

Our Writers on Writing

Tips & Tricks for Writing Well



'No art ever came out of not risking your neck' (Eudora Welty)— aim to be bold, think beyond the obvious, and take risks.

If all else fails, fresh air, exercise, greenery help inspiration flow. Make sure to break up writing with plenty of walks.

A deep breath of fresh air often helps to see ideas in a new light and is essential when detangling a complicated line of thought.

- Alexandra Kingston-Reese, Associate Lecturer

Creating distance from your own words is a key to good writing. When you return to a sentence you've written, try to imagine it from the point of view of a reader other than yourself.

- Adam Kelly, Lecturer in American Literature

"If it sounds like writing, I rewrite it." (Elmore Leonard)

- Bryan Radley, Lecturer

Writing is always hard work, and so it should be. Remember, 'only bad writers think that their work is really good' (Anne Enright).

The golden rule: 'The only kind of writing is rewriting' (Ernest Hemingway).

The method: 'Reread, rewrite, reread, rewrite' (Helen Dunmore).

The secret: patience and perseverance. 'To major things the surest road is on the minor pains bestowed' (Samuel Beckett).

But don't forget: 'The pleasure is the rewriting' (Joyce Carol Oates).

- Emilie Morin, Senior Lecturer

The paragraph is your friend. Each paragraph should be governed by a topic or idea that needs to be in place to move the argument forward, although a paragraph may explore a reservation or qualification in your argument rather than just add a step to a logical sequence.

Think about the last sentence of one paragraph and the first of the next. They are the hooks and eyes that link one to the other. Make sure they connect. Try not to end a paragraph with a quotation. It almost certainly needs a sentence of explanation, rather than being left to speak for itself.

- Jon Mee, Professor

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I have been getting fed up with essays which are compilations of nicely referenced quotations with little argument moving them on. So, I say to students that they might have two objects of desire, an IPAD and a good mark.

To achieve the latter always remember the former: when you introduce an Illustration (quotation, fact, date etc), you should always Pause which will make you Analyse in order to Develop your essay. IPAD."

- Matthew Campbell, Professor

For me, good writing does not happen without music in my ears. It can be any type of music—depending on the topic of what I am writing, or the time of the day: I tend to prefer hard beats in the morning or when I am feeling sleepy, and softer beats or sometimes classical music later in the day, when I have already done substantial writing.

I have written with anything ranging from Schubert's Winterreise to bossa nova, indie music and even club hits! Music is the true caffeine ingredient in my writing process. I find making cups of tea or coffee is the real procrastination from writing that needs to get done...

- Nicoletta Asciuto, Associate Lecturer

Remember your reader does not have access to your mind, only what is on the page; it is easy to believe you have said what you mean just because you know what you mean.

It helps, when writing an essay, if you build in enough time to put it aside and come back to it with fresh eyes, so that you are not reading it as if you already know what it says. Not only will this help you see the essay your reader will see, and whether it really does articulate your thought, it will also help you to spot small errors that your eye would previously have skimmed over.

- Richard Walsh, Associate Lecturer

When you're reading criticism, make a long list of the 'critical' verbs being used: exemplify, disclose, tease out, interrogate, complicate, throw into relief, illuminate, point to, signal, connote, signify, imply, typify, prefigure... etc etc.

They all mean something different. Using them correctly in your own work will help you identify how something in a text is meaning and will push your thinking forward. It will also help you avoid boring verbs (reflect, show, suggest, highlight, demonstrate).

- Trev Broughton, Lecturer

Remember what Hemingway said: 'Do not worry. You have always written before and you will write now'. Show your iceberg: 'If a writer... knows enough of what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows... A writer who omits things because he does not know them only makes hollow places in his writing'.

- Stephen Minta, Senior Lecturer

You might like to see what rules and philosophies the writers you study have for writing, too.

Check out The Guardian's *Ten Rules for Writing Fiction* for timeless advice on writing from some of the world's most renowned authors.