

25 Tips for Writing

1. Practice often. The more you write, the easier it gets to put your thoughts on paper.
2. Read a lot, especially the kind of writing you like to do. This is how we learn the language of readers and writers and listen in on their conversations.
3. Seek to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange—for yourself as the writer.
4. Start your project as soon as you can. Your writing process is every bit as important as your final written product.
5. What comes to you first doesn't have to end up in the lead, or anywhere else for that matter. Just mute the critic and write.
6. Use your natural voice. Afterward, revise for your audience or discipline. Over time your natural voice will change as it needs to.
7. Don't be afraid to follow your rabbit holes; you never know where they'll lead.
8. Support your thesis with research, but first research to develop a thesis. This is also called listening before you talk.
9. Talk about your writing with someone. Get them to ask you questions so you can see what you say or what you need to say.
10. Imagine an audience beyond a teacher.
11. To avoid being distracted by a length guideline while drafting, screw up the margins and font size.
12. Use the senses. Show what you saw, heard, touched, smelled, or tasted, so the reader can think and feel the same as you.
13. Learn the standards before bending them, and don't bend them without a good reason.
14. Revise. Ernest Hemingway rewrote the final page of *Farewell to Arms* thirty-nine times.
15. Put some daylight between drafts. Walk away, reinhabit your life, refresh.
16. After you have a draft, outline what you've written to see whether the path you're on is the one you want to take.
17. Active verbs energize the prose. Where possible, use them to replace adverbs, adjectives, *be* and *have* verbs, and passive voice. For example—

<u>Replace these</u>	with	<u>Active verbs</u>
Michael walked awkwardly away.		Michael lumbered away.
Toby's eyes were bloodshot.		Pink veins crawled Toby's eyes.
The request was approved by Jenner.		Jenner approved the request.

18. Use precise words. Sometimes that means choosing a big word, sometimes a small one. It almost always means nixing clichés.
19. Vary your sentence structure. Too many essays and too many sentences begin with *I* or *there is*.
20. By the end of the process, make every paragraph about one thing.
21. Read your draft aloud to someone; among other things, this gives you a sense of audience, lets you hear the way you come across in the piece, and it can help you vary your vowel and consonant sounds.
22. Readers pause at commas, but writers don't put a comma everywhere they pause. Study the current punctuation standards.
23. When proofreading, say each sentence aloud, working from the final sentence to the first.
24. Write the truth as you experience it—your truth. And be transparent about it.
25. Remember that ultimately, writing is more a conversation than a performance.