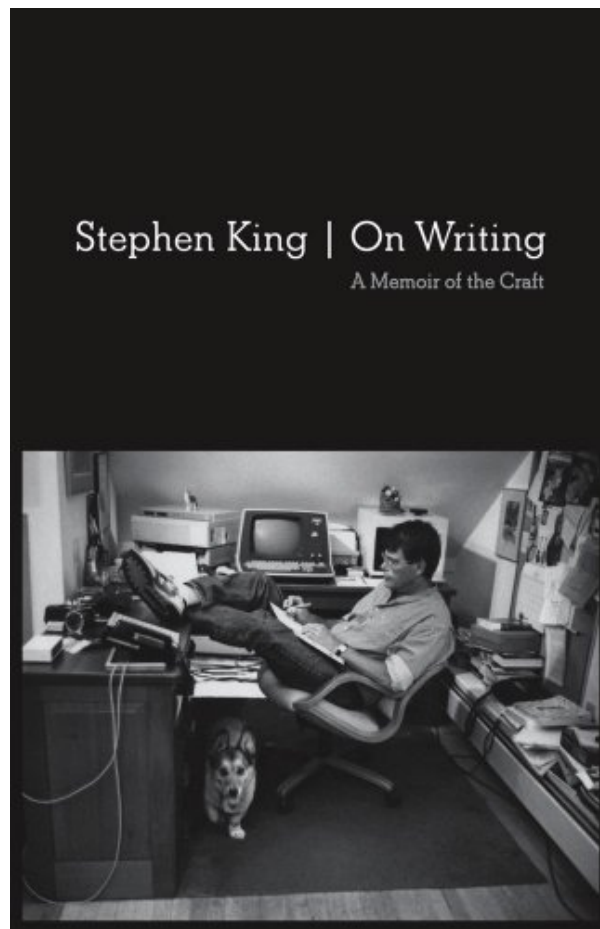


**ON WRITING: 10TH ANNIVERSARY  
EDITION: A MEMOIR OF THE CRAFT BY  
STEPHEN KING**



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# Stephen King | On Writing

*A Memoir of the Craft*



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## Amazon.com Review

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Immensely helpful and illuminating to any aspiring writer, this special edition of Stephen King's critically lauded, million-copy bestseller shares the experiences, habits, and convictions that have shaped him and his work.

"Long live the King" hailed Entertainment Weekly upon publication of Stephen King's On Writing. Part memoir, part master class by one of the bestselling authors of all time, this superb volume is a revealing and practical view of the writer's craft, comprising the basic tools of the trade every writer must have. King's advice is grounded in his vivid memories from childhood through his emergence as a writer, from his struggling early career to his widely reported, near-fatal accident in 1999—and how the inextricable link between writing and living spurred his recovery. Brilliantly structured, friendly and inspiring, On Writing will empower and entertain everyone who reads it—fans, writers, and anyone who loves a great story well told.

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- Great product!

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Most helpful customer reviews

561 of 573 people found the following review helpful.

Uncovering the Fossil

By A Customer

For the legions of Stephen King fans out there (which is to say a lot), the first third of the book containing his short memoir is truly a gift. One can't help wanting to read about his/her favorite writer after being transported to fantastic worlds countless times in Mr. King's prolific career. Some fans would have paid... gladly for the first 101 pages of the memoir ("C.V." he calls it), which includes heartfelt tidbits about his brother, mother and his long battles with alcohol and drug addiction.

The second part, "On Writing," is where the aspiring novelists will find inspiration. Assuming you're a serious writer (or wanting to be a published one), you'd no doubt would have read the countless manuals on the mechanics of writing. With Mr. King, you do get short lessons in the mechanics of prose here and there. What he mostly offers to the aspiring writer is the inspiration, the cheerleading, and as some have already suggested, after reading it makes you want to sit and write something. He actually allows you into his writing routine, when and where he writes, how many months it takes to write the first draft, and even how he goes about editing the second draft.

Some very original thoughts I found quite interesting:

1. Story is a fossil you find on the ground, and you gradually dig it out slowly.
2. He doesn't plot his stories. He puts "a group of characters in some sort of predicament and then watch them try to work themselves free." In fact he even goes as far as to say, "plot is shift, and best kept under house arrest."
3. Write first draft with the "door" closed, and the second draft with it open.

There are truly gems here for writers, simple, direct, to the point. As always, he doesn't talk down to you. There is even advice on finding agents.

The final section elaborates his near-death experience in summer of 1999, when he was hit by a van driven by Bryan Smith. The book is actually a sandwich: two slices of autobiography with the writing advice as the meat of the book.

Though the thin volume was not your edge-of-the-seat thriller or horror, I found myself reading the darn thing in one seating. A pretty good deal for a non-fiction book. This may sound funny, too, but I felt like the book became a good friend of mine. In a word, this is book is intimate. As a fan, and perhaps a writer, that might be worth something.

647 of 693 people found the following review helpful.

For writers and readers -- get inside King's mind

By Dr Beverly R Vincent

The cover shows an inviting scene, a country house with a warm light glowing in the living room window, a set of double doors leading down to the cellar, the house lined with pink and white flowers. "Come on in," the picture seems to say. "I have a story to tell."

It generally takes Stephen King about three months to finish the first draft of a book. He began "On Writing" at the end of 1997, but put it aside a few months later, unsure how to finish it. Over a year later, in mid-1999, King decided to spend the summer "finishing the damn writing book."

The events of late-June, 1999 interfered with those plans. King spent three weeks in the hospital after he was struck by a van. In late July he decided it was time to start writing again, and it was "On Writing" that he chose for his return to work. The finished product, "On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft" will be released by Scribner in early October, 2000.

It was a discussion with Amy Tan while on tour with the Rock Bottom Reminders that inspired King to write this book. "No one ever asks about the language," Tan said in response to King's query about the sorts of questions that she doesn't get at author appearances. "Serious" authors get asked that but they don't ask the popular novelists who, he says "care about language in our humble way, and care passionately about the art and craft of telling stories on paper."



King opens with a lengthy memoir that "attempted to show some of the incidents and life-situations which made me into the sort of writer I turned out to be." He calls this section "C.V," as in "curriculum vitae," his list of accomplishments and job skills. Some of the story is familiar, though many of the details are new. He works his way through his stages as a writer from childhood to novice to apprentice to worldwide success.

For the first time in any detail, King addresses his battle with alcohol and drug abuse, when it started, how it evolved and how he eventually was forced to confront his problem. He reveals that he has little memory of writing "Cujo" ("I wish I could remember enjoying the good parts as I put them down on the page"), that he hadn't realized that when he was writing "The Shining" he was writing about himself, and how Annie Wilkes in "Misery" could well be seen as a symbol for coke and alcohol. "I decided I was tired of being Annie's pet writer," King says.

King is more revealing of his life in this book than ever before. He is frank in discussing the merits and deficiencies of many of his books. Of "Rose Madder" and "Insomnia" he says: "These are (much as I hate to admit it) stiff, trying-too-hard novels." He talks about how he reached a point in "The Stand" where he had to set the novel aside for several weeks until he could figure out how to go on. If he had written a couple of hundred pages less at that point he probably would have abandoned the book completely. Also described in some depth are the issues he had to deal with in writing "Carrie," "The Dead Zone" and "The Green Mile." He spends some time relating an event that inspired him to write the upcoming novel "From a Buick Eight" and the research required for the second draft that had to be deferred after his accident - a couple of weeks riding with the Pennsylvania State Police.

"But I'm not a writer," the prospective reader of "On Writing" might cry. "Why should I want to read this book?" While a substantial section of the book is about writing, King's approach to it and his advice to writers at all levels of the art, there is much here for the non-writer as well. King's success has made him a high-profile personality, more so than many other authors, and the level of public interest in his life is easily demonstrated by the overwhelming number of requests for updates on his condition received by his office and official web site in the weeks following his accident. Here is the opportunity to read King on King, and on his books. He describes the symbolism in many of his novels, rarely planted intentionally on the first draft but uncovered, as an archaeologist uncovers a ruin, during the writing of the second draft.

For writers, though, the book is chock full of advice, some of it common sense, some of it uniquely King's. His taboos of writing: adverbs (especially those in dialog attributes) and the passive voice. His description of the writer's toolbox: Common tools on the top shelf (vocabulary and grammar), elements of grammar and style on the second level, along with an understanding of the paragraph as the basic element in fiction, and a synthesis of all of these along with innate and developed skills at the bottom.

"If you want to be a writer," King says, "you must do two things above all others: read a lot and write a lot." King calls reading the creative center of a writer's life. He advocates reading in small sips as well as long drinks - in waiting rooms, in line at the theater, in the checkout line at the grocery store, on the treadmill at the gym and in the john.

When it comes to writing, though, King is more selective. "We do best in a place of our own," he advises. The most important feature of this place: a door that you can and are willing to shut. No TV, no phone and no video games. Curtains closed. Write first with the door closed. Write for yourself without worry about theme, symbolism or accuracy of details. Those are for the second draft, which is usually written with the door open, after he has sent the book to a select group of critical readers.

King includes examples of both good and bad writing, sometimes taken from his own work, sometimes taken from such writers as Elmore Leonard and John Katzenbach. The final chapter of the book is an annotated rewrite of his first draft of the opening section of "1408," one of the three stories in the recent "Blood and Smoke" audio release. This section should silence critics who suggest that King doesn't rewrite his work. It is an interesting look at the creative process and what an author should look for when editing his or her own material.

He also describes his approach to research. It's all about back story, he says. "What I'm looking for is nothing but a touch of verisimilitude, like the handful of spices you chuck into a really good spaghetti sauce to really

finish her off."

Toward the end of the book, King tackles the subject of his accident. This section, called "On Living," is partly a bully platform for him to get his version of the story down, as well as his opinion about how the legal system handled the case of driver Bryan Smith. It also describes how an otherwise ideal day went wrong, the minute details of his injuries and some of the challenges of his recovery process. "Life isn't a support system for art - it's the other way around," he concludes.

Throughout the book, but especially in this chapter, King pays tribute to wife, Tabitha. She is King's "Ideal Reader," the person for whom he writes all of his books, the one who he wants to make laugh or cry through his writing. His love and admiration for her shines through, from a touching scene in their early courtship where he sits at her feet as she reads her poetry in a workshop, his hand on her calf, to her organization of a group intervention to make him confront his addiction problems, and all the way through to her support and encouragement of him during his convalescence.

At the end, King includes a list of nearly a hundred novels that he considers the best that he's read in the last three or four years. "A good many of these might show you some new ways of doing your work. Even if they don't, they're apt to entertain you," he concludes.

The same might be said of "On Writing."

218 of 240 people found the following review helpful.

Get out your notebooks, sharpen your pencils...and learn.

By ConstantConsumer

Though far from the definitive writer's guideline, this book shines a unique perspective on the craft. Stephen King lays down the law and then teaches it. He shares his techniques, his pet peeves, and his own personal horrific experiences - both as child and adult - and he does it all within the cerebral classroom of the printed page. He wraps a juicy filling of personal tragedy, growth and experience within a tight covering of his famous story telling style.

As a human, I was touched by his childhood anecdotes and often laughed with him about his insecurities. I am still in awe at what he has recently had to overcome physically. I mean, damn.

As a writer, I am grateful for a brief glimpse into his vocational world. I gained confidence from learning about things I have been doing right and have changed many bad habits (may the adverb rest in peace). I've read several tomes on the subject and believe his reigns as the most complete.

I've been a fan of King's since the seventh grade when I was given *The Dead Zone* and *Cujo* as an Easter present. A year later I had read every book he'd published (with the exception of the dreaded Limited Editions of which I could opine negatively for hours - suffice it to say that writing should be for everyone to read, not just the rich). I've read or listened to all his books since. I can honestly say, that this is my favorite.

Sometimes the coldest hands to wrap around your neck are the true ones.

The only bad thing I can say about this book is that it's too short, something one rarely has the opportunity to state regarding the beloved author.

A huge thank you to Mr. King for a brief indulgence into the life of a genius.

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