10 Things That Will Transform the Way You Write

Karen Taylor
Website: Sovereignwriter.org

The single belief that stops most writers before they start

If I had to pinpoint one single belief that stops most writers before they start, it would be the belief of: I am not good enough.

Writing takes time and practice, and the biggest obstacle for most writers is this fear. Bad experiences with feedback in a writer's past can be a seemingly insurmountable obstacle. There are many famous writers who received rejection after rejection but never gave up. You can too. To name two, Stephen King and James Patterson.

Why "I'll write when I'm ready" is a myth — and what to do instead

The truth is everyone "writes." Writing is just translating the thoughts in our head to the paper or screen. Trusting in your words and allowing them to come through is the key. Revision comes later.

Just sit down and write. Butt in seat; do the work. Telling ourselves that we will write when we are ready is just another excuse for not writing. Once we sit down to write, we are ready.

How to find the real first sentence of your story

I use various methods to help me when I begin a new writing project. One thing that I have found to be quite helpful is to use the paper or document in front of me as a dumping ground for whatever comes out. I call it word-vomit. Gross, yes, but it is an effective descriptor because that is what I will do. Just start writing and allow it to flow for five minutes. I time it.

It doesn't matter if I am writing a grocery list, a rant about something I am ticked off about, or several lines of repetitive, "I don't know what to write." The key is to just write. Once the action of writing has begun, many of the obstacles we place in our way disappear.

The difference between a diary and a memoir (and why it matters)

A writer can use a diary to help with writing a memoir, but they are not the same thing. A diary is personal as is a memoir, but a memoir has the goal of being read by someone else, so the important rules of writing such as voice, audience, purpose, and story, must be incorporated into the work. Even if a writer plans for their memoir to be only for family and friends, those elements need to be included.

There are other things to consider as well, but to keep things focused, I will stick with this first point.

What Karen tells every writer who says "no one will care"

This will sound harsh but stick with me. It shouldn't make any difference about anyone caring. First and foremost, write for yourself. That doesn't mean to haphazardly slap something together and put it out into the world. It just means to write what you would like to read, what you think needs to be out in the world. Toni Morrison said, "If there's a book that you want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it."

Of course, there are many steps in the process of getting something written and out into the world; however, the most important thing about the "no one will care" idea is that writing comes from within. Be true to yourself and the content will come.

Writing is not just good grammar and punctuation.

I have been teaching English composition for fifteen years, and I have heard several people say, "I am a grammar Nazi." I would never call myself an anything Nazi because the negative connotations of its meaning are too awful.

Language conventions have been used as a tool of oppression for a long time, and the damage that has been done to prospective writers by those who focus on the rules of grammar and punctuation over learning the process of writing and how to make meaning is immeasurable. Grammar and punctuation can always be edited and fixed. Who knows how many good writers fell by the wayside because of their lack of expertise in those two things.

Getting the words down in a way the purpose of the piece is clear and makes sense is the most important goal. Editing and revision come later, and that is where the rhythm of the words conveying the idea are finessed and polished. Grammar and punctuation are addressed after the main concerns are handled.

I don't know what to write.

Write anything. Practice writing. Write in a journal. Write little rhymes. Most writers who say they don't know how to write are enforcing that mental block they have. It is a barrier they use to keep themselves from facing their fear. We have all heard the adage that says if we face our fears, death of fear is certain. Writing something every day, even just a sentence or two, is a good practice for getting over fears and getting into the habit. Persistence isn't only for the gym.

I will write a bestselling novel and become a millionaire.

It is possible. Some have done it. James Patterson is the first one that comes to mind. What I will say to this is to pick an author who has made one of the best sellers lists a few times and do some research on them. Do more than one author. Just read about their story. Many people have a grandiose view of writing novels and becoming rich.

I am not saying it is impossible for anyone. Nothing is impossible, but if your reason for writing is to become rich, it may disappoint you somewhere along the way.

I don't have the talent to write.

I will answer this one with quotations from two successful writers:

Stephen King: "Talent is cheaper than table salt. What separates the talented individual from the successful one is a lot of hard work."

Ernest Hemingway: "It's none of their business that you have to learn how to write. Let them think you were born that way."

Bonus:

I was coaching a veteran once who was writing a book. He had written a fair amount on it. As we chatted, I asked him if he liked reading and he said no.

Another time, in one of my Freshman Composition classes, one of my students said she was writing a book. I complimented her and during our conversation I asked what books she liked to read. She said she hated reading but loved writing.

Expecting to be able to write a book and have it published without studying other writers by reading is like saying you are going to be a NASCAR driver, but you don't want to learn to drive a manual transmission. To write well, it is important to study how successful writers do it, so I question anyone who says they want to write a book, but they don't like to read.

Sovereign Writer is not focused only upon writing for publication. That is one thing. Sovereign Writer is to provide coaching to those who wish to free that inner voice, whether it be for publication or for personal reasons.