

# Writing Tips On Craft

By

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## 1. One of The Most Underrated Tools For Writers: Poetry

If a poll was conducted, I would bet that most people, whether they think of themselves as writers or not, have tried their hand at writing poetry at some time in their lives. Most likely, it was during that angsty-teenage phase in high school, right?

I wrote plenty of poems during that phase. Some were actually quite good, though most ended up in the trash. But what is it that draws us to write poetry, as opposed to short stories or novels?

What I have always enjoyed about writing poetry is taking emotions, concepts, and metaphors, then fashioning them into a pleasing pattern that evokes exactly what I wanted to convey. With poetry, the goal is to create the most impact with the least amount of words. So they must be exactly the “right” words, in the “correct” order. Rhythm, rhyme, cadence, and even the visual layout of the words on the page, are all taken into account when creating verse.

### Poetry Is Personal

Writing poetry is a great way to get the creative juices flowing if they have been blocked or stalled. I had put aside creative writing for many years, but after my first husband died, I began writing again while I was in mourning. Poetry came naturally to me, as a way to express the tumult of emotions I had to sort through. It was so very personal, and helped to heal me in a way that nothing else had. Expressing my thoughts about it in the form of a poem took me to the heart of the matter, and gave me something I could read again and save as a testament of what I experienced during that time.

### Creative Flow

Writing poems after so many years of not writing broke loose my stalled creativity. As time went on, the poems became lighter, humor came back, and I began experimenting. I started writing scenes, one of which later turned into **Unexplained**, my first published novel.

Poems still pop into my head out of nowhere, and I also enjoy reading other people's poems now and then. There is such a wide range of styles, and though there are guidelines for crafting poetry, I believe it is one of the most personal things we can write, and therefore we should use words in whatever way we see fit.

So whether you are “a writer” or not, you might want to give writing poetry a try. It's a wonderful tool of expression, and you can share it with the world, or keep it private. They are your words, after all.

How do you feel about poetry? Is it passé, or does it have a place?

(If you'd like to discuss, contact info is at the end of this mini ebook. I love to hear from readers!)

## 2. Five Ways Writing Erotic Poetry Helps Romance Writers

Crafting poetry is a great way to get the creative juices flowing, because all you have to focus on are words, sentences and images. Most poems do not have a plot or characters, per se, although there are some that do contain those elements. But just playing around with the words and fitting them together can be fun and inspiring.

The tricky part is walking that fine line—erotic poetry can easily descend into “purple prose” or can be too graphic, either of which may spoil the effect (unless graphic is what you're going for). The goal is to aim for arousal and stimulation, through the use of subtle description and implication. There is something thrilling about describing the most intimate of acts in a delicate way, which still provides the impact of a more graphic description. Erotic poetry has been around for generations, at least since the time of Ancient Greece, and will probably never go away.

### Five Tips

Here's what reading and/or writing erotic poetry can do for writers:

1. Get you in the mood for love—this really helps if you are stuck writing a sex scene, or perhaps wondering how to approach that first kiss. The short, descriptive phrases can evoke images and cause your creativity to flow in the right direction.
2. Help with word choice—examining the choice of words to describe the lovers, the action, the setting, can stimulate the imagination and expand vocabulary.
3. Emotional impact—writing poetically about lovemaking can assist in focusing on the emotions behind the acts. Weaving emotion and sensation together is the ideal for maximum impact.
4. Create a framework for a scene—if you like what you have written (or read), consider expanding it to a scene, or including words you've used in your poem in a scene.
5. Having fun, letting off steam—You can be as intense or graphic as you like, just to get it out of your system. Then later clean it up, or use parts of it in another work.

### My Sample

When I began writing again after a long hiatus, poetry was one of the things I experimented with. I began writing more erotic poetry when I started dating again after being widowed. It helped me to deal with the feelings and experiences I was going through. Here is a sample:

#### Joy

I awaken

Diffused sunlight

Muscular warmth along my back

Pressing close

Arms enfold me

Like the banks of a river

Tangy scent of skin

Deep, low breath in my ear

I turn, melt across his chest

Strength moves into wetness

Intensity shines in blue depths

Before lids close, uncontrollable

Breath comes, ragged

Words come, revealing

Sweat comes, smoothing the way between us

Release comes, all too soon

Stay close, for a moment

Chemicals subside, the tide rushes out

Powerful but elusive

This transitory joy.

I'd be interested to hear if other writers have tried their hand at erotic poetry, and if it helped in any way. If not, you may want to play around with it and see where it takes you!

(If you'd like to discuss, contact info is at the end of this mini ebook. I love to hear from readers!)

### **3. Sh\*t I Tell Myself While Writing A First Draft**

Finishing a first draft is always an important event for a writer, whether it is your first or fiftieth. The good news is it does get easier to reach that finish line with practice. The not-so-good news is, from what I have heard and read, even a superstar author's first drafts will require at least some revision.

#### **The Truth of Memes**

There is a meme going around the internet that perfectly captures the difference between the joy of writing that first draft and the discomfort (okay, let's be real and use the right word, "agony") of the revision process (rewrites and editing). The message is: writing the draft feels triumphant, like a god or goddess who has created the world; going back to begin fixing it (and it will need fixing) is a bloody, messy pit of despair.

Okay, this may be an exaggeration but writers are prone to such, even if it doesn't show in their writing (the final product). I am proud to have finished a few drafts so far in my writing journey, and it has become easier to get through to the end with each project.

### **That Moment When It Hits You**

But something shifted in me recently, an awareness of how much pressure I have been putting on myself with each new story. I felt tremendous pressure to make each first draft "right", the best it can be. After all, who the hell wants to go back and do it all over again, and again, and again? It was as though I had to get the first draft perfect, and if I didn't there was no reason to go forward after that. And then the urge to start a shiny new story would start, bringing with it the hope that this would be 'the one'.

I certainly hope my realization that the above theory will never work shows I'm making progress and am no longer a clueless Newb.

### **My First Draft Rules**

For a few years now, I have been devouring blog posts, craft books, articles, and taking classes in an effort to improve my skills as a writer. When the light bulb went off in my head about how I should be approaching first drafts, a list came to mind which I promptly typed and hung above my desk. It is a summation of what I have heard countless others say, so I can't give credit to anyone because it has all coalesced in my mind. Anyway, this is what works for me and I am sharing in case it may help you:

1. The first draft is NOT "The Book". It is a blueprint.
2. The first draft is you telling yourself the story.
3. The first draft is for getting to know the characters.
4. The first draft is to set the stage with setting (location) and world building.
5. The first draft is a springboard for necessary research.
6. The first draft is the exploration of an idea, not a finished product.
7. Outline first before writing, but be flexible and open to changing directions.
8. Make changes if needed, but resist the urge to edit.
9. It is important to get in the zone and let the words flow. It can all be fixed later. Repeat: IT CAN ALL BE FIXED LATER!
10. The first draft is for you; your story, your voice. Editing will later prepare your story for the world.
11. When the first draft is finished, walk away for at least a few weeks, or even a month.

You may find some of these rules do not work for you. So find some that do, and get those drafts written! Nothing else can happen to your work until you finish it, and the first draft is only the first step. As for me, I am slowly making peace with all the other steps that follow, and hopefully one day soon, I will have conquered those, as well.

What rules would you add to this list?

(If you'd like to discuss, contact info is at the end of this mini ebook. I love to hear from readers!)

## 4. Why Writers Lack Confidence- The Struggle Is Real

Yesterday a writer friend who left our critique group about a year ago indicated she was ready to come back to our fold. We of course, welcomed her back, all wondering what had happened to cause her to leave in the first place. She confided to us she had given up on writing for a time, due to doubts about her abilities. It gave me pause, because I, and every writer I have met/talked to/read about has had confidence issues at some time. Whether you are published or unpublished, traditional or self-published, a fiction writer or non-fiction writer, working on your first book or your fiftieth book, self-doubt is an inherent part of the writing process.

### A Moving Target

When I decided to take writing seriously and pursue it with the goal of being published, I assumed my confidence level would increase over time, as I became more experienced and honed my skills. While that is true to a degree, I now believe that “confidence” is more a moving target than an end point, because with every new accomplishment (like being published), comes new challenges.

So why do writers struggle with a lack of confidence? And how can we continually work to improve our confidence level, when faced with rejection, criticism, and competition? I did some research, and there are many blogs and articles which have addressed this very subject.

**AliVentures** posted about why writers may not be confident about their work, and gives tips on how to recover. **Nathan Bradford** went into the psychological aspects of confidence, and why we may be deluding ourselves. **Daily Writing Tips** and **Copy Blogger** both had excellent ideas on how to increase our confidence level through writing activities, and **Write To Done** took a look at how the internet has uniquely affected writer’s confidence levels.

### What You Can Do

I know from my own experience that there are some days when it really sucks to be a writer. But even when I “give up” in frustration or despair, something pulls me back. I just cannot bring myself to really quit. A voice inside says, “You can do it. Just keep trying.” I can’t quit, even if it means slogging through the tough times.

Here are a few things you can try, which I do when my confidence needs a boost:

- Read something that you received positive feedback on. I know this helps me to remember that not everything I ever wrote sucks! There is hope, even if it is only a glimmer. Sometimes we focus so much on the negative we forget there ever was a positive aspect to our writing.
- Talk to writer friends who have been there. Get together with your friends or critique partners, and tell them how you are feeling. Chat online, read blog posts, anything to reconnect and reinforce the fact you are not alone.
- Work on an old project you have not looked at in a while. Yes, it may still suck, but you might have a fresh perspective on how to fix it.
- Outline that plot that has been lurking in the back of your mind, but you never could get to. Outlines are meant to be rough, and no one needs to see it. But you will be writing, not judging yet, because it is so new.
- Do some research, especially if your lack of confidence stems from not knowing enough about your subject material. We are blessed these days to have a world of information at our fingertips, so take

advantage of it. You can get lost on the internet doing this, but that will move your focus from your lack of knowledge onto ways of increasing your knowledge.

-Attend a writing seminar or conference. I'm always inspired when I come home with new knowledge and contacts. Making friends with other writers is inspiring in itself.

-Sometimes, you just need a break! Take some time off to do other things you enjoy.

### **It's Just A Cycle**

The important thing is to find ways to work through your lack of confidence cycle, and get back to feeling inspired and hopeful. To my surprise, I learned that writing is more of a roller coaster than an upward climb, at least emotionally. Perhaps, in the end, it will be worth the ride. There's only one way to find out, and that is to keep trying, keep creating, and keep learning.

What do you do when lack of confidence hits?

(If you'd like to discuss, contact info is at the end of this mini ebook. I love to hear from readers!)

## **5. Seven Things To Consider Before Submitting Your Writing for Critique**

Are you nervous about having your writing critiqued? Welcome to the club.

Just like reading reviews of your work, critiques are one of those things that most writers get nervous about. In my experience, though, critique, both positive and negative, is a powerful tool for improving one's skills.

A friend who is just starting out recently joined our writers group. She was asking about how we approached critiques, and confessed to being a bit nervous about submitting her work. We assured her our goal was to be helpful and considerate at the same time, an approach we have refined over the years. Then a discussion ensued on the differences between helpful and potentially hurtful criticism.

Several of us have been on the receiving end of criticism by our peers which we found less than helpful. We've also had feedback which was inspiring and constructive. My friend's question called to mind some other things I have learned in the past five years I have been attending my critique group, and I thought it might be helpful to new writers to share some things to consider before they submit their work:

**-Just Do It.** Writing without feedback is writing in a vacuum. Being nervous is normal, but you won't overcome it unless you put your precious words in front of some eyeballs. When you finally do become published, you will be judged by the entire world, so starting out with a few writers you know is a relatively safe way to begin. You may actually waste more time by writing without ever getting feedback, and end up having much more to correct and edit in the long run.

**-Start small.** Start by submitting something short—a scene you are working on, or a first chapter. First chapters are actually great to start with, since the opening of a story is considered to be the most important part, and also the most difficult thing to do properly. New writers have a tendency to start the story in the wrong place as well, so don't be surprised if someone points that out. Writing great openings takes practice, and feedback can help you to learn how to do that more efficiently and sooner.

**-Baby Steps.** By starting with something small, you are not facing judgement of the entire project. Learning to take criticism and use it wisely takes practice. Separating your emotions from the feedback

takes practice, too, as we tend to identify closely with our work when just starting out. The more you write, your perspective changes and you realize you can always fix what you wrote, or write some more. You will learn over time how to discern which feedback is structural (plot issues, grammar problems, etc) and which is subjective (the person giving the feedback is filtering through their own tastes).

**-Submit Clean.** Always clean up your work before submitting! Go over it multiple times, use a grammar guide, run a spell check. No, it does not have to be perfect, but clean it up to the best of your ability. I've had to critique some work where the premise was exciting and interesting, but the grammar, spelling and general writing was so bad that it was difficult to understand what was happening. Some folks think, "I'll clean it up after they critique so I don't have to do it twice". No. Just don't do that. It is a disservice to others who are taking the time to provide feedback when there are a billion other things they could be doing. Have courtesy for your readers, even when your work is in a "raw" stage.

**-Alpha Readers.** If you have cleaned up your work and edited it to the best of your ability, but you feel you still need major help with grammar and structural issues, consider submitting it to only one or two trusted writer friends. Family and non-writer friends may not give you the kind of feedback you need at this stage. They might be overly kind or overly harsh, depending on the relationship, or they may give neutral feedback to avoid saying anything. One or two trusted writer friends may be able to point out what needs to be done to prepare your work sample so you can submit it to a larger group for feedback.

**-Fair Balance.** Be willing to provide feedback to others. Yes, this means taking the time to read their work and give thoughtful feedback. This process provides tremendous insight as to what to look for in your own work, and helps you to realize others are being brave and putting their work out there. Even though it sometimes made me uncomfortable, I submitted my writing to my critique groups and beta readers as often as I could. I also reviewed the work of others as often as I could. A successful critique group requires this balance. If certain members only review others, and never submit their own work, or keep submitting but never offer critique to others, it can cause discomfort among the group. Besides, those who only do one or the other are missing out on half of the purpose of critiquing—to become a better writer.

**-Be Specific.** When asking for feedback, indicate what you are looking for. If it is just a general impression, say so, but it will help you to consider what you are looking for specifically. Examples might be: Does this opening hook you? Does the dialogue in this scene sound natural? How much work do I need to do to clean up my grammar? Is there too much backstory?

Taking it step by step will help you to build your confidence so that when you do get that first truly negative critique you've been fearing, it won't hurt as much. You'll be better equipped to take it for what it is worth, and learn from it.

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## 6. The Pros and Cons of Comparing Yourself to Other Writers

Being a fiction writer can be much like working in a bubble. While smart authors keep an eye on trends in the market, ultimately they each must create the best book they can and then hope it finds an audience. Since each work is an individual piece, and each author has their own distinct voice and style, are fiction authors really in competition with one another?

## The Trend Chasers

When a trend is hot, and many are jumping on the bandwagon with similar titles and themes, then yes, those authors are competing for the audience that is buying that type of story. However, those situations are usually temporary because trends in fiction come and go. Tropes, genres and sub-genres rise and fall in popularity. Authors rise and fall in popularity (or notoriety). But thanks to a little invention called the e-book, published stories can now remain on the virtual shelf until they become popular again or are discovered by new readers (which may still require marketing and promotion, but at least now there's an opportunity for resurrection).

Readers may have a huge TBR (to be read) pile, and the self-publishing gold rush may be over, but that doesn't mean there is *no* chance for any given book to find an audience and gain sales. Whether self, indie, or traditionally published, a good story deserves a chance to be read. It's not like we already have all the authors we can handle, or there are too many books in the world. The pipeline needs to be fed!

## Author vs. Author

Does another author's success or lack of success really affect you as an author? Only if you let it, by comparing yourself to others and feeling as though you are in competition with them. But there are times when comparing yourself to other writers can be helpful; it all depends on why you are doing it.

### Reasons Why You Should:

**For inspiration-** Your favorite authors are your favorite because something in their voice and storytelling abilities resonates with you. It may be worth exploring in depth why that is so, to understand what touches you as a reader. It will likely be part of why you want to write in the first place.

**To learn-** So much can be learned from observing successful authors- craft techniques, marketing ideas, story structure, and more. You can also learn valuable lessons on what not to do by observing what goes wrong. Even bestselling authors have flops now and then, or well-known authors behave badly. You can also learn from emerging authors you know, what to try and what to avoid.

**To strategize-** From other writers, both new and established, you can learn how they handle things like marketing, social media, relationships with their readers, and how they network with professionals in the industry.

In short, discovering what other writers are doing and how they are doing it (maybe even why they are doing it) can help you along your own career path.

However, there can be a downside to comparing yourself to other writers...

### Reasons Why You Should Not:

**To judge yourself, or others-** You should assess where your skills and accomplishments are, in relation to where you want to be, and act accordingly. You should not compare your skill level or accomplishments to your fellow writers, whether they are established authors or unpublished critique group members. Each person has their own path to follow, and there is no "right" way. Interview ten best-selling authors, and each one will have a completely different story of how they arrived at that status. Feeling inferior to another who seems to be ahead of you in progress, or feeling superior to someone who seems to be lagging behind you is pointless, because it is constantly changing, and you may not know the whole story of why they are where they are. Both attitudes, believing you are lagging behind, or that you are levels ahead of someone else, may actually keep you from reaching your own potential.

**To use as an excuse-** As explained above, there are plenty of readers to go around. There are ways to be discovered. It may take work, it may take time, it may take investment, but every writer has a chance. Focus on your own progress, don't waste your energies worrying about how you compare to someone



else. Don't let someone else's lack of success scare you away from trying, and don't let someone else's success intimidate you into thinking you can't do the same.

As an industry, authors are well-known for assisting other authors. Which is as it should be; being kind and helpful to each other is beneficial to all. Competing with other writers doesn't really help anyone. When it comes down to it, the readers decide who is worthy of their time, money and attention.

What do you think? Have you ever felt in competition with other writers? Was it a positive or negative experience?

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