



Writer's Kit





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Guidelines for Successful and Publisher-Ready Writing

What defines a successful writer? For some, it might be seeing their title on the New York Times Best Sellers list, but for many, it's the actual pride you receive by being a published author. Most of us write for the joy of expression or to find a sense of purpose. Inherently, we want to share our stories, whether they are drawn from our lives or our imagination.

Instead of chasing overnight success, focus on crafting a compelling narrative and being able to present it well to a wide audience, let success follow naturally. The most fulfilled authors know that publishing isn't solely about financial gain, because the sense of pride, personal fulfillment, and leaving a legacy all compete for that number one spot. While true financial freedom as an author is rare and often only achieved by a few, the satisfaction and pride that come with being a published author are rewards in themselves.



You're Not Hemingway:

All writing is valuable if it reflects your authentic expression or your imagination, so just keep writing! All authors are not created equal, as some have better grammar or style than others. What truly matters overall is the story itself. A good story stands out from the crowd regardless of errors, because guess what, that's what editors are paid for!



Carpe Diem:

Don't make excuses not to write, just jump in with both feet! Don't hesitate to share your ideas with family, friends, writing groups before you start a chapter or passage. Ask for their input on your characters and plot and go from there. You can take their advice, or it might convince you that your original thought is the best way to proceed. Early input is crucial as there is nothing worse than finishing a book only to realize that it needs a complete rewrite. If you are a first-time author, we are here to provide you feedback that can be invaluable.



Record Your Thoughts:

You never know when inspiration will strike, so keep a notepad handy—by your bed, desk, or kitchen—to capture ideas whenever they come, whether at night, at work, or while cooking. You will be amazed at how quickly these rushes of inspiration can fade from memory if you don't capture them right away.



Create a "Do Not Distrub" zone if necessary:

Some people require total solitude to write, while others can focus surrounded by a hectic environment. If you are the type of writer who needs complete silence to concentrate, you need to be able to communicate that to your family or whoever surrounds you. If that is not possible, look for quiet places to go and write, like a library.



Establish Timely Goals:

Establishing goals for yourself is a smart strategy. We understand that the goal is to write a book, but breaking that overall goal into bite-sized pieces will help you accomplish it faster. Some writers set word count goals, while others focus on page count. The key to short-term goals is to keep you on track and moving forward. This approach allows you to celebrate small victories, which boosts your confidence that progress is achievable. Remember, the more incremental goals you accomplish, the closer you are to fulfilling your overall goal of completing a book to submit to a publisher on time.



Avoiding Analysis Paralysis:

Trying to overthink your next words? Do not get discouraged—we've all been there. Just keep on keeping on! It is better to produce ten pages and discard most of them than to write nothing at all. Write whenever you can, as there are countless opportunities to write throughout the day, so never make excuses. Let your thoughts flow freely, knowing that you can always edit later. If you find yourself staring at the same sentence for too long, step away. Take a walk, hit the gym, watch a movie, or just change your surroundings.



Let You be You:

Do you have a writing routine? Some writers follow a strict schedule while others write whenever inspiration strikes. There is not a right or wrong approach, just write! Obviously, the best system is one that works for you, but commitment is the number one rule. If you can maintain consistency, you can reach your goal. If you feel like you are not getting where you want to be in your writing journey, try setting specific times to write that will minimize distractions that would generally disrupt your creative flow. Stick to a pattern, as it builds habits and habits evolve into rituals. Those rituals can ultimately lead to a finished manuscript! Set goals for yourself to stay on track and avoid letting this process take years and years to complete. To assist you in this, we have created printable templates available at the end of this kit for you to use.

Tips for Immersing Yourself in the Art of Writing:

Still unsure how to begin? Here are some additional ideas to kickstart your writing journey:

Join local writing groups: Many cities have several writing groups and even the smallest of towns usually have at least one or two. If you can't find an in-person group, consider looking online. Facebook and other social media platforms have writing communities you can join.

Enroll in a creative writing class: Look for writing courses offered at local community colleges, libraries, high school extension programs or community centers.

Read and write everyday: Successful authors dedicate hours each day to reading and writing. We are not saying this needs to be the equivalent of a full-time job, but we are saying that you need to be consistent.

Participate in book clubs: Joining a book club encourages you to explore topics and genres you might not choose on your own. This exposure can help your understanding of different writing styles as you grow as a writer.

What are you afraid of? What is holding you back? Is it the fear of criticism? The worry of never finishing? The anxiety of success? Many writers dream of being a published author for years, only to feel fear when the opportunity arises. They see it as the final test, but that isn't the case, as the real challenge is achieving your goal of getting published. Once published, you have succeeded in what you set out to do. Commercial success is secondary because you have achieved your original goal of becoming a published author! Remember, you are just a writer until you "publish" your work. Only then do you truly earn the title of "author." It's an achievement that less than 1% of the world will ever realize, so be proud of yourself. Be courageous!

How to Hook ‘Em

Professional writers stress the importance of capturing an audience's attention quickly, as readers often decide whether to buy a book within the first few pages. Creating immediate engagement is essential—without it, you risk losing them for good. One effective approach is to start with a compelling opening line or a powerful “hook.”

Surprise! Surprising your reader can be a powerful way to draw a their attention by presenting something so surprising or intriguing that they can't help but want to know what happens next. A good example of this is, “It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen.”

Why it works: This disorienting detail immediately signals that the world is off-kilter, drawing the reader into a dystopian reality where the ordinary is unsettling. Most readers powered on after reading that opening, thus making Orwell's 1984 a must-read for the ages!

Start at the exciting part, then go from there – This common technique involves diving straight to a pivotal moment in the story, immersing readers in a situation that's part of a larger sequence of events. It can begin with an element of confusion, intrigue or mystery. The narrative can continue from there or the author might backtrack to explain how the characters arrived there. Regardless of the approach, if done correctly with engage the reader interest and sets the stage for clarity later on.

Use humor – Writing humor effectively can be challenging as people that usually think they are funny are NOT! And just like reading a text on your phone, you can't hear the other persons tone, so tread carefully here to not be offensive. Using humor correctly can quickly establish the mood, storyline or characters you highlight. It gives the reader a clear sense of what to expect from the book.

Conflict Introduction: Introducing a conflict or problem early on creates tension and the desire in the reader to find out how the conflict will be resolved. A good example would be from J.D Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*, “If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth.” Immediately, I'm intrigued!

Build up tension – “It grew louder—louder—louder! And still the men chatted pleasantly and smiled. Was it possible they heard not? Almighty God!—no, no! They heard!—they suspected!—they knew!—they were making a mockery of my horror!—this I thought, and this I think. But anything was better than this agony! Anything was more tolerable than this derision! I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer! I felt that I must scream or die!—and now—again!—hark! louder! louder! louder! louder!”

Uh yeah, that sure stresses me out, thanks Edgar Allan Poe! This building tension technique allows new authors to develop the story chronologically where they introduce the “event” first, then guide the reader through the narrative, using the main characters as anchors to uncover “whodunnit”.

Scene Setting – “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way...”

This opening line from Dicken's *A Tale of Two Cities* masterfully introduces the contradictions and extremes of the era during the French Revolution. It sets the tone for the novel's exploration of dualities, conflict, and human resilience in times of turmoil. Still quoted today by a lot of people who probably don't even know where it came from!

Why Self-Publishing is the Best Avenue for 99% of Authors

Traditional Publishing: 20 plus years ago, authors only had one path to publishing and that was the “traditional” route. Authors would have to plead with traditional publishers (many of which are out of business today) to consider their manuscript. While some still exist, the chances of them reviewing your manuscript are extremely low. 99.9% of unsolicited manuscripts sent will never cross an editor’s desk. They simply throw them away. The few Traditional publishers that remain focus on titles they know will sell well, often from established authors with proven sales records. There is no harm in submitting your work to these publishers, if you have realistic expectations and understand the odds involved.

Self-publishing: This is the most popular choice by most authors as most self-publishers will be willing to review your manuscript. There is still no guarantee of acceptance, you will however have a fair opportunity. If your book is accepted, the publisher will, for a fee, manage the process and transform your rough manuscript into a polished final product. The self-publisher will also help with distribution and authors' royalty structure are usually favorable. The advantage of this option is that the author receives a high-quality finished book and some level of distribution while maintaining full creative control, ownership, and most of the royalties earned.



How and What to Send to Publishers

A completed manuscript – A completed manuscript is essential. We strongly advise against sending a publisher anything less. Just think about it, what will they do with an incomplete manuscript, as they don’t know your vision of where the story is headed or how its going to end. You should only approach a publisher when you have a finished manuscript in hand as a completed manuscript shows that you are a serious author ready to take the next step. By being complete, prepared, and organized, you significantly increase your chances of publishing success.

Send proper format – A Microsoft Word file is preferred over a PDF or a handwritten manuscript. Most publishers will work with a PDF or hand copy but at some point, you will need a Word document to move forward with the publishing process.

How to send – NEVER send the only copy you have of your manuscript to a publisher! It is not their responsibility to send it back and nine times out of ten they won’t. The best way to send your manuscript is after you have contacted the publisher. Each publisher has a different way they prefer to receive manuscripts for review.

Writing Workout 1: Engage All Your Senses for Immersive Writing

To create a vivid and engaging scene, it's critical to go beyond visual descriptions and incorporate all five senses. This approach will make your readers feel like they're truly in the environment you're creating in your theater of the mind. Here's a step-by-step scenario to help you practice this technique in your writing:

Scenario: A Rainy Café Afternoon

Imagine you're writing a scene set in a small, cozy café in a tony town on the Eastern Seaboard during a rainy afternoon. Instead of focusing solely on the visuals, try this exercise to engage all your senses:

Sight

- Describe the soft, warm glow of the overhead pendant lights casting long shadows on the wooden floor.
- Notice the tiny droplets of rain tracing patterns down the large glass window.
- Capture the vibrant colors of the café—deep reds of upholstered chairs, rich browns of the wooden tables, and the bright green of a potted plant swaying slightly by the steel screen door.

Sound

- What do you hear in this space? Mention the steady rhythm of rain tapping against the windowpane, the low hum of background conversations, the sound of the breeze flowing through the screen door, or the gentle clinking of ceramic cups against saucers.
- Include more subtle sounds too: the whirr of the coffee grinder, the distant laughter from a corner table, or the faint crackling of a small fireplace nearby.

Touch

- Bring texture into the scene. Is there a slight chill in the air when someone opens the door? How does the smooth ceramic cup feel in your character's hands as they wrap around it for warmth?
- Describe the plush feel of the armchair your character sinks into or the slight stickiness of a table that wasn't wiped down thoroughly.

Smell

- What scents fill the café? Focus on the aroma of freshly brewed coffee, mingling with the scent of baked goods—perhaps buttery croissants or a hint of cinnamon from a batch of muffins.
- Consider other scents too, like the earthy smell of rain-soaked pavement wafting in whenever the door swings open.

Taste

- Your protagonist is sipping a drink, how does it taste? Is the coffee robust and slightly bitter with a hint of caramel? Is the pastry flakey and sweet with a sugary aftertaste?
- Even if taste isn't central, describe a faint taste of mint on your character's tongue from an earlier cup of tea or the lingering flavor of something they recently ate.

Put it All Together

- Ask Sensory Questions: As you write, pause and ask yourself: What does the setting feel like to the touch? What can my character hear that would go unnoticed by a casual observer? Is there a specific smell that defines this environment?
- Use Contrast: Highlight contrasts for impact, such as the sharp scent of citrus cutting through the heavy aroma of brewed coffee, or the warmth of a fireplace juxtaposed with the cold rain tapping outside.
- By integrating all senses into your descriptions, you'll paint a richer picture, giving your readers an immersive experience that engages them on multiple levels. The scene becomes more than just a backdrop—it becomes an experience.

Writing Workout 2:

Visualize the Story

Purpose: Visualization helps writers build vivid, detailed settings and character interactions, allowing them to craft more dynamic and engaging scenes. This writing workout focuses on picturing the story as if you were watching a movie unfold, capturing both broad and minor details.

Scenario: A Tense Confrontation in a Busy City Market

Imagine you're writing a scene set in a crowded marketplace. Your protagonist has just spotted an adversary—a person they've been trying to avoid—standing near a street vendor. The goal of this exercise is to visualize the setting, the characters' actions, and the tension in the air.

Step-by-Step Guide:

1. Picture the Setting:

- Close your eyes and imagine the marketplace. What do you see as if you were there?
- Picture the layout of the stalls: are they haphazardly arranged, or lined in neat rows?
- Is the marketplace outdoors, under a sun-dappled canopy of colorful fabric, or inside a dimly lit bazaar with hanging lanterns?
- Imagine the colors, the crowd movement, and the lighting—what time of day is it? Does the sunlight cast long shadows, or is it dusk, with lanterns just starting to glow?

2. Visualize the Characters:

- Picture your protagonist: What are they wearing? Are they hunched, trying to blend into the crowd, or standing rigidly still, unsure of what to do next?
- Visualize their body language and facial expressions: Are their hands trembling slightly as they pretend to browse a stall? Are they biting their lip or narrowing their eyes?

3. Imagine the Adversary:

- Picture the antagonist or adversary: Are they facing the protagonist, oblivious, or scanning the crowd with a searching gaze?
- What are they doing? Are they talking animatedly to a vendor, shifting nervously, or leaning casually against a stall with a smirk?

4. Create a Mental Movie:

- Now, play the scene like a short movie in your mind. Imagine your protagonist catching a glimpse of the adversary. How do they react? Do they freeze, take a step back, or pretend to be engrossed in a nearby stand?
- Imagine the antagonist looking up suddenly, making eye contact. How does your protagonist's expression change? Picture the shock, the quick intake of breath, and the urge to flee.

5. Focus on Movement and Reaction:

- Picture how they move through the market: Does your protagonist weave through the crowd, ducking between people, or do they make a bold move and confront the antagonist?
- Imagine the adversary's reaction. Do they smile, raise an eyebrow, or turn on their heel and disappear into the crowd? Play out multiple possibilities.

6. Capture the Surrounding Action:

- As the tension between them builds, visualize the oblivious market scene around them. Are vendors shouting about their wares, children running past, and the scent of spices wafting through the air?
- Imagine the chaos or calm of the marketplace, juxtaposed with the tension between your characters.
- Does the protagonist's pulse seem loud against the hum of conversation and distant laughter?

7. Write It Out:

- Now, put your visualized scene into words. Start with the broader setting, move into the characters' actions, and finally focus on the tension. Let your narrative flow naturally, guided by what you've pictured.



Visualization Prompt:

"The protagonist spotted their adversary at the far end of the market, half-hidden behind a fruit stand. For a heartbeat, time seemed to freeze. The bustle of vendors, the shouts of customers, the blur of people moving—all faded as their eyes locked. The adversary's smirk was small, almost imperceptible, but it was there. It tugged at the corner of their mouth, daring the protagonist to act. The moment stretched, a breathless anticipation in the air, before..."

Use this prompt to continue writing your visualized scene, focusing on each image as if you were directing a movie.

This exercise helps develop the skill of seeing your story unfold, making it more real for you as the author and, ultimately, for your readers. Let me know if you'd like to expand on any of these steps!

Writing Workout 3:

Building Character Depth Through a Day-in-the-Life Scene

Purpose: This exercise focuses on developing well-rounded characters by putting them in an ordinary, everyday situation that isn't part of your main plot. Understanding how your character reacts, what choices they make, and how they think in a mundane scenario will reveal layers of their personality, strengths, and weaknesses.

Scenario: A Day Off for Your Protagonist

Imagine that your protagonist has a rare day off from their usual adventures, conflicts, or main storyline. What do they do with this time? Choose a setting or activity that fits their personality, and explore their thoughts, interactions, and reactions throughout the day.

Step-by-Step Guide:

1. Set the Scene:

- Decide on the setting. Are they spending a quiet morning at home, visiting an old friend, hiking in the woods, or maybe just running errands in a busy town square?
- Describe the environment: the sights, sounds, and atmosphere. Is it calm or chaotic? Welcoming or tense? Use the setting to reflect your character's mood.

2. Introduce a Small Conflict or Task:

- Every day has its challenges, even if they're small. What minor obstacle does your character encounter?
- It could be as trivial as losing their keys, dealing with a rude server, or trying to cook a meal without burning it. The point is to reveal how they handle small irritations or unexpected events.

3. Focus on Internal Dialogue:

- Dive deep into their thoughts. Are they content or restless? Are they dwelling on past regrets, thinking about their goals, or just enjoying the peace?
- Use this opportunity to show how they think, not just what they think. Do they overanalyze? Do they approach every problem logically or emotionally?

4. Add a Meaningful Interaction:

- Introduce another character—a friend, stranger, or even a pet. How does your protagonist interact with others when not under pressure? Are they warm and talkative, or reserved and private?
- Use dialogue to reveal their attitudes, beliefs, and hidden fears. Even a simple exchange can show a lot about who they are when they're not "on stage" in the main plot.

5. Create a Small Turning Point:

- By the end of the day, include a small realization or shift in your character's perspective.
- Maybe they learn something new about themselves, confront a lingering doubt, or feel a renewed sense of purpose. This turning point can be subtle but should leave your character slightly changed by the day's end.

6. Reflect on the Day:

- Write a short paragraph or two from your character's point of view summarizing their thoughts and feelings as they wind down for the night. What are they grateful for? What still bothers them? What do they hope for tomorrow?

Example Scenario:

Character: Imagine a fierce warrior who's always on edge, accustomed to danger and constant movement. Today, however, they have no battles to fight and no enemies to face.

- **Setting:** A quiet day in a bustling village where they're supposed to "relax."
- **Small Conflict:** Struggling to navigate the crowded market while trying to purchase supplies without their usual weapons and armor.
- **Interaction:** The warrior runs into a curious child who keeps asking questions about their scars.
- **Turning Point:** By the end of the day, after talking with the child, the warrior might realize that they've forgotten what it's like to feel at peace—or they might decide they don't want a peaceful life after all.
- **Reflection:** That night, as the village grows quiet, they might stare at the stars and feel a sense of unease, realizing they're more comfortable facing danger than enjoying a calm evening.

Why This Exercise Works:

By placing your protagonist in an everyday scenario, you remove the pressure of high-stakes plot points and let their true personality shine through. It's a great way to reveal their hidden traits, values, and motivations without the filter of the main storyline. Understanding your character on this deeper level will help you write them more authentically when the plot thickens.