

75 Books Every Writer Should Read

by Staff Writers (Online Universities)



“It is better to
write a bad first
draft than to write
no first draft at all.”

Will Shetterly

Freedom With Writing

Whether you want to make writing your career or just want to know how to improve your writing there's plenty of reading material out there to help you get inspired and hone your skills.

Here's a collection of titles that will instruct you on just about every aspect of writing, from the basics of grammar to marketing your completed novel, with some incredibly helpful tips from well-known writers themselves as well.

Writing Basics

These books address things like structure, plot, descriptions and other basic elements of any story.

1. **The Power of Myth by Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers:** You can improve the quality of your writing by adding a mythical quality to them with advice and insight from this book.
 2. **Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers by Christopher Vogler:** Whether you agree with the ideas in this book or not, you'll find it a useful and informative read for writing.
 3. **Word Painting: A Guide to Write More Descriptively by Rebecca McClanahan:** Get some pointers that will help you make your settings and characters come alive from this book.
 4. **Simple & Direct by Jacques Barzun:** Barzun says that his purpose in writing this book was to "re-sensitize the mind to words" and he does this through a variety of helpful lessons on grammar, word usage and writing that are sure to make your writing better, or at least more thoughtful.
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5. **Plot & Structure** by **James Scott Bell**: This book will help you create plots that will draw readers in and make your work more powerful.
6. **Elements of Writing Fiction: Characters & Viewpoint** by **Orson Scott Card**: Check out this engaging book for a little guidance on creating more believable and fully developed characters.
7. **Between the Lines** by **Jessica Morrell**: In this book you'll learn how to craft a cohesive and layered story through the use of suspense, transitions and more.

Advice from Authors

Who better to give advice on writing than those who have made a name for themselves doing it? These books offer some insights on the craft from those who know it best.

8. **On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft** by **Stephen King**: This is widely regarded as one of the best books for any aspiring author to read. Why? King's book divides it's time between being an instructional manual for writers and a richly engaging memoir that serves as a great example of how to write and write well.
9. **Letters to a Young Novelist** by **Mario Vargas Llosa**: Readers will not find a true instructional manual on writing in this book, but instead a thoughtful exploration on the the way writing itself works and how it can change or enrich a life.
10. **Zen in the Art of Writing: Releasing the Creative Genius Within You** by **Ray Bradbury**: Many are familiar with sci-fi author Ray Bradbury. In this book of essays he gives his thoughts on the literary and commercial aspects of writing as well as providing motivation for the aspiring writer out there.

11. **Ron Carlson Writes a Story** by **Ron Carlson**: Ron Carlson is often called the "master of the short story," and in this book he shares his process for creating one of these short masterpieces.
12. **The Faith of a Writer: Life, Craft, Art** by **Joyce Carol Oates**: Containing twelve essays and an interview, this book delves into the deeper issues of writing, like inspiration, faith, and failure.
13. **On Being a Writer** by **Bill Strickland**: This book is a collection of thirty-one interviews from *Writer's Digest* exploring the work and process of literary greats like Hemingway and Faulkner.
14. **The Best Writing on Writing** by **Jack Heffron**: Check out this multi-volume series to hear advice, recollections and stories from authors both famous and more obscure.
15. **On Writers and Writing** by **John Gardner**: In his time, Gardner was considered one of the best teachers of writing. In this book you'll be able to read some of his best essays and reviews.
16. **Art Objects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery** by **Jeanette Winterson**: This collection of essays touches on everything from how to look at a painting to how to keep personal and professional lives separate.
17. **Everything I Know About Writing** by **John Marsden**: Writer John Marsden shares his experience and expertise on writing in this book.
18. **Lessons from a Lifetime of Writing: A Novelist Looks at His Craft** by **David Morrell**: Morrell wrote the book that inspired the film *Rambo*, but he is just as well-versed in classic lit as popular fiction. In this book he'll explain how to navigate some of the basic elements of writing a great book.
19. **The Believer Book of Writers Talking to Writers** by **Vendela Vida**: This book is a collection of conversations between writers and their mentors, offering insights into their processes and a whole lot more.

20. **How I Write: Secrets of a Bestselling Author** by Janet Evanovitch: Get a behind-the-scenes look at how this author constructs her novels about the intrepid bounty hunter Stephanie Plum in this book.

Improving Your Writing

Use the information in these books to hone your writing skills.

21. **Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within** by Natalie Goldberg: This easy-to-read book will offer you some tips on writing as well as often entertaining comparisons and insights on the craft.
22. **Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life** by Anne Lamott: Check out this instructional book to get help creating your work from the **first drafts** to the final publication.
23. **The 10% Solution** by Ken Rand: This book helps guide writers through many of the areas of writing that cause them trouble and keep them frustrated.
24. **Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft** by Janet Burroway, Elizabeth Stuckey-French and Ned Stuckey-French: Burroway's book is one of the most widely read and respected books on writing fiction, and in it writers will find tips on everything from creativity to tone.
25. **The Artful Edit: On the Practice of Editing Yourself** by Susan Bell: There are few things more helpful to improving writing than good editing, and this book is full of tips to help you tackle scaling back and refining your own work.
26. **Writing Magic: Creating Stories That Fly** by Gail Carson Levine: Are your stories lacking that certain something? Get some tips on finding the missing ingredient from this book.
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27. **Edit Yourself : A Manual for Everyone Who Works With Words** by **Bruce Clifford Ross-Larson**: No matter what kind of writing you do, you'll find tips on trimming the fat in this book.
 28. **Keys to Great Writing** by **Stephen Wilbers**: This basic guide will help you improve all aspects of your writing with lessons writers at any level can use.
 29. **The Classic Guide to Better Writing: Step-by-Step Techniques and Exercises to Write Simply, Clearly and Correctly** by **Rudolf Franz Flesch**: This guidebook will help you work on organization, grammar, spelling, voice and more.
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Grammar

Whether you struggle with grammar or just want to learn to master it better, these books are great reads and reference tools.

30. **Woe Is I: The Grammarphobe's Guide to Better English in Plain English** by **Patricia T. O' Conner**: O' Conner is an editor at the *New York Times Book Review* and gives a witty and fun take on the often boring subject of grammar in this book.
 31. **A Dash of Style: The Art and Mastery of Punctuation** by **Noah Lukeman**: If you struggle to know when to use a semicolon or a colon, this book can help you conquer any form of punctuation.
 32. **Punctuation for Writers: A Thorough Primer For Writers Of Fiction And Essays** by **Harvey Stanbrough**: Make sure your work is free from any major punctuation errors by referencing and reading this text.
 33. **Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation** by **Lynn Truss**: Where you choose to place a comma can make a big difference in the meaning of a phrase, as this fun grammar and punctuation manual will show.
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34. **Grammatically Correct** by **Anne Stilman**: This book will help you resolve some of the most common issues with grammar, spelling and punctuation.
35. **The Grouchy Grammarian: A How-Not-To Guide to the 47 Most Common Mistakes in English Made by Journalists, Broadcasters, and Others Who Should Know Better** by **Thomas Parrish**: If you stink at using grammar correctly, then you're not alone. This book shows you how to avoid making these common mistakes so you can sound smarter and write better.
36. **The Pen Commandments** by **Steven Frank**: This book will make learning the rules of the English language fun, interesting and maybe even funny.
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Reference Books

Keep these books on hand to ensure your writing is mastering the basics like spelling, formatting, word use and more.

37. **The Elements of Style** by **William Strunk, Jr., and E.B.White**: This book is a must-have for anyone who writes, as it has been the standard model for proper English style for decades.
38. **Writing With Style: Conversations on the Art of Writing** by **John Trimble**: Here you'll find many of the same writing tips contained in *The Elements of Style* but in a more accessible and lively format.
39. **Writing Fiction: A Practical Guide from New York's Acclaimed Creative Writing School** by **Brett Norris**: This guide will help you go from idea to finished product with lessons that writers at any stage can employ.
40. **How Not To Say What You Mean: A Dictionary of Euphemisms** by **R. W. Holder**: Whether you're trying to dodge using less attractive terms or just want to get creative with the English language, this book can help.
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41. **1000 Most Important Words** by **Norman W. Schur**: Improve your vocabulary with this collection of great words and intriguing dictionary definitions.
 42. **Dewdroppers, Waldos, and Slackers: A Decade-by-Decade Guide to the Vanishing Vocabulary of the 20th Century** by **Rosemarie Ostler**: Those who like to set their stories in times past can get a quick reference for older slang and now defunct English words in this book.
 43. **The Writer's Art** by **James J. Kilpatrick**: Check out this book for some pretty essential tips on using the English language wisely.
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Writing as a Career

If you're looking to make a career out of writing, these books can be a big help in getting you there.

44. **Telling Lies for Fun & Profit: A Manual for Fiction Writers** by **Lawrence Block**: This book offers plenty of advice for those who want to write better and get their work published.
45. **Making a Literary Life** by **Carolyn See**: Read this book to learn how to look at writing not only as a job, but as a lifestyle.
46. **Writing the Breakout Novel** by **Donald Maass**: Get some advice from this literary agent on how to create a novel that will help you stand out from the crowd.
47. **The Forest for the Trees: An Editor's Advice to Writers** by **Betsy Lerner**: Learn what editors are looking for when it comes to actually getting your work read and possibly even published from this book.
48. **The First Five Pages: A Writer's Guide to Staying Out of the Rejection Pile** by **Noah Lukeman**: Thousands of novels are submitted to publishers each year, but the vast majority of these will not be published. Learn how you can tweak

your writing to give it a fighting chance in this book from literary agent Noah Lukeman.

49. **The Fire in Fiction: Passion, Purpose and Techniques to Make Your Novel Great by Donald Maass:** Learn what makes published authors' stories so "hot" and what you may be doing that's making yours, well, not.
50. **Dare to be a Great Writer: 329 Keys to Powerful Fiction by Leonard Bishop:** This book will teach you to write fiction that's not just good but also sellable.
51. **Sometimes the Magic Works: Lessons from a Writing Life by Terry Brooks:** Check out this book from author Terry Brooks to get insight into the publishing industry and the process of writing.
52. **The Marshall Plan Workbook: Writing Your Novel from Start to Finish by Evan Marshall:** If you need a little push to get yourself into the swing of writing your novel, then this workbook could be a great motivational tool.
53. **How To Grow A Novel: The Most Common Mistakes Writers Make and How to Overcome Them by Sol Stein:** This book will guide you through the process and the necessary elements of creating an engaging novel.
54. **How To Be Your Own Literary Agent by Richard Curtis:** If you're not quite ready to make the commitment to a literary agent, you can still ensure you don't get swindled by reading this book.
55. **The Well-Fed Writer: Financial Self-Sufficiency as a Freelance Writer in Six Months or Less by Peter Bowerman:** Those hoping to work as freelancers can get advice on finding work and making freelancing a steady paying gig in this book.

Genre or Format Specific

These books focus on particular genres like science fiction or mystery or specific types of writing like poetry and nonfiction.

56. **How to Write Science Fiction and Fantasy** by **Orson Scott Card**: This Hugo Award winning book will guide you through the ins and outs of creating compelling and believable sci-fi stories.
57. **Writing Mysteries: A Handbook by the Mystery Writers of America** by **Jan Burke**: If mysteries are more your thing, you can learn how to construct plots, characters and build suspense in this book.
58. **On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction** by **William K. Zinsser**: Those who prefer writing and reading non-fiction will find a wealth of helpful information in this guidebook.
59. **The Poet and the Poem** by **Judson Jerome**: This book will teach you the basics of poetry from diction to verse forms.
60. **The Language of Life** by **Bill Moyers**: This book offers a series of discussions with thirty-four American poets, offering inspiration and insight into what makes poetry great.
61. **The Art of the Personal Essay: An Anthology from the Classical Era to the Present** by **Philip Lopate**: This book contains seventy-five personal essays from an incredibly diverse spectrum of writers. It can be a great way to learn about the changes in the medium and how to develop your own essay style.

Classics

These classic books on writing, writers and creativity will get you inspired to write more.

62. **A Moveable Feast** by **Ernest Hemingway**: Published posthumously, this book details the time Hemingway spent in Paris along with other literary greats, like Fitzgerald, as well as insights into the psyche of the artist himself.

63. **Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man by James Joyce:** This fictional account of the life of Joyce is not only a good read but an interesting insight into the events that shaped the life of one of the world's most acclaimed authors.
64. **Poetics by Aristotle:** This ancient Greek text is all about constructing the perfect tragic drama, but offers invaluable insights into the essentials of any genre of writing.
65. **Walden by Henry David Thoreau:** Check out this book to learn what it means to disconnect from society and focus on nature. Thoreau's lessons on simplicity can be applied to the art of writing as well, where less can often say more.
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Creativity and Motivation

Get some tips and advice on finding your creative spark and getting motivated to finally write your own book, essay, or short story.

66. **The Writer's Idea Book by Jack Heffron:** If you're struggling with writer's block, give this inspirational and educational book a read to get some ideas on how to move forward.
67. **Writing With Power: Techniques for Mastering the Writing Process by Peter Elbow:** No matter how you like to write, this book contains a guide to help you get motivated and move through the process from beginning to end.
68. **How To Think Like Leonardo Da Vinci: Seven Steps to Genius Every Day by Michael Gelb:** The aim of this book is to help you reach into your brain and find untapped reserves of intelligence, creativity and ability so you can unlock your own inner genius.
69. **The Write Time: 366 Exercises to Fulfill Your Writing Life by Robert Yehling:** In this book you'll find writing exercises, motivational quotes and loads of resources to help you get writing.
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70. **The War of Art: Break Through the Blocks and Win Your Inner Creative Battles** by **Steven Pressfield**: Novelist Steven Pressfield offers his advice to help writers (or other creative types) break through their creative barriers and get inspired.
71. **Keeping a Journal You Love** by **Sheila Bender**: In this book you'll find journal entries from 15 poets and writers as well as their own explanations of these entries. Aspiring writers can use the book as a guide to creating a useful and productive journal of their own.
72. **The Right to Write: An Invitation and Initiation into the Writing Life** by **Julia Cameron**: The essays contained in this book detail the drive to create and the many tasks of everyday life that often stand in the way as well as pointers on getting yourself to work in spite of them.
73. **Room to Write** by **Bonni Goldberg**: Each of the writing lessons in this manual are a page long, offering you numerous but succinct opportunities to kick your writing up a notch.
74. **Writers Dreaming: 26 Writers Talk About Their Dreams and the Creative Process** by **Naomi Epel**: Read this book to hear well-known authors talk about the role dreams play in their work and how they inspire their creativity.
75. **Writing Begins with the Breath: Embodying Your Authentic Voice** by **Laraine Herring**: Learn how to connect with your inner voice and become a more fully-realized creative person through the lessons in this book.
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