

Finding Your Writer's Voice

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Everyone has a story to tell. We all have interesting experiences, so your first goal is to find that “inner voice” from which to write. And we all have an inner voice.

You want your stories to have an authenticity that is uniquely yours so that your expressions come alive with what you want to say. Your purpose is to write about your life with detail and meaning that will jump off the pages into receptive minds. Your voice is the identifiable part of your personality that keeps popping up in your writing style, so all you have to do is pay more attention, and trust what your subconscious mind says.

We aren't all gifted writers; it is our critical voice that interrupts the flow. Give yourself permission to be imperfect. Don't worry just start writing. In the process, you will learn to trust your mind and your body. Remember your hands are connected to the heart chakra and when you write, your deepest and truest self emerges. Not everything that emerges from your deepest heart is appropriate to publish, but it doesn't matter. At this stage you are learning about yourself. There are times when your writing will surprise and delight you, and times when it will make you cry as shadows of the difficult times flood in.

During your writing you will begin to recognize your difficult times as your very own *divine challenges*. They provide the catalyst for personal growth, and they are nothing to be ashamed of. Remember how you surmounted these challenges, and consider telling your stories for they may be useful to others.

Writing Tools and Writing Environments

The tools you choose for your writing projects are important. Use a computer if you want, but by all means experiment with paper and pens as well as pencils. Decide which tools are best for you. For myself, I like to have a couple of inexpensive note pads strategically placed, one pad by my bed for that special nighttime revelation, and one by my favorite place to sit and look out the window. When good ideas come, I like to jot them down fast before they leave my conscious mind. I especially like gel ink pens because they glide quickly across the page; I don't want to struggle with a pen that threatens to stop my flow. In my purse, I carry a pen and a small book with blank pages, just in case an idea pops into my head when away from home. I often have thoughts about my health when I am shopping for groceries, and since I have a hard time holding bright ideas in my head until I get somewhere to write them down I just whip out my book and write. Other times, I like to sit at my computer with eyes closed and write from the preconscious level of the mind.

I always give myself permission to allow my thoughts to come out any way they want, never worrying about spelling and punctuation because this can get in the way of the idea; I want to capture the thought while it breathes. I can always clean it up later if I think it's worth keeping.

Writing Practices

Writing is like working out in the gym the more you workout, the more fit you become. And the more you write, the better your writing becomes. Working with words and ideas are like muscles, and they are meant to be strengthened and stretched.

So start a daily or weekly writing practice. Set aside five to thirty minutes every day, or once a week to explore your mind for material. While sitting at your computer, or with pad and pen on the table, shift into your right brain and write down what ever comes up for you. Or scribble, or sketch, or leave the paper blank. Just staring at the page is an inspirational act. You do not have to make complete sentences or dot every “i.” Write as fast as you can and let the “untamed” mind express itself. It may simply be a single word or two, or a whole paragraph of ideas. It may even be a spontaneous poem (even though you don’t consider yourself a poet), but whatever you do don’t judge it while you are free-associating.

You might, for example, describe the cereal you had for breakfast and then switch to the smile on your loved one’s face. Whatever the subject, keep writing. Learn to express yourself. Do not block your inner world but allow it to express itself in anyway that it wants. Create a muse and give him or her a name, and create a dialogue between the two of you. My journal entries often begin with the salutation “Dear Lady Claire.” It’s like reuniting with the imaginary friend you gave up when you were six-years old.

Topics List

Sometimes, you can’t think of anything to write and nothing wants to come. You feel intimidated by the blank page and your chattering mind says, “I just can’t do this. I can’t think of anything.” We all know that one but there is a simple remedy: keep a page of “topics” that are interesting enough to write about and, whenever you think of something new, go to your notebook and add your topic idea to the list. Later, when you want to write but are drawing a blank, go to your list for ideas. The best thing about the list is that it makes you start noticing your relationship to your life. You begin to see what interests you and what is in your world that you want to share with others.

Writing Ideas

Until you get your own list here are several ideas so that you can get started.

1. Begin with the sentence “I remember...” and continue to write a story. If you get stuck repeat the line “I remember..” You can also start the story with, “Once upon a time....” Or you can make up your own beginning line.
2. Choose a color to write about. Pay attention to where you find that color in your home, work and in nature. How do you feel about the color? What do you think about it? How does your body feel when you see the color in various places?

3. Visualize a healing place. Notice color, textures, smells and feelings. Write about it describing every detail. When someone reads it they should be able to feel the place by reading your creative details.

4. Write about a dying client or friend in need. What was it like to come to work that morning? Who was present? What did they look like? What did they say or do?

5. How do you feel about hospital work, nursing ideals, your best friend, self-care, your grandparents, or your favorite pet...the possibilities are infinite.

Organizing Ideas

After you have filled up one or two notebooks with your thoughts, one of your journaled entries may jump out and entice you to write a longer piece. Again, continue to write spontaneously. Then use your left-brain to organize and give your ideas structure. Once you have the backbone of your story, you can flesh it out by adding and deleting ideas. Read through the work several times and read it out loud to yourself or a friend. Every time you do so, add to the details as you change and refine it until you suit your ear. When you are satisfied with how it sounds while being read aloud you will know you have molded it into a cohesive sounding essay.

Editing

Some journals and magazines have editors that will help you edit your writing but many do not. Before you hire an editor, ask several friends (ideally ones who love to write) to read your essay and give you the honest feedback you need. Take a college class and join a writer's group. Your local library or bookstore should be able to recommend one, and there are even online groups you can join.

Everyone needs an editor. Editors need editors and hiring one is the best thing you can do for yourself and your writing projects. You also find out just how much your ego was attached to your writing. While it is difficult to accept cutting a favorite passage out of an essay, at the same time, you must consider the recommendations of the editor, who more often than not is right. Accept some of what he or she recommends and disregard the rest. Remember, it is your story and there are times when you are the best judge of what you want to say.

In the process, your hands will get practice teaming up with your heart to express your unique perspective. And you will have a finished piece that has a professional polish that you can be proud of.

Recommended Resources

Goldberg, N. (1986). Writing Down the Bones. Boston, MA: Shambhala.

Kane, T.S. (1994). The New Oxford Guide to Writing. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Waldman, M.R. Editor (2001) The Spirit of Writing: Classic and Contemporary Essays Celebrating the Writing Life. New York, NY: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam.

“Words, like eyes, are windows into a person’s soul, and thus each writer, in some small way, helps to enrich the world. But it takes courage to share one’s life with another, for we live in a world where every sentence penned can be criticized or praised. But it is a risk worth taking, for a greater vision remains: that through our words, be they fiction or fact, we might touch another soul as we share our stories and song. In that moment, however brief, we suspend the walls of separateness that so often cause suffering and pain.

Through reams of reality, in tenderness and tears, we celebrate each writer’s life.”

Mark Robert Waldman, editor