

Writing, Writers, and Things We Say to Keep People from Such

By Dwayne Phillips

There are oft-used phrases regarding writers and writing. Many of these ruin persons wanting to be writers. Let's consider the essence of writing and how that debunks many of these ruinous phrases.

Writing: the activity or skill of marking coherent words on paper and composing text.

Writer: a person engaged in writing.

A writer is a person who composes words.

Now that the basic definitions are settled; consider some of those oft-used phrases.

Writer's block: this is something that exists with some writers at some times. There is the desire to compose words, but the composing is paralyzed. It seems that the writer wants to compose specific words for a specific purpose at a specific time, but is unable. Well, that's life, and everyone is living life. The desire to play professional basketball for \$40 million a year combined with the inability to do so is not called "basketball block;" it is called life.

Writing Career part 1: some people want to have one of these. Take morning walks, sit in front of a picture window, bang out words on a keyboard, and receive royalty checks every month that allow world travel or longer morning walks or something idyllic that comes as a reward. This depends on millions of other people. Those other people have to give up money to read the words of the writer for the writer to have a writing career. How does the writer convince all these other people to do so? As such, the writing career depends on the ability to separate people from their money. Is that to be desired? Perhaps not.

Writing Tools: welcome to the Internet and the world of computers. If only a person had the right writing tools, they could write. Well, back to the definition of composing words on paper. A pencil and a paper is sufficient. Go to a public library. There are scraps of paper and little pencils lying on the tables. There are the necessary tools.

Reading about Writing: read this book and learn to be a writer. (Read this post you are reading right now and...) Perhaps those books exist, but were probably read before reaching age 10.

There are excellent books that describe the accepted rules of a language and its grammar. For example, is it "excellent books that describe" or "excellent books who describe" or "excellent books that describes" or am I supposed to put commas between all those things? I highly recommend those. Most of the best ones are available for less than \$5 online at used book stores. "The Chicago Manual of Style" covers just about everything. Buy one that is several versions older than the current version and save lots of money. Second best of this lot is any high school English book. These are available for \$1 or free at many garage sales.

The other books, the ones that purport to teach writing, are many and costly. Great authors (we could discuss "author" versus "writer," but not here and now), who tire of writing great writing resort to writing about writing. There are many excellent examples of this sort. Caution: do not read more than one a year. Second caution: do not wait until finished reading these before writing. Third caution: write,

write, write while reading these as there is no end to these and a reader is not writing and hence, not a writer.

Published writing: recall the earlier definitions. Composing words has nothing to do with being "published." Some writers crave to be published. They won't consider themselves a "real writer" without being published.

There is much satisfaction with holding a book in hand that has the name of an established publisher on the spine next to the writer's name. The same is true for holding a magazine in hand the contains some words composed by the writer.

There are many great writings that were rejected by many well-known publishers before some little-known publisher risked money on paper, glue, and binding. Rejection by publishers means little. It is, however, rejection.

Do not attempt publishing if rejection will trigger violence and other mayhem.

There are many forms of publishing today. Go to wordpress.com, create a blog (at no cost, and "no cost" is important), publish your words as often as you compose them. Note, Charles Dickens never had the ability to show two thirds of the world his words right now with no help from a "publisher." Every writer today has that ability. Use it.

When trying to convince readers to part with their money in exchange for the writer's words, it is helpful to have a portfolio of compositions. That provides something for the writer to say, "You might like my words. Look over here for some samples."

Similar to Wordpress are self-publishing options. These are better than the vanity presses of yesteryear. Send the publishers composed words, they print and bind them, and buy a few dozen copies for about \$10 each. That provides something to give to readers. That may be helpful in marketing the same way a no-cost blog site is. The paper-in-hand, however, appeals to some readers who disdain reading online.

Fear of Writing: as with writer's block, some would-be writers experience the fear of writing. Go back to the definitions. Compose words on paper or computer. The end.

Most fear of writing is based on the question, "but what will people think of me if they read this?" This is a false question as the real question is closer to, "but what will certain people (who are important to me) think of me if they read this?" Further still, the question is, "but what will certain people (whose negative opinion will crush me) think of me if they read this?"

No one else needs to read the words the writer composes. Write what wordpress.com calls "Drafts." Write in any computer editor. Print the result and put it in a box for safekeeping where no one will read it. Write with a pencil in a notebook and stash the notebook in the back of your underwear drawer where no one ever ventures.

Composing words is what is necessary to be a writer. Listening to criticism is not necessary.

And one thought about criticism: Criticism is criticism of the words, not the writer. That separation isn't easy to make. It is, however, liberating. When a reader says, "You stink." The writer can reply, "Oh, you didn't like the words? (I'm sure you love me.)"

These ideas remove the fear of writing. At least they remove the arguments in favor of fear of writing. Agree with the arguments, grab a pencil and notebook, open the underwear drawer, and compose words.

Writing Career part 2: Let's assume that the idyllic life resulting from millions, or is it million\$, of other people who are willing to part with their money to read the words composed by the writer is the goal in life. Personal experience is wanting in this area. Still, advice is available.

First, learn to live without money. There will be years, especially early in this quest, when other people won't want to read the writer's compositions. Food and shelter cost money. Some forms of food and shelter cost far less money than others. Learn to live with these.

Second, write everything everywhere available. The market may appear in unexpected places. Follow the market and its money as far as needed. Writing ads for fast food places may not be fulfilling, but it may provide enough funds for basic food and shelter. Write the fulfilling words during the remainder of the day.

Third, always tell readers about your words. A big reason why readers won't read the composed words is they don't know the words exist and where to find them.

Finally, give this writing career plenty of time---ten or twenty years is a realistic expectation. Some writers are luckier than others in pursuit of a writing career. And that is all there is to it---they are luckier, not better.