

Two dozen tricks of the masters

Here are a few suggestions from master writers:

Research. Research. Research.

Don't tell. Show.

Include details. Details. Details.

Avoid abstract descriptions.

Write. Rewrite. Rewrite.

Keep it simple. Make it easy for readers to follow your story at all times.

Be conscious of the sound of your writing. Read aloud every opportunity you get.

Don't be afraid to consciously imitate the masters.

Create your writing nest that provides what you need.

Kill your darlings. In other words don't get too fancy.

Rewrite each sentence the number of times it takes to get it right.

Evoke all the senses in your descriptions, but not all of them in one passage.

Read other authors to learn what works.

Reveal the tension among your characters.

Limit the number of characters in a scene.

Be specific in describing characters and scenes.

Evoke the period of your writing with artefacts of that period.

End your paragraphs with intriguing elements that make readers want to continue.

Keep your characters in motion.

Highlight dramatic details.

Select your point of view with care.

Depict growth in your characters' understanding of themselves and others.

Be certain of the historical accuracy of things like clothing, technology and values.

Share drafts of your writing with others and obtain feedback.

Edit. Edit. Edit.

Inspiring thoughts about writing

Here are a few quotations from master writers:

A story should have a beginning, a middle, and an end... but not necessarily in that order. Godard

All my best thoughts were stolen by the ancients. Ralph Waldo Emerson

An author in his book must be like God in the universe, present everywhere and visible nowhere. Flaubert

As to the adjective, when in doubt, strike it out. Mark Twain

Be obscure clearly. E.B. White

Don't tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass. Chekhov

Easy reading is damn hard writing. Nathaniel Hawthorne

Every author in some way portrays himself in his works, even if it be against his will. Goethe

Every writer I know has trouble writing. Joseph Heller

Fill your paper with the breathings of your heart. William Wordsworth

For me, a page of good prose is where one hears the rain [and] the noise of battle. John Cheever

How vain it is to sit down to write when you have not stood up to live. Thoreau

I do not like to write - I like to have written. Gloria Steinem

I love writing. I love the swirl and swing of words as they tangle with human emotions. James Michener

I'm not a very good writer, but I'm an excellent rewriter. James Michener

Most editors are failed writers - but so are most writers. T.S. Eliot

Proofread carefully to see if you any words out. Author Unknown

Substitute "damn" every time you're inclined to write "very;" your editor will delete it and the writing will be just as it should be. Mark Twain

The best time for planning a book is while you're doing the dishes. Agatha Christie

The best way to become acquainted with a subject is to write a book about it. Benjamin Disraeli

The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug. Mark Twain

The time to begin writing an article is when you have finished it to your satisfaction. Mark Twain

The two most engaging powers of an author are to make new things familiar and familiar things new. Johnson

. . . those songs that have been any good. . . The words have just crawled down my sleeve. Joan Baez

. . . the greatest pleasure of writing is not what it's about, but the inner music the words make. Truman Capote

Writing is a socially acceptable form of schizophrenia. E.L. Doctorow

Writing is both mask and unveiling. E.B. White

Writing is utter solitude, the descent into the cold abyss of oneself. Franz Kafka