

To the aspiring fiction writer,

I want to write a series of articles addressed to beginning writers, and include everything I wish someone had told me back when I started out seven years ago. Not that I'm hugely successful at this moment, but hey, maybe I can **save you some time and energy**.

I want to share with you what I've learned about what it takes to become a successful, published writer. *But I can't* tell you what to do because our world is in flux. Markets change, trends come and go, renowned literary journals disappear. If you are an aspiring writer, by the time you read this, any specific suggestions may no longer be viable. Within a few years, the links I provide will read "Page Not Found." But there **IS** a way **I can maybe help**.



I will describe to you my personal writing journey in the hopes that it will toss you a flashlight for finding your own way. I'll tell you about my early beginnings with workshops, flash fiction, and poetry. I will share with you what I read, what books helped me the most, what exercises I found beneficial as I branched into short story writing and, finally, novel writing. I will explain to you the market at that time and the challenges I faced. All in the hope that it will help you overcome your own personal difficulties. And overcome them you must. Because you know at your very core that you are a writer.

People ask me a lot of questions about writing, but what they really want to know is:

Am I a writer?

I don't agree with the notion that you are a writer simply if you say you are. On the other hand, I don't believe you need a publishing credit to prove you are a writer. Like they say, Van Gogh only sold a single painting in his lifetime.

I consider someone to be a writer if they write in an attempt to connect with others in a way that evokes emotion. And I don't mean those people who jot down a few lines every time someone breaks up with them, or a political decision gives them a wedgy, or their dog dies. I consider those people hobby writers, not

professional writers. They only show up for sunny (or stormy) weather. And it is fine to write as a hobby! But the guys who shoot hoops with their friends once a week don't call themselves professional basketball players. A serious writer writes consistently, earnestly. A professional writer is in it for the long game.

You need to ask yourself, "Do I just like the idea of being a writer? Or am I willing to put in the solitary, frustrating hours it requires to be a professional writer?" Some people want to fly to Florence and sip Chianti while flourishing a number two pencil over a notebook as they gaze across the Tuscan landscape and spill out their first masterpiece. Best of luck with that. Others think you have to lock yourself in a dark room and drink bourbon to painfully squeeze out a few true words. People like that don't know what it's like to be a writer sitting in the laundromat, or at a messy kitchen table, or in the back of a Chevy Impala...stealing moments with your pen like with a secret lover. They don't understand what it is like to be a writer day after day, all...year...long.

Writers write. On a somewhat irregular, but regular basis, not simply on a whim. They write everywhere. They write a lot. They don't wait for the muse to infuse them. They write despite the chaos in their lives. They write to survive the mayhem.

Are you a writer?

During an online workshop I attended several years ago, one of the students said that she wrote only for herself. To me, that is not writing. That is journaling, similar to keeping a diary. For me, the essence of writing is to reach out to others, to touch them by finding the universal commonalities between us while revealing something new. So don't play shy. Even if you fear rejection, because rejection is part of the game. Once you step on the court, you are going to miss a few shots. The reality is, you are going to miss a lot of shots. But you will eventually land a few two-pointers, and the sound of that swoosh will bounce joy off the bleachers!

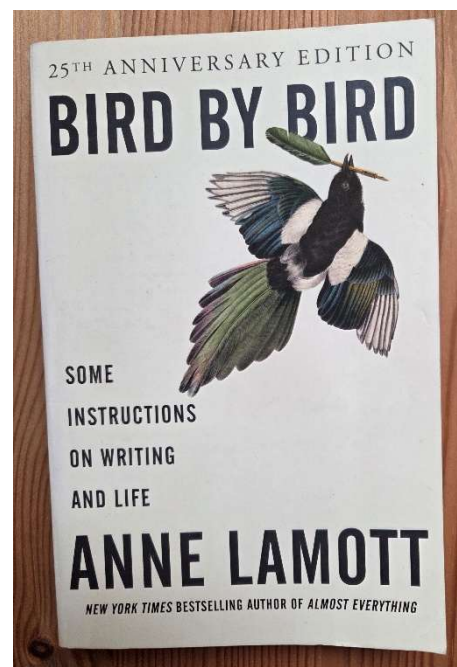
Now, if you connect with readers merely to inform, I would say you are a (news) journalist (although the best journalists connect to their audience by evoking emotion while providing factual information). I was never stuck on facts. When it comes to creative non-fiction, I push the borders. I prefer fiction because I tend to exaggerate everything. I have to keep my imagination on a leash or it will run across the freeway and end up on a semi's grille guard.

Ever since I began writing seriously in April of 2019, I have tried to write for at least one hour every day, seven days a week. Sure, I took vacations...and occasional notes while I was gone. But I didn't let days slip by without exercising my writing muscles. That means ON PAPER (or the digital version thereof). After a year, that became one hour a day of *reading like a writer* (see that blog) and one hour of writing. When I began my novel, that turned to two hours of writing a day, and then three-a-day while editing.

It doesn't sound like much when I hear Friedrich Bachman say he writes eight hours a day, or Barbara Kingsolver mention she writes for five or six hours daily until she simply has to stop. I do what I can. I found my pace. But I do it every single day.

So, WRITE.

Write anything. But when you edit, be selective. As all writing is rewriting, pursue only those pieces that you feel passionate about. You know that tingly feeling when the excitement of the words releases endorphins in your brain? What is the universe longing to express through your vessel? Yes, you must sometimes plod through the mud to reach the castle, but make sure the castle is worth it.



Imagine that you have only a limited number of words to share in this lifetime. What do you want to be remembered for? Okay, don't use high ideals as an excuse not to write. I'm just saying, when you take a second look at what you've written, prioritize your time. Like Anne Lamott says in *Bird by Bird*, go ahead and write a shitty first draft. Let your imagination soar. Then settle down and see if it is something you can stay excited about.

A Chinese friend of mine once told me about a famous old curse: *May you live in interesting times*. As much as I love peace, I'll choose growth, even if painful, every time. I'm not someone who can lay on a beach for the entire vacation. Five minutes of sunshine with the sound of waves whooshing, and I'm off to check out a location's history or pursue the inhabitants' most popular pastime or their recent struggles.

We live in interesting times. Painful as that experience may be, I love being a part of it. As Whitman wrote, "the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse."

Write your verse. Not just for you, but to connect with others. And make it count.

I hope you'll [subscribe to my newsletter](#) for more writing tips and to follow my journey with my first novel *Just Lisa*.