.

Long, long ago, while still in high school, I took a driver's education class along with a friend. With a death grip on the wheel, he sat bolt upright, swerved back and forth on the road, and slammed the brake at every intersection. He was so fixated on not making a mistake, he couldn't concentrate on just driving. Likewise, if you build your writing life around the idea of avoiding failure, you will

be unable to concentrate on writing well. You will certainly not realize your full potential. Instead of avoiding failure, strive for success and accept the occasional failure as part of the learning process.

4. Focus on important problems.

My work involves writing marketing copy, which is often tested to see what works best. Recently, a business showed me test after test where they had changed a color slightly or modified minor copy points. “We just can’t seem to change our results,” they lamented. I could see why immediately. They were focusing on tiny, irrelevant issues! When you focus on trivia, you will generally get trivial results. And this will only discourage future creative thinking. Success breeds success. So tackle the big issues first. That’s where the real results come from.

5. Find new uses for old ideas.

While analyzing copy for a fundraising organization, I concluded that people may harbor doubts about how funds are used. I knew from my work in advertising that doubts are often put to rest with a guarantee. So I suggested including a detailed guarantee about the use of funds. They hesitated, since none of us had ever seen a fundraiser use this blatantly commercial technique. But this old idea used in a new way helped significantly.

6. Break down false barriers.

When it’s time to write a blog post, do you immediately start writing? Who says a post has to be just another post? Why not a video? Or a Q&A with another blogger? Or a series of photos with captions? Back up. Think things through from the beginning. What is your message? What would make it most interesting? What sort of post have you never tried before? False barriers blind you to alternatives. Ask yourself how you would normally do something. Then look for other ways. Often you’ll find them.

7. Set the conditions you need to create.

For most people, this means comfortable lighting, pleasing sounds and colors, plenty of space to spread out and work, information and equipment handy, and no distractions. But the right conditions vary from person to person. Beethoven poured ice water over his head. Kant wrote in bed. Balzac drank cup after cup

of coffee. Hemingway merely got up at dawn and sharpened 20 pencils. Find what works best for you.

I must admit that while driving along unfamiliar roads, I often get lost. But that's okay. Because I always find my way again. And I always discover something new.

About the Author:

Dean Rieck is one of today's top direct marketing writers and has worked with more than 250 companies, including Intuit, Rodale, Sprint, and American Express. He publishes two blogs, one for marketing professionals (www.DirectCreative.com/blog) and one for copywriters (www.ProCopyTips.com).



201 Ways to Arouse Your Creativity

By Katie Tallo

*“Electric flesh-arrows ... traversing the body.
A rainbow of color strikes the eyelids. A foam
of music falls over the ears. It is the gong of the
orgasm.”*

~ Anais Nin

Creativity is like sex. You fumble your way through, you get lost in it, you fall in love. Both are passionate, rhythmic, pleasurable, and flowing. Both can bear fruit. And both can rack your soul with vulnerability, bliss, fear and awkwardness.

I know, I know. Last time I appeared on Write to Done, I was [naked](#) so you're probably thinking, "Is this woman sex-crazed?" Well, I do like to bare my soul once in a while, but what I love even more is exposing other people's secrets.

The people I speak of are writers. They lust writing. When you're in lust, you can be desperate to keep that feeling alive. So when creativity goes limp, writers are the ones who know the secrets to keeping it interested. They know how to flirt with it, tease it and arouse it. In fact, they know hundreds of ways to get their creative freak on.

Below, I've exposed some of their secret tips, methods, and techniques. After all, they just left them strewn across the web. I lovingly picked them up, adapted and played with them. Some are contradictory and some are in harmony. Dig in. Use the ones that entice your creativity the most. If you want more, link to the source for the original juice.

*Now, lie back, relax and take pleasure in these 201 provocative ways to
arouse your creativity.*

Great hacks from Merlin Mann of [43 Folders](#)

1. Talk to a monkey. Explain what you're really trying to say to a stuffed animal.
2. Do something important that's very easy.

3. Try free writing.
4. Take a shower; change clothes. Give yourself a truly clean start.
5. Write from a persona. Lend your voice to a writing personality who isn't you.
6. Get away from the computer. Take pen and notebook, and go somewhere new.
7. Quit beating yourself up. You can't create when you feel ass-whipped.
8. Stop visualizing catastrophes, and focus on positive outcomes.
9. Stretch. Maybe try vacuuming your lungs.
10. Add one ritual behavior. Get a glass of water exactly every 20 minutes. Do push-ups. Eat a Tootsie Roll every paragraph. Add physical structure.
11. Listen to new music. Try something instrumental and rhythmic that you've never heard before.
12. Write crap.
13. Finish something.
14. Write the middle. Stop whining over a perfect lead, and write the next part or the part after that.
15. Do one chore. Sweep the floor or take out the recycling. Try something lightly physical to remind you that you know how to do things.
16. Make a pointless rule. You can't end sentences with words that begin with a vowel. Limits create focus and change your perspective.
17. Work on the title. Quickly make up five distinctly different titles. Meditate on them. What bugs you about the one you like least?
18. Write five words. Literally. Put five completely random words on a piece of paper. Write five more. Try a sentence. Could be about anything. A block ends when you start making words on a page.

Rejuvenating Tips from Joel at [Lifhack](#)

1. Surround yourself with creative people.
2. Develop a morning ritual.
3. Do an info-dump so your head is clear enough to create instead of worry.
4. If you're a crime writer, read fantasy. If you're a productivity writer, read something about slacking off.
5. Imitate the real world.
6. Drink too much coffee.
7. Play chess. Go outside. Sing in the shower.
8. Don't be too precious about your work. If the doctor and the garbage man can do their jobs every day, then those in a creative line of work can too.
9. Consume information by the bucket load. The more you know, the more you can create from that knowledge.
10. Meet new people from different walks of life. Strike up a conversation on the bus.
11. Shut out the world. Instead of sucking in new information, sit quietly.
12. Creativity is a muscle. Exercise it daily.
13. Carry a notebook everywhere.
14. Write down a list of ideas and draw random arrows between them.
15. If you're not on a tight deadline, walk away and do something completely unrelated.
16. Create a framework. Instead of trying to rely on pure inspiration, think within the box you create for yourself.
17. Remove obstacles to creativity. That friend who calls to complain about their life can wait until you can afford to get stressed about their problems.

18. Don't judge your ideas until you have plenty to judge.
19. Keep a journal. It can get your mind working.
20. Stop telling yourself you're not creative.
21. Don't be a workaholic. Take breaks.
22. Experiment randomly.
23. If one thing isn't working, try a new strategy.
24. Choose a topic and write about it as wonderfully or badly as you possibly can.
25. Trash what you're working on. Start again.
26. Exercise every day before you sit down to be creative.
27. Spend time with your children. Or someone else's.

Tips from Amy Ng of [Pikaland](#)

1. Experience sights, sounds and smells. Sitting still won't bring new ideas in; experimenting and trying new things will.
2. Maintain a certain pattern to the day. A morning bath can start your work with a fresh mind and spirit.
3. Jot down notes every night before bed and actively place worries onto paper.
4. Keep a box labeled for each project. Toss everything in the box, and don't worry about misplacing things or ideas.
5. Keep a different sketchbook for different topics and ideas.
6. Try and find the pattern between things, and connect the dots between random things just for fun.
7. Practice, practice, practice.

Dan Goodwin's Wakeful Ways at [A Big Creative Yes](#)

1. Let your mind wander and come up with whatever it wants to.
2. Wake up ten minutes early, then go back to sleep and dream.
3. Focusing entirely on one sense. Creative stimulation comes through our senses.
4. Imagine waking up somewhere distant and exotic.
5. Recall your creative triumphs. It means you can create something equally wonderful, if not more so, again. In fact you can go out and create it today.
6. Count your blessings. As well as feeling happier, it will inevitably help you be more creative too.
7. Choose just one creative aim for the day. What one creative project can you begin/continue/finish today?

A Few Rules from [Steve Pavlina](#)

1. Define a clear purpose. Vague intentions don't trigger the flow state.
2. Identify a compelling motive. You need a reason to be creative.
3. Architect a worthy challenge. If a task is too easy, you don't need to be particularly creative, so your creative self will simply say, "You can manage this one without me."
4. Provide a conducive environment. The optimal environment varies from person to person, so you'll need to experiment to find what works best for you.
5. Allocate a committed block of time.
6. Prevent interruptions and distractions.
7. Master your tools. Creating a tangible piece of creative work requires tools such as a computer, guitar, or pencil. You must achieve basic competency.

Old Fashioned Advice from Mirko of [Designer Daily](#)

1. Clean up your working space. Even if you are not a cleaning addict, a tidy desk helps to create a fresh start.
2. Go jogging. Running is a great way to refresh your brain. The effort will also bring satisfaction. Self-esteem is good for creativity.
3. Drink a beer with your buddies. Being happy will make you more productive. It will also give you greater enthusiasm.

Creative Encouragement from Jacob Cass at [Just Creative Design](#)

1. Mindmap. Whether you use key words, images, colours, a hierarchy system, numbers, outlines, circles or random words, mindmapping gets your creative juices flowing.
2. Finding inspiration in what other people have done and what has succeeded (or failed) is a great way to get your feet off the ground again.
3. Take a moment to do something that makes you happy; that brings you joy; that you love; that centers you.
4. Give gratitude. Thinking about all the things you are grateful for produces a positive energy flow and vibration.
5. Be in the moment. Athletes call this 'being in the zone'. Give full attention to whatever you are doing: eating, washing dishes, making your bed.
6. Flip through a book containing thought provoking images.
7. Go to an art gallery.
8. Practice asking yourself how to do something differently.
9. Be Open. Never shut down or judge any idea that comes your way.
10. Think on Paper. With a bunch of loose paper, start jotting ideas down.

Artistic Techniques from [Karen Daniels](#) at [Write to Done](#)

1. Get some crayons and warm-up your creativity. Get a piece of paper and draw a totally useless picture of nothing at all.
2. When you feel done, use a crayon to proudly sign the picture. Now, put your picture in a special frame and hang it on the wall.
3. Name the colors in a box of crayons. Name them with abandon, using words like squashed-pea-green, severed-arm-blood-red, or dancing-fairy-silver.
4. Next time your writing gets stuck, pull out your crayons and look at the colors. Remember the names. Write a few silly sentences. Then keep going.

Inspiration from Jennifer Moline on [Fuel Your Creativity](#)

1. Take it outdoors. The best inspiration is often free. Go for a hike. Take your laptop to a park. Look all around you. Soak up your surroundings.
2. Head to a café. There's a reason home-office folks don't always work from home; they crave other humans. A change in surroundings can recharge your brain.
3. Get some training. Not only could you learn something new, but it's also an excellent opportunity to network.
4. Volunteer. Getting your hands dirty for a good cause can be the source of more inspiration than you'd ever imagine.

Guidance from Alison Motluk on [New Scientist](#)

1. Embrace your inner grouch. Discontent may just be a vast, untapped source of creativity.
2. Let your mind wander. A wandering mind may allow your brain to search more widely for connections that could trigger a "eureka" moment.
3. Play an instrument. It may help you to think with both sides of your brain at once.

4. Colour your world blue. It may be nothing more than an association with big skies and the open seas, but beholding the colour blue makes you more creative.
5. Seek out creative company. The best ideas are forged not in moments of solitary genius, but during exchanges with trusted colleagues.
6. Be more playful. Horsing around may be better in the long run than hunkering down.
7. Raise a glass. Many of the most creative pursuits – jazz, for instance, and poetry – are associated with heavy boozing, but can a dram or two really help?

The Dirt from Joel Reyes on [Design Reviver](#)

1. Aim at being unique, not ordinary. Go right past the dull.
2. Cataloging your ideas is productive because it allows you to go back and take a second gander while viewing your ideas on much larger scale.
3. Use visual structuring. Getting your paper and pencil out not only lets you see your ideas on a physical level, but it will make you feel like a kid again.
4. If all else fails, keep working. Some individuals work better as they reach their breaking point, they excel and take flight in the hardest of times.

Perfect Insights from Diggy on [Goodlife Zen](#)

1. Stop being (other people's) perfect. The expectation of making something perfect uses up emotional energy that you could put to much better use being creative and artistic.
2. Ask yourself if you're doing it for the right reasons. Even if you are not the best in the world at something, if you are really passionate about it, your passion can be an inspiration and motivation for others.

How-to's from Mark McGuinness of [Lateral Action](#)

1. Don't plan. Plans are good for buildings, savings, exercise. But there comes a point when it's time to face the stage, the page, the canvas or the blank screen.
2. Let go. You heard me. Let go!
3. Start fooling around. Splash the paint on. Scribble the words down. Sing.
4. Notice when you surprise yourself. Keep playing around with that one good riff until you find the next one growing out of it.
5. Get good amazing feedback. Don't settle for everyday compliments.
6. Enjoy not knowing. Isn't it nice to have one small corner of your life where you don't know what you're going to do, or what's going to happen?

A Little Advice from Julia M. Lindsay of [Our Little Books](#)

1. Have clearly defined goals. This will help direct your attention to a purposeful outcome.
2. Have balance between your skills and challenges. Too easy, you'll be bored. Too hard, you may feel frustrated.
3. Avoid multi-tasking. It is impossible to get immersed in an activity if you are not totally focused on it.
4. Set aside a time to do non-productive tasks. Activities such as reading your e-mail, tweeting and making phone calls should be done at a defined time.
5. Before you start, clean your desk, make sure you have the equipment you need, adjust the temperature and make sure the noise level is optimal.
6. Adjust your goals as your skills increase.
7. Avoid engaging in mindless tasks such as TV. Mindless activities are usually passive and decrease flow experiences.

One Trick from James Chartrand of [Men with Pens](#)

1. Just say screw it. What I do know is that everyone gets jammed sometimes, even the pro writers you look up to. And when that jam happens, it's important to remember that no one forgets how to write well. It doesn't disappear. It'll always be there. And maybe... maybe you just have to say screw it and stop looking for it so hard.

Unblockers from Brian Clark of [Copyblogger](#)

1. Avoid logical thinking. It's often the enemy of truly innovative thoughts.
2. Break the rules. Look at creative thinking as a destructive force. You're tearing away the often arbitrary rules that others have set for you.
3. Stop being practical. Practicality stifles innovative ideas before they can properly blossom.
4. Allow your mind to be at play. You've heard the expression "work hard and play hard." They're the same thing to a creative thinker.
5. View yourself as an explorer. In an era of hyper-specialization, it's those who happily explore completely unrelated areas of life and knowledge who best see that everything is related.
6. Give yourself permission to turn everything that's accepted upside down and shake out the illusions.
7. Give yourself permission to be a fool and see things for what they really are.
8. Reject the false comfort of clarity. Ambiguity is your friend if you're looking to innovate.
9. Free yourself to make mistakes. Just try out your ideas. Ask yourself, what's the worst that can happen if I'm wrong?
10. Strip away all of your delusions and acknowledge that you're inherently creative, and then start tearing down the other barriers you've allowed to be created in your mind.

Motherly Advice from Michelle Mitton of [Scribbit](#)

1. Practice thinking. Think about things and formulate some opinions. They may be right, they may be wrong, but I bet they'll be interesting.
2. Use life markers for ideas. Old photos, family stories, a journal entry, a souvenir from a trip, a collection you love or a piece of clothing—if you've saved it for a reason there is most likely a story there.
3. Look at your life as if you're a stranger. Good writing is made up of details so learn to see the details of your own life.
4. Look at what inspires other people's creativity and then put your own personal spin on it. But whatever you do make it your own and bring your own life and talents to the task.
5. Make lists. What are your favorites? Foods, colors, flowers, cars, games, habits? What are your pet peeves, your thrills or your favorite vacation spots? Use lists to spark an idea and run with it.

Dos and Don'ts from Paul Indigo of [Beyond the Obvious](#)

1. Don't sit and write lists of ideas. All you're doing is intellectual foreplay and pussyfooting around the problem. You're not dealing with it head on.
2. Don't give up and sit sulking in the corner. Sooner or later you're going to have to come out. You're just prolonging the pain.
3. Don't compare your work to other peoples'. Everyone is unique. You have to find your own creative voice.
4. Don't choose the company of doubters and negative people. They will just pull you down.
5. Do pick up your camera (or you pen) and start taking pictures (or writing) of anything and everything. One idea will lead to another.
6. Do set yourself an achievable target.

7. Do challenge conventions and the norm. Challenge everything you've learnt.
8. Do think in terms of opposites, conflicts and interesting juxtapositions.
9. Do realize and remember that all creatives feel the same as you do from time to time and some of the most successful are driven forward by tremendous self doubt. Turn the negative feelings into positive self motivation.
10. Do surround yourself with people that believe in you and want you to succeed. This kind of support makes a world of difference.

An Abundance of Ways from Marelisa Fábrega of [Abundance Blog](#)

1. Stop second-guessing yourself.
2. Experiment with different media: music, photography, writing or drawing.
3. Read one page of the dictionary every day and write down any words that catch your attention.
4. Show up even if you're not feeling creative.
5. Immerse yourself in the task at hand: do your research, read everything you can about your subject, attend seminars, ask experts for their input, and so on.
6. Be curious about everything.
7. Exercise during your lunch break.
8. Go to the playground. Play hopscotch, jump rope, climb on the swings, and climb on the jungle gyms.
9. Awaken your sense of wonder. Take yourself on some small festive adventure.
10. Think of something routine you do on a daily basis and find a way to give it a little more pizzazz.
11. Let your body contribute to your creative process by blaring the music and dancing around the room.

12. Surround yourself with inspirational props, whether it's books on creativity, images you find inspiring, or creativity quotes.

Food for Thought from Kristen Fischer on [Freelance Switch](#)

1. Set aside a day. By making time to devote one day to your project of choice, you may be able to unblock everything by focusing on just one task.
2. Alter your atmosphere. Try putting up some new art, rearranging the furniture or clearing out some clutter.
3. Battle the blabber. Examining the psychology of feeling blocked may help you to unblock, and yes, writing about it can help you to untangle some knots inside and be able to finally, finally create.

Some Juicy Tips from Tom Walker on [RobsWebTips](#)

1. Hypnosis. Although some people may be skeptics, hypnosis and other forms of meditation can be perfect for relaxing the mind and body and getting your creative juices to running freely.
2. Timer challenge. It might be useful to time yourself when you are working using an online timer. This will show you how productive you are being, and often when we are timed, we simply keep going and going.
3. Identify your creative times. Choose those times when you know you will be the most creative.
4. Don't Force It. Stop. Do something else. When you get back you will feel far more refreshed and ready to get started.

Positive Thoughts from Henrik Edberg of [The Positivity Blog](#)

1. Generate a boatload of ideas.
2. Take a trip outside your personal bubble.

3. Criticize later, or some part of your mind may feel threatened and shut up and withdraw.
4. Build it. Like so many things in life creativity is a bit like lifting weights. If you train, over time you'll build your creative muscles.
5. Sleep less. When I feel a little groggy and sleepy, the words start flowing out of my fingers when I sit down to write.

Black and White Tips from Jody Cleghorn at [Write Anything](#)

1. Arrive late and leave early. Get straight to the heart of the narrative.
2. Learn to say no/no way/go f*ck yourself because no one else will stand up for your work.
3. Go out and live your life. Do not allow yourself to become stuck in a hole of your own creativity.
4. Make up the rules for what you want to produce.
5. Work on several projects. This keeps you energized and working creatively even when one project isn't firing.
6. Try to write every day, even if just for a few minutes.
7. Write simply and vividly.
8. Don't hold back and don't protect yourself. Say things no one else has said before.
9. Collaborate with new people.
10. Cultivate a community of writers. Writing can be a lonely enterprise, but it doesn't need to be – other writers understand where you are, what you're thinking and feeling.

Simple Advice from Leo Babauta of [Zen Habits](#)

1. Play.
2. Don't consume and create at the same time — separate the processes.
3. Shut out the outside world.
4. Reflect on your life and work daily.
5. Look for inspiration all around you, in the smallest places.
6. Start small.
7. Just get it out, no matter how crappy that first draft.
8. Don't try for perfect. Just get it out there, asap, and get feedback.
9. Constantly make it better.
10. Ignore the naysayers.
11. But let criticism help you grow.
12. Teach and you'll learn.
13. Shake things up, see things in new ways.
14. Apply things in other fields to your field, in ways not done before.
15. Drink ridiculous amounts of coffee.
16. Write all ideas down immediately.
17. Read wildly different things. Especially stuff you disagree with.
18. Get lots of rest. Overwork kills creativity.
19. Don't force it. Relax, play, it will start to flow.
20. Allow your mind to wander. Allow distractions, when you're looking for inspiration.

21. Then shut them off when you're going to create.
22. Do it when you're excited.
23. When you're not, find something else to be excited about.
24. Don't be afraid to be stupid and silly.
25. Small ideas are good. You don't need to change the world — just change one thing.
26. When something is killing your creativity, kill it.
27. Stop reading creativity advice, clear away everything, and just create.
28. Most of all, have fun doing it.

Enough said.

About the Author:

Katie Tallo is a mother, wife, writer, director, artist, fitness lover, vegetarian, motivator and momentum gatherer. She seeks to inspire simple, joyful life change through her blog, [Momentum Gathering](#). She seeks to live creatively through her career as a writer, filmmaker, motivator, volunteer and entrepreneur. And she seeks to learn, love and live a mindful and healthy life through her on-going collaborations with [Elation Centre](#), [Creative Women Workshops](#), [The Daily Brainstorm](#) and the [A-List Blogger Club](#). Katie lives in Ottawa, Canada with her husband and daughter.



How to Squeeze Writing Inspiration From Every Experience

By Mary Jaksch

Do you have days where you sit in front of an empty page – and find nothing, absolutely nothing you could write about? I used to. But now I've learned to squeeze inspiration from every experience.

What, every experience? Yes, I know it sounds a tall order. Read on to see how it works.

The secret of creativity

First of all we need to determine what triggers creativity. It's quite simple:

Creative innovation happens through communication between regions of the brain that are not usually connected. (You can read more about that [here](#)).

Let's imagine that you want to write an article about social media. Your page is empty and your brain is on slow-go. Then you start making a list of points you want to cover:

- Twitter
- Connections
- Viral news
- Stumbleupon

Does this list inspire you? Does it trigger ideas in your brain? Well, not in my brain! At this point I still can't find any theme connected to social media that I might want to write about.

Now let's take a different tack in order to kick-start creativity: we'll choose an unrelated idea and hold it up against our theme 'social media'. What we're doing at that moment is to connect two different areas in the brain.

Let's say that the word we choose to connect with 'social media' is 'potato'. Wacky, eh?

Just pause for a moment and see what your brain comes up with when you connect 'social media' and 'potato'.

Here is what happens in my brain when I connect the two concepts:

- *Potatoes grow underground and you can't see them from above/* You can't understand social media by looking in from the outside.
- *You only get to see the size of the harvest when you dig up your potatoes/* It takes a time to see the result of ongoing social media cultivation
- *Potatoes are a staple diet/* Your communication on social media allows people to get to know the 'ordinary' you
- There are endless recipes to cook potatoes/ Each social media has its own style and you need to adapt to it

Ok – that was just a five minute harvest of ideas to illustrate how creativity works. Even though I didn't come up with any brilliant mind flashes, what I did get was four different themes for an article. So, if you were to connect 'social media' with twenty different unrelated things, such as door handles, cats, rain, hunger, rainforest, or ... you name it, you would end up with 100 ideas for articles about social media. That better than none, isn't it?

What hinders creativity?

There are lots of things that can hinder creativity, from low self esteem to a lack of break-fast. But let me focus in on one particular hindrance for now: linear thinking.

Linear thinking kills creativity

In term of the way our brain functions, linear thinking means triggering neighbouring ideas. For example, if you use logical thinking, you move down a linear pathway of thinking until you have a result. That's great for engineers. But not for writers.

How to use every experience for inspiration

What we all wish for is to have writing ideas tumble out of our brain continually, so that we always have too many ideas to choose from.

Impossible? No, easy! All we have to do is to follow the principle of association that we tried out before.

Here's how:

Let's imagine you're back at your desk with no idea of what to write about. You desperately need fresh ideas for the next blog post. What to do?

First thing: get up from your desk and grab a notebook in order to record even the wackiest ideas! Then let your mind go into free-flow and allow your next actions to trigger ideas.

Here's a list of what I might do next and the post themes for Write to Done this would trigger.

- I make myself a cup of coffee
 - ~ "Too Hot to Handle: Wake up Your Readers!"
 - ~ "10 Mistakes that Make Readers go to Sleep"
 - ~ "How to Drip-Feed Information"

- I go to the window and stretch
 - ~ "How to Relax and Write Better"
 - ~ "Give Your Readers a New Perspective"
 - ~ "Write From Your Point of View"
 - ~ "Find Your Voice and Grow Your Blog"

- I have a shower
 - ~ "Clean out your website"
 - ~ "Write Like Water"
 - ~ "Give Your Readers a Fresh Perspective"

You get the idea? Ok, so some of these themes may be non-starters, but they in turn may generate useful ideas. In any case, I could head back to my desk with a new collection of ideas for my next post. It sounds easy, doesn't it? But there is a trick.

What does it take to use every moment for creativity?

You need to use a trick. Actually it's not really a trick. You need a particular mind state. Quite simply, you need to be present! For example, if you're having a shower and you're thinking about who you've got to email today, or about the bills you have to pay, or you wonder why your girlfriend isn't returning your calls – you won't create a single idea. Because you're not present.

Being preoccupied kills creativity.

If you want to be creative, you need to become aware of the present moment.

Let the breath lead you to the present moment.

A simple Zen way to return to the present moment is to take one complete breath – and feel the air flowing in and out. Then focus on what you are seeing, hearing, or sensing.

When you are present, you can squeeze inspiration from every experience. In fact, there's no need to squeeze because being present makes inspiration flow free.

I'd love to hear how this works for you.

About the Author:

Mary Jaksch is a published author, Zen Master, and psychotherapist. In the last few years, she's turned into a successful blogger and online entrepreneur.

She writes the blog [Goodlife ZEN](#) and is Chief Editor of [Write to Done](#). Together with Leo Babauta of Zen Habits, she is a co-founder of the [A-List Blogger Club](#) and [A-List Blogging Bootcamps](#). Her most recent blog is [A-List Blog Marketing](#) which shows bloggers the Good Karma path to online income.



Zen Power Writing: 15 Tips on How to Generate Ideas and Write with Ease

By Mary Jaksch

Do you ever sit down to write a blog post, article or chapter and nothing, but nothing, appears in your mind? This is the dreaded ‘writer’s block’. The good news is that if you use the following 15 tips, you will generate more ideas than you need, love the writing process, and never ever get stuck.

I find that some Zen meditation techniques enhance my writing. Most of the problems that arise in the writing process happen when our mind is at war with itself. At those times our creative energy is scattered, instead of being focused in one steady beam.

As writers, we suffer from a split personality. On one side is the Creator who wants to splash wild ideas all over the page and falls in love with every sentence, and on the other side is the Editor who sits there with pursed lips and ticks off the mistakes. It’s really important to keep these two apart! When you’re finding and developing an idea, send the Editor on holiday. When you want to refine what you have written, stuff the Creator into a cage. The first 10 of the following tips will unleash your Creator, the last 5 will give direction to your Editor.

1. **Forge your identity.** Say, “I am a writer!” Maybe you feel reluctant to say it because you think you’re not good enough? Well, forget about ‘good enough’! A writer writes. Do you write? If yes, then you are a writer. Plaster your home with notices that say, “I am a writer!” Tell people about it. When you next fill in a form, put ‘writer’ as your profession. Thinking of yourself as a writer will boost your confidence and unlock your creativity.
2. **Practice fun writing.** If you only write to produce something important, your creativity can become stunted. It’s important to schedule time for fun writing practice. Maybe you can earmark just 10 minutes a day for fun writing. After all, even a top pianist still practises scales each day! Here is a simple way to practise fun writing: take a blank page and set a timer for 5 minutes. Write for 5 minutes – without stopping. Don’t think about it. Just do it. The first minute may be difficult, but then your creativity will kick in and surprise you.
3. **Find inspiration.** The right place to look for inspiration is – everywhere! Keep your creative mind on the alert at all times. Let’s imagine that you write a blog about blogging. Here is how you could use your everyday experience as inspira-

tion. You wake up early in the morning: “Why early morning is the best time for writing.” You take a shower: “How to come up with 20 great ideas in the shower.” You have breakfast: “15 reasons why good nutrition can make you a fabulous writer.” You get into your car: “10 important things driving a car can teach you about writing”, and so on. Not all of your ideas will mature into articles because some may be wacky. But wacky is good! Because anything out of the ordinary can trigger your creativity.

4. **Use an ‘everything book’.** Ideas are elusive. Get a distracting phone-call and you may forget the brainwave that struck you just before. I use an ‘everything book’ to retain and collect ideas. It’s a notebook which I always carry with me. In it, quotes, ideas, and cooking recipes are all jumbled together. Not only does an ‘everything book’ help you grab that great idea before it disappears, it can be a source of inspiration when you read past entries.
5. **Develop a swipe file.** Another good idea is to keep a swipe file. This is a folder in which you collect interesting copy that you find. It can be a fine source of inspiration. Skellie has written a [compelling post about swipe files here](#).
6. **Prepare your mind by meditating.** The best ideas come out of silence. Try starting your writing time with 5 minutes of meditation. Just sit upright in silence. Notice your breath and the sensations of your body. Listen to sounds around you. Let thoughts go. Even such a short time of meditation can turbo-charge your creativity and make you feel alive.
7. **Brainstorm a title.** Brainstorming a title before you start to write a piece can kick-start and channel your creativity. Write down a whole list of ideas without discarding a single one. After all, ideas breed ideas. When you have a rich collection, select one good-enough title to start with. You can refine it later on. You can find inspiration for titles by reading some of the [excellent articles on how to craft titles listed here](#).
8. **Lay out the bones of a piece.** Once you have the working title, lay out the bones of your piece. For example, if your title says something like ‘20 Tips on How to Write Better Posts’, write down numbers 1 to 20 under each other. This jolts your creativity into action. Your brain now knows that you expect it

to come up with 20 subheadings. Set the total length of your piece and divide it by the number of planned sections. For example, if you plan to write a 1000 word piece divided into 20 'tips', then you know that each 'tip' should be 50 words long. As you write the piece, check the word count of each segment. As soon as you hit the required length, move on to the next one. This is more efficient than writing a lot more than you need and then having to prune your piece drastically.

9. **Leave the end and beginning to last.** We can get stuck if we start at the beginning. The beginning is supposed to introduce the theme. But at the start of a writing project we may not know exactly what we're going to say. So, it's best to write the introduction later on. Once you have completed your first draft, it's time to add an introduction and a conclusion. The intro can be short but it needs to say why your theme is important, or to outline the benefits that follow from reading your piece. The conclusion should tie it all together.
10. **Invite your inner Editor to have a look.** Wait until you have finished your draft, then let your Editor have a look at your work. Remember that the first draft doesn't have to be good. All you need is a certain amount of words on the page with a focus on a particular theme. Now the Editor is going to shape and buff your piece.
11. **Check: Does your piece deliver on the title?** The first task of the Editor is to check whether the piece actually delivers what the title promises. If not, you need to either tweak the piece or change the title to fit.
12. **Check balance and length.** Check whether the segments are reasonably even in length. If they are too long, you can split them into two. If they are too short, you can meld them into one. Look the overall word count. Is your piece too long? In that case you need to do a hard prune. If your piece is too short, you need to add more material.
13. **Edit each sentence.** Read your piece out loud, sentence by sentence. Our ear is much more reliable than our eye in this instance. Weigh up each word. Can you cut it? Can you say it better? Rewriting is the crux of good writing. Sometimes it helps to defer this important task to another time. A break allows us to gain necessary distance from our piece.

14. **Check grammar and spelling.** A good way to check grammar and spelling is to read a piece back to front. Otherwise our eye tends to skip over mistakes without alerting us.
15. **Read your piece out loud.** Now your piece is nearly finished. To make sure it is the best it can be, complete two last tasks: print out the piece and then read it out loud. Make sure you have a pen handy. You will notice things you wish to change and can make notes.

Zen Power Writing means writing with a calm and unified mind. Most writing problems are based on brawls between the Creator and the Editor. When you keep these two aspects of writing separate, it will boost your creativity and bring ease to your writing.

About the Author:

Mary Jaksch is a published author, Zen Master, and psychotherapist. In the last few years, she's turned into a successful blogger and online entrepreneur.

She writes the blog [Goodlife ZEN](#) and is Chief Editor of [Write to Done](#). Together with Leo Babauta of Zen Habits, she is a co-founder of the [A-List Blogger Club](#) and [A-List Blogging Bootcamps](#). Her most recent blog is [A-List Blog Marketing](#) which shows bloggers the Good Karma path to online income.



Five Ways to Build the Writing Habit

By Ali Luke

Whether you're just starting out with writing, or whether you're a seasoned pro picking up your pen again after a dry spell, you might have discovered just how daunting that blank page can be. Sitting down and putting words on paper (or on a computer screen) can be a huge effort. No wonder writers find themselves engaging in displacement activities: checking emails, Twittering, even the housework can seem more attractive than writing.

Over several years of writing fiction and non-fiction, I've found that writing really is a habit. If I write every day (or at least most days), I find the words flowing easily; if I take a writing vacation for a few weeks, it's much harder to get back into writing.

Here are some ways you can help yourself build the writing habit:

Write Something Each Day

One of the most common tips from established authors to aspiring authors is to “write every day”. This is powerful advice: a daily action quickly becomes established in your routine, and, if you're working on a book or other long project, writing every day helps build momentum.

You might have days when you're burnt out, exhausted, or hectically busy. That's fine. Even if you can only manage a single sentence, just write something every day.

Set Yourself Targets

There's no one right way to set yourself writing targets: different authors like different methods. You might want to consider a couple of things, though:

1. Published authors have deadlines – and, as any student pulling an all-nighter knows, deadlines are a great way of concentrating the mind. So why not set yourself a firm completion date for your current work in progress?
2. Give yourself a daily target. Some writers have a word target (e.g. 500 words per day), others prefer to write for a set period of time (e.g. half an hour). Try both, and see which works best for you.

If you don't have any sort of deadline or target, it's easy to put off writing until another day. Try posting your targets near your desk, so that you'll see them while you're working, or keep track of your progress using a blog, Facebook or Twitter.

Join a Writers' Circle or Group

I've been a member of several different writers' groups over the past decade. Without exception, they've encouraged me to write more, and they've helped me to improve my writing immensely. Meeting regularly with other writers, and sharing work-in-progress, can motivate you to finish and polish pieces to submit to the group.

Most writing groups focus on fiction and/or poetry: if you're a non-fiction writer, you may be able to find or form a group with similar interests, though.

If you've got the money and time to devote to it, an evening course or a creative writing or journalism degree is a powerful way to give writing a priority in your life. With assignments and group workshops, you'll find that you pretty much have to get into the writing habit!

Keep a Notebook With You

This is another piece of popular advice – carry a notebook. This isn't just in case you have a great idea whilst in the car or out for a walk: I find that I'm rarely struck with inspiration out of the blue, but that little scraps of time (waiting for trains, standing in line at the post office) can be fruitfully used to brainstorm.

If you're really short on time, scribbling in a notebook whenever you end up waiting around somewhere can squeeze at least a few minutes of writing into each day.

Call Yourself a Writer

Many beginning and even established writers are reluctant to call themselves “a writer”. We often feel that we should be earning money or writing professionally in order to use the title. In reality, though, a writer is simply someone who writes! You're a writer, so use your title with pride – don't wait until you've got that book deal or even that first paid gig.

Calling yourself a writer isn't just about having something interesting to say at parties. If you regularly introduce yourself to people as a writer, you'll become more and more comfortable with this identity. Plus, you'll feel more motivated to write (after all, that's what writers do).

Have you got the writing habit – or are you still on your way to making writing a regular focus in your life?

About the Author:

Ali Luke is a writer and writing coach from the UK, and has degrees in English Literature (BA) and Creative and Life Writing (MA). She blogs about writing on her own site, [Aliventures](http://aliventures.com), and has a regular writing newsletter (with ebook freebies) available at www.aliventures.com/newsletter.



Learn from the Greats: 7 Writing Habits of Amazing Writers

By Leo Babauta

Finding the ideal working habits that will allow me to write as consistently as possible is always something I'm exploring as a writer.

As I've said before, I try to make it a habit to [write first thing in the morning](#). It helps me to focus and ensure that I'm getting my writing done.

I love reading about my favorite writers and what writing habits led to their success. Below, I share with you some of my favorite writers' work habits ... and it's obvious that there's no single way to success. Some like to write a certain number of words or pages every day, others were happy to write a page or a sentence. Some liked to write long-hand, others did it on index cards. Some wrote standing up, others lying down.

There's no one way that works. Do what works for you. But maybe you'll get some inspiration from these greats, as I have.

1. **Stephen King.** In his book *On Writing*, King says that he writes 10 pages a day without fail, even on holidays. That's a lot of writing each day, and it has led to some incredible results: King is one of the most prolific writers of our time.
2. **Ernest Hemingway.** By contrast with King, "Papa" Hemingway wrote 500 words a day. That's not bad, though. Hemingway, like me, woke early to write to avoid the heat and to write in peace and quiet. Interestingly, though Hemingway is famous for his alcoholism, he said he never wrote while drunk.
3. **Vladimir Nabokov.** The author of such great novels as *Lolita*, *Pale Fire* and *Invitation to a Beheading* did his writing standing up, and all on index cards. This allowed him to write scenes non-sequentially, as he could re-arrange the cards as he wished. His novel *Invitation to a Beheading* took up more than 2,000 cards.
4. **Truman Capote.** The author of "Breakfast at Tiffany's" and "In Cold Blood" claimed to be a "completely horizontal author." He said he had to write lying down, in bed or on a couch, with a cigarette and coffee. The coffee would switch to tea, then sherry, then martinis, as the day wore on. He wrote his first and second drafts in longhand, in pencil. And even his third draft, done on a typewriter, would be done in bed — with the typewriter balanced on his knees.

5. **Philip Roth.** One of the greatest living American writers, Roth works standing up, pacing around as he thinks. He claimed to walk half a mile for every page he writes. He separates his work life from personal life, and doesn't write where he lives — he has a studio built away from his house. He works at a lectern that doesn't face the view of his studio window, to avoid distraction.
6. **James Joyce.** In the pantheon of great writers of the last century, Joyce looms large. And while more prolific writers set themselves a word or page limit, Joyce prided himself in taking his time with each sentence. A famous story has a friend asking Joyce in the street if he'd had a good day writing. Yes, Joyce replied happily. How much had he written? Three sentences, Joyce told him.
7. **Joyce Carol Oates.** This extremely prolific writer (see her bibliography on [her Wikipedia page!](#)) has won numerous awards, including the National Book Award. She writes in longhand, and while she doesn't have a formal schedule, she says she prefers to write in the morning, before breakfast. She's a creative writing professor, and on the days she teaches, she says she writes for an hour or 45 minutes before leaving for her first class. On other days, when the writing is going well, she can work for hours without a break — and has breakfast at 2 or 3 in the afternoon!

About the Author:

Leo Babauta is a simplicity blogger & author. He created Write to Done and [Zen Habits](#), the Top 25 blog (according to TIME magazine) with over 230,000 subscribers, [mnmlist.com](#), and the best-selling books [focus](#), [The Power of Less](#), and [Zen To Done](#).

Together with Mary Jaksch of Goodlife ZEN, he is a co-founder of the [A-List Blogger Club](#) and [A-List Blogging Bootcamps](#). Along with Barrie Davenport (Live Bold and Bloom) and Katie Tallo (Momentum Gathering), he also created [The Habit Course](#), a 4-week intensive, interactive online course meant to teach you how to create habits for life.



Edit to Done: Revision and the Art of Being Concise

By Leo Babauta

“Revision is one of the exquisite pleasures of writing.”

- Bernard Malamud

Sometimes it's just good to know when to shut up.

The problem with a lot of amateur writers is that they can be long-winded, writing in a few paragraphs what could be said in a few sentences. They might think they're impressing people with their flowery prose or thought-out arguments ... but really they're losing the reader.

Most people don't have time to wade through long paragraphs for a few nuggets of information. Do the reader a favor by getting to the point.

I can't claim to be the world's most concise writer. I have certainly written my share of long posts — but my goal is to pack my posts with useful information. You can't do that in a couple paragraphs, but you can try to edit all extraneous words and information and just have the essentials.

Here's a quick guide to doing that.

1. **Do just one thing, and do it well.** Know from the outset what you're trying to do with any writing piece, whether that's a post or a short story or a magazine article or a novel. The piece should have one main purpose, and you should start your writing by defining that purpose. I usually try to do that with my post title (or “headline”). If you don't define your purpose, you might have several aims, and that diffuses the power of your writing. Trying to do too many things at once is a sure recipe for wordiness and confusion.
2. **Write, then revise.** When you're doing your first draft, there's no need to be concise. Just type away, and let the words flow. Don't stop yourself. Then go over that first draft, closely examining each sentence and word to ensure that they're necessary to achieve the purpose of the piece. Then revise again. Revi-

sion can be daunting, but it doesn't have to be: it's simply reading your own work with a critical eye, and it's necessary if you want to write well. The art of writing is really the art of revision.

3. **Learn to revise in your head.** Once you've done enough revision, it can become an automatic process. I wouldn't recommend this for beginners — do revision after you do your first draft — but for the more experienced editors, revision becomes something that's part of the writing process. You begin to test out phrases and words for their sound, and begin to shorten things as you go. It's a good skill that cuts back on revision time later (though you will still need to do that). I revise as the thought is flowing from my head to my fingers, and then I revise what I just typed as I go along, and then I go back and revise that first draft when the whole piece is done.
4. **Eliminate the non-essential.** If you know the essential ideas you're trying to communicate, try to identify the non-essential ones. Would the piece be just as good without it? Sometimes we feel things are essential, but if we eliminate them, the piece isn't hurt at all. If you're not sure, try it without the word or phrase or sentence. Always keep in mind your purpose (see No. 1 above) so that you know what's essential — only the words and sentences necessary to achieve that purpose, and no more.
5. **Learn the common mistakes.** After awhile, you'll see common phrases that can be shortened. "The fact that" is almost never necessary, for example. It adds extra words without adding meaning. I could provide a list of common extraneous phrases, but I think it's better to learn them as you go — you get better at spotting them that way, and better understand why they're unnecessary.
6. **Read [The Elements of Style](#) (affiliate link).** A concise guide to writing concisely. It's a classic for a reason — there is no better guide to eliminating excess words.

About the Author:

Leo Babauta is a simplicity blogger & author. He created Write to Done and [Zen Habits](#), the Top 25 blog (according to TIME magazine) with over 230,000 subscribers, [mnmlist.com](#), and the best-selling books [focus](#), [The Power of Less](#), and [Zen To Done](#).

Together with Mary Jaksch of Goodlife ZEN, he is a co-founder of the [A-List Blogger Club](#) and [A-List Blogging Bootcamps](#). Along with Barrie Davenport (Live Bold and Bloom) and Katie Tallo (Momentum Gathering), he also created [The Habit Course](#), a 4-week intensive, interactive online course meant to teach you how to create habits for life.



Wordflab Surgery: How to Put Your Writing Under the Knife

By Mary Jaksch

Does your writing suffer from wordflab? Wordflab is the number one enemy of good writing. At least, in the eyes of Sol Stein, the master editor who wrote [Stein On Writing](#).

Yes, folks – we’re back at school with Sol.

This time it’s off to the operating table: We’re going to liposuction wordflab.

Stein says:

“Flab-cutting is one of the best means for improving the pace of both fiction and non-fiction. When eliminated, the loss of fat has the welcome side effect of strengthening the body of the remaining text.”

Here’s how to operate on wordflab in two steps:

1. Remove all adjectives.

Once you’ve got rid of them, **readmit a few after careful testing**.

Mark Twain hated adjectives. He wasn’t into surgery. He liked to kill.

“If you catch an adjective, kill it!”

The great thing about taking out adjectives is that the resulting text is sleek and the pace quickens.

Here are some examples by Stein. See what happens:

“The conspicuous bulge in his pocket had to be a weapon.”

‘Conspicuous’ is expendable. The sentence surges ahead without the adjective: “The bulge in his pocket had to be a weapon”?

How about this one?

“He was a strong, resourceful warrior.”

As Stein points out, the sentence sharpens as soon as you take out one of the adjectives. And the meaning shifts according to which one you leave in.

Now we move to the second surgical procedure:

2. Eliminate dispensable adverbs

Dispensable? Yes, almost all adverbs are dispensable! Remember, adverbs are qualifiers. And many are fillers without substance or function – like ‘very’ or ‘quite’. (Sol suggests using the ‘find’ function to immediately delete every ‘very’ and ‘quite’.)

Delete most adverbs for tight writing, but keep an eye out for two exceptions.

- Adverbs that supply necessary information.
- Adverbs that help the reader visualize the image you want to evoke.

Let’s see how text is transformed through wordflab surgery.

I’m jumping onto the operating table myself to subject my writing to adjective surgery. I’ve chosen a paragraph at random from a post I’m writing for Goodlife Zen.

Here it is.

Before the operation:

There are times when it’s natural – and even necessary – to feel low for a while. Maybe you didn’t get the great job you wanted, or lose the one you had. You’re forced to sell your lovely home. Or you lose the person you love. When we suffer a loss – whether it’s the loss of a loved one, our job, our health, or a dream we’ve cherished – it’s quite natural to feel low.

I’m on the table now. It’s scary. The mask is on and I’m counting backwards from ten...nine...eight... [*Mary goes under*].

After the operation:

I’ve come too and the surgeons have taken off the bandages. This is what the paragraph looks like now:

There are times when it’s natural to feel low: you don’t get the job you want or lose the one you love; you’re forced to sell your home; you lose a loved one;

you let go of a dream.

Yes, loss makes us feel low.

It seems tighter. What do **you** think?

I find it difficult to be objective about my own writing. That's why I find editing systems, like wordflab surgery, so helpful.

What about you? Do you have the guts to put one of your paragraphs on the operating table?

Don't forget that there's no school without homework – Sol's school included.

Sol has left us a puzzle. Your homework is to solve it.

Look at this sentence:

There is nothing I would like better than to meet an interesting person who could become a new friend.

How could it read after wordflab surgery?

PS: Read my complete post-operative post [Is Flexible Optimism a Key to Happiness?](#)

About the Author:

Mary Jaksch is a published author, Zen Master, and psychotherapist. In the last few years, she's turned into a successful blogger and online entrepreneur.

She writes the blog [Goodlife ZEN](#) and is Chief Editor of [Write to Done](#). Together with Leo Babauta of Zen Habits, she is a co-founder of the [A-List Blogger Club](#) and [A-List Blogging Bootcamps](#). Her most recent blog is [A-List Blog Marketing](#) which shows bloggers the Good Karma path to online income.



5 Quick-Start Tips to Help Improve Your Writing

By Oleg Mokhov

Feel like you're stuck with the current level of your writing ability? Struggling to get better, or maybe you don't even know how to go about improving?

Then the following **5 quick-start tips** to help improve your writing are for you.

I've personally used them to un-suck-ify my writing within a matter of a few weeks.

Now granted, I'm consistently improving all the time of course, but these 5 quick-start tips gave me a quick boost to start improving my writing.

And that's the point with these tips. They're not magic pills to go from bad to great, but simple tips to **quickly un-suck-ify your writing** and **get on the right path to consistently improve**.

Without further ado, here are 5 quick-start tips to help improve your writing:

1. Write How You Talk

If you wouldn't use it in a conversation, don't use it in your writing. Just write how you would say it.

It's a lot easier to start writing this way, because you don't need to try writing – you just do it.

No analyzing the style, or figuring out which word to use – **just write how you'd say it**.

Plus, if you've ever tried to figure out how to make your writing style stand out, *this is how you do it*.

A conversational tone makes you human and interesting – and uniquely you, since no one else talks exactly like you.

2. Keep It Short

Throw the following idea out the window: that each piece needs to be an essay.

Nothing needs to be anything.

Say what you need to say, and not a single word more.

Don't worry about making it a certain length.

The point of your writing is to deliver a message, not appear long.

Length is irrelevant. It's about the content, not how it looks.

If Leo Babauta can keep it to [400 words](#) for some of his writing, so can you.

3. Use Simple Words

Don't think you need to look like a fancy writer with your writing.

Use as simple words as possible.

Don't use a long, wordy word when a shorter, more often-used synonym will do.

Using simple words not only makes it easier for you to write, but it makes it easier for more people to read what you have to say.

When in doubt, refer to point #1: if you wouldn't use it in a conversation, don't use it in your writing.

The point of your writing is to inform and/or entertain, not to impress people with your word processor synonym skills.

It's what you say, not how you say it, that ultimately counts.

4. Use a Simple Style

Don't think you need to be creative with the format or presentation.

It's about the content, not how it looks.

Yes, a cool visual or formatting style can help, but it's easy to get the presentation wrong and screw up what otherwise could've been valuable content.

So don't worry about a format or presentation.

Just write and keep your paragraphs, headers, and so forth as simple as possible.

The honing of how you present your writing will come with time.

5. Forget What You Learned In College

Break all the rules:

- Write in first-person
- Insert opinions
- Inject words and slang you actually use
- Have one-sentence paragraphs
- And so forth...

You're done playing by professors' rules (who probably hated those rules anyway), so no need to keep following term paper rules.

Unlike breathing, drinking, and eating, there's no right way to write.

Since writing isn't something you need to do it to survive.

There's no right or wrong – only sucky and awesome.

So just have fun writing.

If you feel you've been in a writing rut, stuck with your current level of writing, hoping to somehow get better, then the above **5 quick-start tips can help you break through that wall and start improving your writing.**

No, these tips aren't magic pills to "Instant Writing Success!", but they *will* get you on the right path to consistently improve.

I know they've greatly helped me. After all, you've read my writing this far without clicking the Back button, so hopefully I did a decent job of informing and maybe even entertaining you.

About the Author:

Oleg Mokhov is an electronic artist and occasional writer. Born in Russia and raised in the US, he travels the world and makes music that's a cross between Aphex Twin, Four Tet, and Boards of Canada. You can find out more about Oleg by visiting his [website](#).



Juicy Writing: 5 Ways to Glue Readers to the Page

By Mary Jaksch

I love reading. But not just anything. Some writers arrest me on the spot and shackle me to their page. But others fail to keep my attention: I soon start playing with the cat or surf off to other sites.

Our readers are exactly like that. Their attention is fickle and they will wander off if we don't grab them with our words.

That's why it's important to seize them from the moment they hit the page and get them to read our stuff in one gulp. In the following five steps I'll show you how to glue readers to your page, whether you're writing a blog post, an article, or a book.

- 1. Sweep in; don't creep in.** Make an entry with your first paragraph and jump right to the core of your message. Return to your start as the final editing task. Hone those words.
- 2. Floor the accelerator.** Pick up the pace and increase the flow of your text. If you are writing a short piece you can push the pace right to the end. In a chapter or a longer article, you need to let up the pace at times for readers to catch their breath. Here is how to step on the gas:
 - Use short sentences;
 - Use frequent paragraphing;
 - Get rid of filler words;
 - Use only one idea per paragraph.

See Jakob Nielsen's bench-mark article [How Users Read on the Web](#).

- 3. Use zesty language.** Choose words that trigger emotions and tell a story for high impact writing.

Sol Stein's book *Stein on Writing* contains great suggestions for juicing up language. I read his book a day before my Masters dissertation was due and was so fired up that I stayed up all night to re-write it. Here is a clip of an ancient Zen story before and after that long night of the wild pen:

Before:

Another monk wanted to learn the older man's answer, and after trying to find out to no avail for three years, finally threatened him with a knife to make him tell.

After:

A young disciple wanted to learn the monk's answer, and—frustrated after badgering him for three years—finally bailed up the old man with a knife to make him tell all.

4. Liposuction flab. Superfluous words and phrases slow the pace and weaken the reader's attention. The following actions ensure a sleek text:

Scratch all adjectives and adverbs. Then reinstate only those few that are essential; (that's a suggestion from Sol on Writing)

Cull all phrases that double up on what you said before;

Eliminate fillers such as: to sum up; I believe; note that; it has become clear; I would like to point out, and so on.

5. Inject color. People are stirred by images and emotions, not by thoughts. 'Show, not tell!' is the catchcry of fiction writers. But non-fiction writers must also take this to heart. If we transform ideas into images, readers sit up and take notice.

Here is an interesting use of colorful writing: [blogwriter Skellie suggests](#) that we 'write dirty' and 'leave a big, colorful, human smudge on our words'.

'Human smudge' – that's wonderful!

You can read more about using images on [Angela Booth's Writing Blog](#).

These five simple steps show that everyone can learn to write with more juice and zest. Using juicy language will not only excite your readers, it will also fire up your own passion for writing.

The best time to explore juicy writing is ... write now!

About the Author:

Mary Jaksch is a published author, Zen Master, and psychotherapist. In the last few years, she's turned into a successful blogger and online entrepreneur.

She writes the blog [Goodlife ZEN](#) and is Chief Editor of [Write to Done](#). Together with Leo Babauta of Zen Habits, she is a co-founder of the [A-List Blogger Club](#) and [A-List Blogging Bootcamps](#). Her most recent blog is [A-List Blog Marketing](#) which shows bloggers the Good Karma path to online income.



10 Tips for Writing Excellence From Top Writing Bloggers

Do you want to drastically improve your writing? Are you looking for new ways to boost your writing career, retain more clients, stick to your writing schedule, or get more readers addicted to your blog's content?

We asked the winners of Write to Done's [Top 10 Blogs for Writers Contest](#) for their best advice on how to achieve excellence in the business and art of writing.

Here are their top tips. I think you'll agree that there are some excellent ideas here.

Dream Big, Write Big

Here's what [Larry Brooks](#) of [Storyfix](#), a blog on writing fiction, recommends:

*“Not so long ago there was an elephant in the writing room: the work was all about **getting published**.*

You did that by writing a great story.

But today, with digital venues having no qualitative criteria, the elephant has a new mantra: you'll still need a really great story. That is, if you want to sell to anyone besides your family and your critique group.”

But not just any story.

Until recently, publishers did all the vetting. Today that power exists in the digital marketplace.

Which means you, the aspiring author, need to play the odds: a “small” story about your grandmother's childhood in Des Moines is less likely to make a dent in the Amazon rankings than, say, a story that takes an astoundingly compelling concept and sends it sailing over the fence.

So think big. Out of the box. Don't try to compete with James Patterson or Nora Roberts – you can't, they're still out there. Rather, become the *next* James Patterson or Nora Roberts by swinging for that fence.

Write the story you were born to write. Do it now... the door has never been open wider.”

Why Your Writing Doesn't Really Matter

Here's what [James Chartrand](#) of [Men with Pens](#), a blog that offers “world-class web design and web copy,” recommends:

“Most writers jam up. In fact, very few writers actually write with complete peace of mind, firing off words and then hitting publish without a doubt in the world. They edit. And re-edit. And edit again. Stress levels go up. Self doubts rise. And hours of blood, sweat and tears go into the smallest pieces of writing.”

Here's the thing: Your writing doesn't really matter.

That doesn't mean you shouldn't care about making your writing the best it can be. You should edit and try to catch the typos, use proper punctuation and grammar and work out the kinks in awkward sentences, sure.

But there comes a time when you need to stop twisting yourself up in knots. Let the writing go. Because it doesn't really matter.

What I truly mean by that is that the medium of your message isn't as important as you think it is. People don't get excited over “perfect” writing. They don't leave comments that say, “Wow, that was some damned fine editing!”

No. People get excited about the message you have to share. Not your “perfect” writing.

And if you're preventing yourself from letting people see your writing because you're stressing over the perfection of it... well, your message never makes it out there to the people you want it to reach.

So give yourself permission to write what you need to write in the way you want to write it. Stop stressing over what people will think of your work. That's not important. Start getting excited about sharing your message instead – and making sure that the people who need to hear it actually do.

Your writing doesn't really matter. Your message does.”

The #1 Reason Your Blog Post Goes Unread

[Carol Tice](#) of [Make a Living Writing](#), a blog that offers “practical advice for hungry writers,” says:

“Did that headline make you feel you simply had to read this section? You’ve just seen a demonstration of why strong headline writing skills are essential for writers who want to succeed in the Internet age. If you can [write intriguing headlines with key words](#), it will help your audience find you. You can really stand out from the crowd, too — I reviewed more than 100 writers’ blogs recently, and weak headlines were the single biggest problem I saw.

Where newspaper headlines have a subhead to help fill in the details for readers, online your headline stands alone. It must grab readers who see it on search engines and compel them to click through to your piece, or you won’t be read. Strive to make your headlines both meaningful and intriguing. In my view, improving your headlines is the single most powerful thing you can do to help your online writing career.”

To Get Inspired, Embrace the Mundane

[Judy Dunn](#), founder of [Cat’s Eye Writer](#), a blog that helps bloggers “get their posts noticed more, read more and shared more,” recommends:

“Whether you are writing a blog post, telling a story in a marketing piece or penning a novel, ideas and topics are right in front of your face— if you watch and listen.”

In everyday life—at the grocery store, at the bank—turn the camera on yourself. Carry a notebook and record what you see and hear. There is enough bizarre behavior out there to spark the creative juices indefinitely.

Mine your family for rich material. I spun my experiences in raising my daughter into stories that are still educating, engaging and entertaining my blog readers.

Writers should be avid readers. Reading across genres is a catalyst for new ideas. It improves your vocabulary. It helps you find your voice. It shows you how to touch the senses and emotions in writing. And it helps you tell your stories better. My reading ranges from children’s books, true crime and memoirs to 19th century classics.

Finally, write, write, write. I am a big fan of free, stream-of-consciousness writing because it brings me some of my most unique ideas. Try journaling for 15 minutes every day and see what happens.”

Blast Perfectionism and Thrive

[Linda Formichelli](#), author of [The Renegade Writer](#), a blog about “living and loving the freelance life,” recommends:

“I teach and mentor writers, and a huge sticking point I always hear from them is that they’re afraid to put their work out there if it’s not perfect. So they wait and wait, and get caught in analysis-paralysis — and of course, they have no success.

I don’t know about you, but nothing I do is perfect. That includes the way I parent my toddler, my cooking skills, and — you got it — my writing. And yet, I’ve been published in more than 130 magazines, from Woman’s Day to Health to Redbook.

Let me assure you: There is no such thing as perfect. Editors (and readers) are all individuals so what one loves, another will hate. You can’t predict it. All you can do is do your best and get your ideas and your queries and your letters of introduction out there. The mediocre idea you send out has an infinitely better chance of being accepted than the one that you never send to an editor because it’s not “perfect.”

If it makes you feel any better, when I was first starting out, I sent out some terrible ideas, including a query to Family Circle called “Quik Dri Cheez: Why Advertisers Can’t Spell.” No one blacklisted me for sending out imperfect ideas. I learned from my mistakes, kept pitching, and ended up writing a dozen articles for Family Circle after that. If I can do it, so can you.

Now: Get pitching!”

Understand the Importance of Perseverance

[Therese Walsh](#) of [Writer Unboxed](#), a blog about “the craft and business of fiction,” recommends:

“I’m not sure who said that the difference between an unpublished and published writer is perseverance, but I believe it. I worked on one fiction project from 2002-

2008; my debut novel, [The Last Will of Moira Leahy](#), was published in 2009. Why does it take such a long time to perfect a story? Because even though we begin the writers' journey believing we know enough to write a book, we usually don't. As we write—if we're able to cast a clear eye on what we've written—we'll see weaknesses in our prose, our characters, the structure of our stories. We'll pick up craft books and ask critique partners for guidance, and apply new ideas and knowledge to our works-in-progress. Until we hit the next snag, and then again we'll try to understand what the problem is, and we'll learn more, then make new changes.

This may seem a crazy process—write, learn, rewrite. But in the beginning, it may be the best way to produce quality work. You must have something inside of you that says write, learn, rewrite, don't quit, repeat. Listening to that voice truly can be the difference between the unpublished and published writer. Write on!"

Establish a Consistent Writing Routine

[K.M. Weiland](#) of [Wordplay](#), a blog that focuses on “helping writers become authors,” says:

“The only way to succeed at the writing business is to treat it like business. That means showing up for work every day, rain, shine, or smog. Write every single day, if possible. If not, plan a workable writing schedule that will allow you to write on a regular basis—and then stick with it. You may be able to set aside several hours a day, or you may only be able to manage twenty minutes. Start small if you have to, and work your way up. Bestsellers have been written a paragraph a day. It isn't quantity that's important, so much as consistency.

Once you've chosen a reasonable schedule for your writing, stick with it like a bulldog on a drumstick. Remember: The only person who can make your writing a priority is you. If you're not willing to make sacrifices and enforce your writing time, no one else will do it for you. Explain the needs of your writing schedule to family and friends, asking them to respect your need for privacy during this time—and then guard your desk with a machete and a flamethrower if necessary.”

Write What You Love to Read

[Joanna Penn](#), author of [The Creative Penn](#), a blog about “writing, publishing, and book marketing,” recommends:

“For years I was held back in my writing because I thought I had to write Booker prize-winning literary fiction in order to be a ‘proper’ writer. I also thought that every sentence had to be perfect when it went onto the page. These two misconceptions blocked me for a long time. But it’s not true!

Take a look at your bookshelf and chunk it down into what you’re passionate about reading. I realized that I had mostly thrillers and books on religion and psychology – these are the things that consume me and drive my interest. So I started to write a thriller that blended these topics and it was so much fun to write! If you’re writing what you’re passionate about – whether it’s your blog, ezine article, fiction or non-fiction book, then you won’t find it hard to enthuse about your writing. It’s also important to know your market and if you’re writing what you love to read, then you will naturally hit the right chord. Let that passion carry you through a first draft and then edit your way to a brilliant finished product.”

Love Blogging for Writers

[Victoria Mixon](#) of [A. Victoria Mixon, Editor](#), a blog that focuses on “the art and craft of fiction,” recommends:

“Writing and blogging aren’t about what you get from others, they’re about what you get from yourself.

So love it. Love blogging for writers.

Love writing—the tools and techniques of written language, the humanity that comes through understanding readers, this art that gives words to everything in life that has no words.

Love writers— your audience and inspiration. It doesn’t matter whether you have one reader or thousands or if the only person reading is you. Whoever they are, that reader is a writer. Appreciate their presence in your life. Love them for loving what you love too.

Love your life—the source of all writing. You don't have to blog about yourself. But if you pay attention to the world around you and write in telling, significant details, crafting each post along the classic structure of storytelling (hook, development, climax), taking your time to draft, revise, and polish your voice until each post is the best post it can possibly be, striving always to say something unique, something that truly needs to be said. . .

Then, no matter what your numbers are, you'll get the most out of yourself. And that's the excellence in blogging for writers.”

Learn How to Inspire Your Readers

[Ollin Morales](#), author of [Courage 2 Create](#), a blog that offers “writing and life advice,” recommends:

“For me, writing isn't worth it unless it inspires.

People seem to believe that if you show your reader a character who is at her most successful and does not have one speck of ugliness, inconsistency, or imperfection in her, that this character is inspiring in herself.

That isn't true.

Whether your character is a character in your novel, or whether your character is YOU as a character on your own blog, the key to infusing your reader with knock-off-your-socks inspiration is by doing the complete opposite of what you think will inspire:

Show your character as ugly, imperfect, needy, arrogant, confused, lost, struggling, in pain—show her at her absolute lowest. Be brutally honest.

Why? Because your readers will relate. Why? Because they've been there, too.

Once you got your readers relating, show how your character triumphed, even though all the odds were stacked up against her.

Have her say to your readers:

“Yeah, I know life's tough. But you can make it through, in spite of it all.”

The deepest of valleys are what make the highest of mountains. So make the valley of your story 10,000 feet deep, so that its peak is twice as high.”

For more inspiration and unmissable information, subscribe to [Write to Done](#)

All material in this book is copyrighted.

©writetodone 2011