

"If you don't have the time to read, you don't have the time or the tools to write."

—Stephen King

"These are not books, lumps of lifeless paper, but 'minds' alive on the shelves. From each of them goes out its own voice . . . [B]y taking down one of these volumes and opening it, one can call into range the voice of a man far distant in time and space, and hear him speaking to us, mind to mind, heart to heart."

—Gilbert Highet

Recommended Reading *continued*:

L'Engle, Madeleine. *Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith & Art*. Shaw, 1980.

Lewis, C.S. *An Experiment in Criticism*. Cambridge University Press, 1961. (This scholarly little book written near the end of Lewis's life explores in an original way the real difference between "good" literature and "bad.")

Lewis, C. S. *On Stories: And Other Essays on Literature*. Harvest, 2002.

Lindskoog, Kathryn. *Creative Writing: For People Who Can't Not Write*. Zondervan, 1989.

O'Conner, Patricia T. *Words Fail Me: What Everyone Who Writes Should Know About Writing*. Harcourt Brace, 1999.

Peterson, Eugene H. *Take & Read: Spiritual Reading: An Annotated List*. Eerdmans, 1995.

Safire, William. *How Not to Write: The Essential Misrules of Grammar*. Norton, 1990.

Sayers, Dorothy L. *The Mind of the Maker*. Harper & Row, 1941, 1987.

Shaughnessy, Susan. *Walking on Alligators: A Book of Meditations for Writers*. HarperCollins, 1993.

Strausser, Jeffrey. *Painless Writing: If you think writing essays and other school papers is difficult and dull, open this book- and think again!* Barron's, 2001.

Ueland, Brenda. *If You Want to Write: A book about Art, Independence and Spirit*. GrayWolf, 1938, 1987.

Veith, Gene Edward, Jr. *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture*. Crossway, 1994.

---. *Reading Between the Lines*. Crossway, 1990.

---. *State of the Arts: From Bezalel to Mapplethorpe*. Crossway, 1991.

---. *The Gift of Art: The Place of the Arts in Scripture*. InterVarsity, 1984.

Watkins, N. James. *Writers on Writing: Top Christian Authors Share Their Secrets for Getting Published*. WPH, 2005.

Williams, Pat. *Read for Your Life: 11 Ways to Transform Your Life With Books*. HCI, 2007.

Willimon, William H. *Reading with Deeper Eyes: The Love of Literature and the Life of Faith*. Upper Room, 1998.

Winokur, Jon. *Writers On Writing: More Than 1,500 Witty and Urbane, Poignant and Colorful Quotations On the Writers Art*. Running Press, 1986.

Wilbers, Stephen. *Keys to Great Writing*. Writers Digest Books, 2000.

Yancey, Phillip & Schaap, James C. (Editors). *More Than Words: Contemporary Writers on the Works That Shaped Them*. Baker Books, 2002.

Zinsser, William K. *On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Non-fiction [30th Anniv. Edition]*. HarperCollins, 2006.

"A non-reading Christian is a contradiction in terms. With the Bible as our primary source, we read other books that serve as teaching tools for the Holy Spirit in order that we may become men & women of God, 'thoroughly equipped for every good work.'"

-David McKenna

"Reading makes a full man; speaking makes a ready man; writing makes an exact man."

—Francis Bacon

The Power of the Pen/Keyboard: Improving Your Preaching by Improving Your Writing

Dru Ashwell, Executive Editor
CP Publishing

"Writing is easy. All you do is stare at a blank sheet of paper until droops of blood form on your forehead."

Gene Fowler, US Journalist(1890-1960)

"A good writer is a graceful guest in a reader's brain."

—Kathryn Lindskoog

Regardless of which direction you're headed in ministry . . . you need to be able to effectively communicate *from the pulpit, on the printed page and through the computer screen*.

Your goal should be to communicate the Word of God as optimally as possible . . . and this includes the *written* word (newsletters, blogs, etc.).

Effective *written* communication also enhances *verbal* communication. Your public speaking can improve by learning how to wield words and craft creative sentences/paragraphs.

The Power of . . . the written word.

Why Write?

"Oh, that my words were written!
Oh, that they were inscribed in a book!"

Job 19:23

1). Do NOT write to become famous or wealthy .

Consider:

- 197,000 new books published last year.
- Avg. retail bookstore carries 100,000 titles (the huge superstores can carry over 100,000, whereas mall bookstores carry 20,000 and focus on bestsellers).
- 70-80% of these 100,000 titles are backlist titles (classics and perennial bestsellers).
- 160,000-170,000 new books never make it into retail bookstores.

It's important to realize that most writers don't get rich according to the *Columbia University Study of American Authors*. Less than 5% of all the writers surveyed earned over \$80,000 and less than 10% over \$40,000.

"Art is a collaboration between God and the artist,
and the less the artist does the better."

- Andre Gide

Why Write? *continued*

2). Do write to honor God.

“Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children.”
Eph. 5:1 (NIV)

The Greek term translated “be imitators” (*mimemai*) is where we get our English word “mimic.” This verb “is always used in exhortations, and always in the continuous tense, suggesting a constant habit or practice.” (Vines)

The practice of our being people who “mimic God” is to become our daily habit. We are to do what He does. Respond to life as He responds. Emulate similar traits. Model His style.

If we are to imitate God, we need to nail down some specific guidelines. An excellent place to locate those specifics in the Bible would be the first place He reveals Himself to us—the book of Genesis, especially the first two chapters.

God is involved in four activities:

- He Creates
- He Communicates
- He Rests
- He Relates

For our purposes in this workshop, let’s just discuss the first activity . . .

Are **you** taking time to **create**?

“Making the simple complicated is commonplace; making the complicated simple, awesomely simple, that’s creativity.”
—**Charles Mingus**,
Jazz Bassist and Composer

“To stimulate creativity, one must develop the childlike inclination for play.”
Albert Einstein

“Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain one once he grows up.”
Pablo Picasso

How to Improve Your Writing

1). Read !

LeRoy Lawson was recently asked, “How does reading help you write?” He answered:

How to Improve Your Writing *continued*

“Both writing and preaching, at their best, come from the overflow. So I really believe the more I read, the better I can write, and the better I can speak.”

“When I get a little money I buy books;
and if any is left I buy food and clothes.”

Erasmus

In an 1815 letter to John Adams, Thomas Jefferson confessed that he could not live without books. It was a flat-out statement, written on a sheet of paper in pen and ink, expressed simply and in a forthright manner: “I cannot live without books.”

Consider . . .

“The average American adult reads one book a year, and reads it with the skills and comprehension of a seventh grader . . . The average American child spends 78 minutes a week reading, 102 minutes a week on homework and study, and 12 hours a week watching television.”—Edward Humes, *School of Dreams* (Harvest Books, 2004)

A recent report by the *National Endowment for the Arts* found 15-to-24-year-olds spend an average of **7 minutes** reading on weekdays. That’s **NOT** just 7 minutes reading ink on paper. That’s 7 minutes reading anything, including words on a computer screen or listening to audio books. Seven minutes total!

The same study found people between 35 and 44 spend **12 minutes** a day reading, almost twice as much as their younger counterparts. Still, those 12 minutes are nothing compared to the **60 minutes** those 65 and older devote to reading every single day.

A few suggestions . . .

1). Read widely & wisely .

“The books we read should be chosen with great care, that they may be, as an Egyptian king wrote over his library, ‘The medicines of the soul.’”
—**Oliver Wendell Holmes**

2). Be sure to read “ the dead guys .”

“The only palliative [for the errors of our modern world] is to keep the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds, and this can be done only by reading old books. Not, of course, that there is any magic about the past. People were no cleverer than they are now; they made as many mistakes as we. But not the same mistakes.”
—**C.S. Lewis**

3) Don’t shy away from non-Christian books and authors — don’t “major” in them but include them in your reading regimen.

“When we separate ourselves . . . we lose our impact upon the culture at large and rob ourselves of the insights we could draw from those whose faith or worldview is different than ours.”
— **Terry Glaspey**

2). Fall in love with words .

Words are magical! Treat them haphazardly and you will be making little difference between eggs and eggplant. You will have lightning bugs instead of lightning. Are you treating your words as if they have the power to persuade, or are you limply using them to simply inform?

“Writing is art only when you adore language itself, when you revel in play of imagination, not when you regard it as a mere instrumentality for conveying your ideas.”

-**Stephen Nachmanovitch**

“The price of learning to use words is the development of an acute self-consciousness. Nor is it enough to pay attention to words only when facing the task of writing. That is like playing the violin only on the night of the concert. You must attend to words when you read, when you speak, when others speak. Words must become ever present in your waking life, an incessant concern, like color and design if the graphic arts matter to you, or pitch and rhythm if it is music, or speed and form if it is athletics.”

—**Jacques Barzun**, *Simple and Direct: A Rhetoric for Writers*

3). Learn to write by imitation .

“Baby ducks learn to survive by imitating their mothers. Learning through imitation is fundamental to many species, including humans. As we become adults we have a unique advantage: we can choose whom and what to imitate.”

-- **Michael J. Gelb**

Who are some authors worthy of our learning from?

4). Just do it !

“If you want to be a writer, write.”
Epictetus

“Writing is no trouble: you just jot down ideas as they occur to you. The jotting is simplicity itself— it is the occurring which is difficult.”

Stephen Leacock

In his book, *On Writing*, Stephen King, speaking about learning to write, says that “you learn best by reading a lot and writing a lot, and the most valuable lessons of all are the ones you teach yourself. These lessons almost always occur with the study door closed.”

Dean Koontz, who has much to say about the importance of avid reading in learning to write, also made this statement in his book on writing fiction: “To a certain extent, a novel can be dissected, its musculature revealed, its skeleton uncovered for study. But a pathologist cannot find a man’s soul while doing an autopsy on his corpse, and a critic can never hope to pin down and dissect the spirit of a novel. Primarily, one learns to write fiction by writing it, then by writing more of it and more of it and more....”

“The best book is not the one that informs merely, but that stirs the reader up to inform himself.”

— **Aiden Wilson Tozer**

“Put it before them briefly so they will read it, clearly so they will appreciate it, picturesquely so they will remember it and, above all, accurately so they will be guided by its light.”

Joseph Pulitzer

A few words of friendly advice from an editor . . .

1). Start small .

“Once I planned to write a book of poems entirely about the things in my pocket. But I found it would be too long; and the age of the great epics is past.”

G.K. Chesterton

2). Write with passion .

“Nothing great in the world has ever been accomplished without passion.”

G.W.F. Hegel

“It is a fact often observed, that men have written good verses under the inspiration of passion, who cannot write well under other circumstances.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

3). Strive for excellence .

“A good novel tells us the truth about it's hero; but a bad novel tells us the truth about its author.”

G.K. Chesterton

“In truth, there has never been a time when we have had more of a need for articulate, intelligent, and stylistically talented Christians to prove their worth in the realm of secular publishing. We Christians have a message of hope, promise, and excitement. Unfortunately, unless it is presented with a talent equal to that of unsaved writers, the message will go unprinted.”

Dennis E. Hensley

4). Finally, don't lose heart .

This is probably the most important thing I can say to you. Yes, you will be rejected. Frank Peretti received **19** consecutive rejections from nineteen different publishers before Crossway finally published ***This Present Darkness***. There are scores of authors with similar stories.

Like many things in life, nothing worthwhile comes easily. But if you have a great idea and are persistent, you will eventually succeed.

“Thinking, planning, imagining, creating—processes encouraged by reading—remain essential to society. Even television shows must have writers. Without people oriented toward language, very little would be accomplished. The point is, the wielders of influence will always be those who read and write, who still work within the framework of language. If Christians remain true to their heritage, if they train themselves to be people of the Word and pursue the disciplines of reading and writing, their influence will be felt once again as it was in the formative moments of our civilization.”

Gene E. Veith, Jr., *Reading Between the Lines*, p. 25

Improving Your Preaching by Improving Your Writing

In an article on “Writing for the Ear,” Robert Hoch observes, “The manuscript can function as a sermonic lab where our labor with words can be conducted methodically. Creativity is not so much ‘inspired’ as it is ‘tutored’ by careful, almost obsessive labor—it is in that depth of focus where inspiration often leads to discovery.

Fred Craddock exhibits the gift for choosing words to create a holistic experience. If you listen to his sermons, you probably will notice there are very few careless words-- every word has its place; every word its purpose; even the seemingly ‘casual’ word has a part to play. A manuscript is a lab of sorts: As we write, words can be weighed on the tongue or tasted as sound in the ear as we labor toward a more complete experience of the Word.” (*Preaching*, Nov/Dec 08)

Keep at it! Harry Potter author J.K. Rowling started writing stories when she was 6.

“The man who does not read good books
has no advantage over the man that can't read.”

Mark Twain

Recommended Reading:

Asimov, Janet. *How To Enjoy Writing: A Book of Aid and Comfort*. Walker, 1987.

Atchity, Kenneth. *A Writer's Time: Making the Time to Write [Revised & Expanded]*. Norton, 1995.

Bagnall, Marlene. *Write His Answer: A Bible Study for Christian Writers*. Write Now Publications, 1990, 1999.

Brennan, H. Thomas. *Writings on Writing: 1,200 Memorable Quotations from Authors on Their Craft*. Barnes & Noble, 1994.

Buechner, Frederick. *The Clown in the Belfry: Writings on Faith and Fiction*. HarperCollins, 1992.

Buechner, Frederick. *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy, and Fairy Tale*. HarperSanFrancisco, 1977.

Canfield, Jack & Hendricks, Gay. *You've Got to Read This Book: 55 People Tell the Story of the Book That Changed Their Life*. Collins, 2006.

Card, Michael. *Scribbling in the Sand: Christ and Creativity*. InterVarsity, 2002.

Clark, Roy Peter. *Writing Tools: 50 Essential Strategies for Every Writer*. Little, Brown, & Co., 2008.

Delton, Judy. *The 29 Most Common Writing Mistakes: And How to Avoid Them*. Writers Digest Books, 1985.

Dillard, Annie. *The Writing Life*. Harper and Row, 1989.

King, Stephen. *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*. Scribner, 2000.

King, Stephen. *Secret Windows: Essays and Fiction on the Craft of Writing*. BMC, 2000.

Knowles, Victor. *Words Fitly Chosen: Choosing the Best Words for Your Sermon or Essay*. National Preaching Summit presentation, 1999.

Lamott, Anne. *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*. Anchor Books, 1994.

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“There are essentially two things
that will make you wiser--
the books you read
and the people you meet.”

Charley “Tremendous” Jones

“A Library of wisdom, then, is more precious than all wealth,
and all things that are desirable cannot be compared to it.
Whoever therefore claims to be zealous of truth, of happiness,
of wisdom or knowledge, aye, even of faith,
must needs become a lover of books.”

– Richard De Bury