

The Easy Way to Write

presents

**Doing the *Write* Thing:
10 Tips on Becoming
A More Professional
Writer**

Sarah White & Rob Parnell

The AWA Guide to Self Editing – 10 Tips**© Sarah White and Rob Parnell.****All rights reserved 2011 and forever.**

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Hello there!

What follows is a series quick tips – ideally digested one a day that will help you become a more professional writer. Perhaps place it by your bedside and read one tip at a time before going to sleep – the subconscious has a marvellous way of digesting information while it's asleep.

Quick Tip One:

Read Every Day.

We all know writers who say they are writers, not readers, so they don't read a lot of other people's works. That's a silly attitude. We need to read to understand what's going on in the world, what other people are writing about, and how to become better writers. Every word we read adds something to our writing by giving us ideas concerning what to write about, how to write it and why we are writers in the first place.

One of the most important requirements for being a good writer is to be a good reader, and that's why it's first on this list of tips.

You should read everything from the cereal box to good and bad magazines to pulp novels and prize-winners. There are books and Web sites (search for “great books” or reading lists) that can give you ideas of good books to read, or you can come up with your own system, like regularly visiting the library.

Sarah says: A couple years ago I started reading books that had won Pulitzer Prizes, and I've found that valuable in my writing.

Reading books that others have considered worthy of praise can give you insight into what is thought of as good writing, which you can either include in your philosophy or ignore completely. But it doesn't really matter what you read, as long as you read every day. It will help you in ways you don't even know. Read before you go to bed at night and if possible, before you get up in the morning. If you keep a book or magazine with you at all times you will find a lot of time to read, and every moment will be worthwhile.

Quick Tip Two

Write Every Day.

You saw this one coming, didn't you? If you want to be a writer, you have to write every day. Or at least almost every day.

Sarah says: I made a resolution in 2002 to write every day, which I broke after the first week, so in 2003 it was to write almost every day, which is a lot easier to wrap the brain around and you don't have to feel guilty if you blow it off every now and then.

Even if you don't have time every day to work on your novel or short stories, write a poem or a journal entry. Just write something to keep the words flowing.

Try keeping a dream journal. Write in it every morning to keep a record of what you remember from your dreams. This can be helpful getting ideas for your writing, as well as getting some words out every day, first thing in the morning.

Writing is like exercise: It gets easier the more you do it, more rewarding the more you do it, and when you slack off you can feel it the next time. Words will come more easily with practice, and when you stop practicing they will seize up again and you'll have to stretch those muscles again.

So write every day, at least five minutes but as long as you can, and you will reap the rewards of actually getting projects done and becoming a better writer more quickly.

Quick Tip Three

Learn New Words.

Writers need to have a good working vocabulary. Words are your toys, and the more of them you have the more fun you will have making things with them.

It's like when you were a kid and you (or your friend) got the really cool Lego set with all the different pieces – you can build a lot more, different things if you have lots of different parts to start with.

If you're writing a lot of non-fiction for mainstream publications you may not have a lot of use for fancy words, but learn them anyway. You never know when you could use an unusual word in your fiction or poetry, or for a more upscale non-fiction market.

Always have a dictionary close at hand (I have at least four and I try to keep one nearby whenever I'm reading or writing) and look up words you come across and don't understand. Buy strange dictionaries (or check them out from the library) to learn more about word origins and oddball words.

Make it a habit to learn a new word every day. Words are all we have as writers. Sure, people have different styles, but that pretty much comes down to using different words in a different order.

How can you find your style if you don't know all the words you possibly can? The point is to never stop learning, about your craft, your language, your passion. Because that's what writing is, right?

Quick Tip Four

Try New Forms.

Experimentation is good. Just because you started out writing short stories doesn't mean you wouldn't be a great poet, or because you started writing nonfiction you shouldn't

try your hand at a novel.

Mystery writers should try romance, sci-fi writers should try mainstream, and literary writers should try action/adventure. It's fun to try different things; you never know what form you might be really good at unless you try. This goes hand in hand with reading a variety of things. You might think you don't like fantasy novels until you read one; then you might want to try your hand at writing one.

Sarah says: I think I don't like science fiction but I have this idea for a story that will be science fiction and I'm excited about trying to write it. I know I will have to read some in the genre to do it properly, but I think it will be a fun challenge. I'm reminded of another exercise metaphor – cross-training. Most people who are runners don't just run, they also lift weights and stretch and do other exercises. Variety is good for keeping your interest up as well as keeping your body healthy.

Variety in writing is good too, to keep your interest and to keep your brain healthy. As writers, we need to challenge ourselves, and trying new and different forms is a great way to do it.

Try to write a flash fiction story if you've never done it before (500 words or less).

Or write a rhyming poem about the weather.

Write a book review, or a short story involving something in the room you're in.

Try to write a song about your favourite pet.

Write a complete short story in 20 minutes.

Look through a travel magazine and write a story or poem inspired by one of the pictures.

Whatever. Just try something different. It will be fun, and you'll learn a lot. You may just find a new genre for yourself!

Quick Tip Five

Nurture Your Creative Spirit.

We live in a busy world, with information and obligations always bombarding us. It's not a very nice place for a sensitive, creative soul to live and work. Sometimes it's hard to keep your creative spirit happy in the real world.

That's why we're writers, because often we find something lacking in real life and want to fix things. But we have to live in the real world, and that can be difficult, especially when faced with rejection or people who are not supportive of our endeavours.

All that negativity can get you down and keep you from wanting to write or feeling good about your avocation. Sometimes we need to give our spirit a check-up because if we're not feeling creative and good about what we're doing, we won't write well.

This could be a whole book in itself but let me take you through the steps quickly.

Everyone needs time to themselves, but writers and other creative people especially need time alone to let ideas simmer and to recharge our creative batteries. It can be hard to get time alone if you're working multiple jobs, are a single parent or taking care of a sick loved one (and many other reasons), but

you really need to make an effort, even if only for a few minutes a day, to be alone with yourself.

Use this time to meditate, write in a journal or just reflect on your creative process and how things have been going for you. Do other things that make you feel creative whenever you have time. This could be a walk in the woods, a visit to an art gallery, playing with your dog or doing yoga or some other reflective exercise.

Of course you also need to take care of your physical body by eating right, exercising and drinking lots of fluids (especially when writing a lot, I've found).

Basically, be as good to yourself as you can, surround yourself with beautiful things and creative people, and you will find yourself feeling more creative and in tune with your own life. This will help you be a better writer because ideas will come to you more easily when you are receptive and you will write better when you are healthy and happy.

Quick Tip Six

Write, Submit. Write, Submit.

Many writers are afraid to submit their work. They either don't think they're good enough or are afraid of rejection or have some other fear holding them back.

Writing for its own sake is fine, if you just want to keep everything in a drawer for your children to find after you're dead. But I think most people who write really want to be published, to see their name in print or pixels on top of something they crafted with their own brain. And for that to happen, you have to submit. There's no other way.

Yes, it's daunting at first, and there will be a lot of rejection. But it's not personal; usually it just means your idea doesn't fit the market you submitted it to for whatever reason. If you follow the guidelines in *Doing the Write Thing* you will be less likely to be rejected for sending in something sloppy because you won't send in sloppy work.

It's hard to find the confidence to send your work out into the void, but you just have to do it.

Sarah says: I'm incredibly shy (that's why I'm not a reporter any more) but I've found the courage to respond to calls for writers and I haven't always been successful but sometimes I have. And now I've written a book and know that I'm helping people improve their writing. That's really cool.

You can have the same feeling if only you put your work out there. It may take a while, but someday your words will find a home, and that's the best feeling ever. Don't be afraid to put yourself out there, because if you don't try, no one will ever get to read your words.

And when the world is getting you down, which is bound to happen if you submit a lot, go back to tip number five (nurture your creativity). And know that with perseverance you can be a success. Okay?

Quick Tip Seven

Don't Be Afraid to Seek Help.

There are writers groups everywhere these days, from small towns to big cities and thousands of message boards on the Internet. Writers need community because our job is often isolating.

Find a group that you think can help you and join up. Of course meeting with a group in person is preferable to an online group if one is available, but any kind of community that can help you answer questions and offer support and congratulations is a great thing.

There are also numerous magazines and e-zines for writers, and the editors often accept questions and are happy to help people who are where they have been. I get tons of these publications and they're a great source of inspiration and information (as well as potential markets, advice and camaraderie).

Some writers are jerks, there's no doubt about it, but there are a lot more good people out there who are willing to share good advice and tips.

If you think a market sounds too good to be true, there are places to go to find out if it really is. If you find yourself stuck, don't be afraid to ask for help.

Someone has been there before you and can show you the way out.

Most writers will be honoured to know that you respect their advice and will be happy to help you whenever they can. Try it. You'll be surprised.

Quick Tip Eight

Love What You Write.

There's no reason to be a writer if you don't love what you write. I know it's hard when you work in an office or shop and have to go to meetings or do other boring things. But at least when you're home, with your words, you should at least be proud of everything you write.

If you don't think your work is worth being published, no one else will. You need to have passion for what you do, otherwise you may as well be selling hamburgers at McDonalds
(this is what I always tell people at work who complain about their jobs).

If you aren't excited about what you're doing, you'll never be able to excite someone else enough to pay you to publish your work. This is a tough business; it's tough even as a hobby. If you don't love it, don't do it. Take up golf if you just want to be frustrated.

But if you really love it, if you wake up every day with a need to put words on paper and share them with the world, welcome to the club. It's hard being a writer, but the rewards can be great and fulfilling. You get to share your ideas, your thoughts and your imagination with the world, and maybe even make a little money from your creativity.

It's a nice idea to think that you can be paid just for using your brain. If you don't love what you're writing, try another genre or another project. If you're working on something you have to finish (because you're getting paid for it), slog through as best you can but understand that you shouldn't do that kind of thing long term.

Every day, every project is a new adventure, a new learning experience. Love the process of writing, love the words, and this will show through in your work.

Quick Tip Nine*Learn to Let Go.*

While you love everything you write, you need to understand that your editor may not love every word, or the placement of every word that you write. Sometimes they will hack and slash your story to bits so you don't even feel like it's yours any more.

This will happen, and it's heartbreaking, but you have to learn to let go. It's like dealing with rejection. You have to learn to let that go, too. Just think: "It wasn't the right time, it has nothing to do with me" when rejections start to get you down.

Re-edit your work and send it somewhere else. This is perhaps the hardest part of being a writer, and I can see why people are afraid to submit.

Sarah says: I was the same way for a long time. I wanted to be a writer, but I didn't want my spirit crushed by people who didn't like what I wrote or the way I wrote it. I've had more rejection than success, as I imagine lots of writers have, but I try not to let it get

to me.

If you're feeling down about yourself or your writing, go back to tip five and do something nice for yourself that will get you back into the creative spirit.

Take a bath. Do something crafty. Bake cookies. And know that you're not the only one who has ever been rejected and felt awful about it. It's OK to feel bad for a while, just do something cleansing and let it go. Don't let it stop you. Get back in the game and you will succeed.

Quick Tip Ten

Have Fun.

Writing is fun. It's one of the most creative things you can do with your time.

If you write fiction, you get to create a whole world with characters and situations that don't exist anywhere but in your mind. It's powerful stuff.

If you are a non-fiction writer, you get to inform people about what is going on in their world, what people are doing and thinking, what laws will be passed, what sports team won or lost, who has suffered a tragedy and who has faced triumph. That's pretty powerful, too.

People think that what we do is simple, but to do it well is hard work. It's also fun work. If you're not having fun, take a step back and think about why you want to be a writer. If it's to make money, try something else. If it's because you don't know what else you would do with your life, or if you don't get the stories out you'll explode, then you're doing the right thing.

Even when you enjoy it and it's the right thing to do you can have dry spells, but that's why it's important to write every day. The more you write the easier it will become. And the more fun.

Enjoy it. And keep writing!

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