



Pearls of Wisdom
Collected from Near and Far

On Starting with a Blank Page

When asked the name of his next book:

“It’s easy to feel like novels are for other people to write, people who are born with ideas already there.

I don’t have a name and I don’t have a plot. I have the typewriter and I have white paper and I have me, and that should add up to a novel.”

~ William Saroyan

On the Art of Writing

“The art of writing is the art of applying the seat of the pants to the seat of the chair.”

~ Mary Heaton Vorse

On Finding an Entry Point

“The best thing to do is to loosen my grip on my pen and let it go wandering about until it finds an entrance. There must be one – everything depends on the circumstances, a rule applicable as much to literary style as to life. Each word tugs another one along, one idea another, and that is how books, governments and revolutions are made – some even say that is how Nature created her species.”

~ Machado de Assis

On Containing Your Inner Editor

Before you begin your month-long noveling adventure, you’ll want to do away with your Inner Editor. What is your Inner Editor? He’s the nagging, no-fun beast we bring along with us on all our creative endeavors. He sits on our shoulder and points out our typos and misspellings and every awkward sentence. When he’s in a



particularly nasty mood, he might try to tell us that we're embarrassingly awful writers, and shouldn't even be allowed to put pen to paper. He is helpful to have around when taking tests and revising things we've already written, but he'll slow you down in the worst way if you let him write your novel with you next month.

~ Nanowrimo

On the Daily Practice

"If I don't write every day, the characters begin to stale off in my mind."

~ Stephen King

On Starting with a Puzzle Piece

Start small. If you try to think about all of it at once—the world you hope to capture on the page, everything you know, every idea you've ever had, each person you've met, and the panoply of feelings coursing through you like a river—you'll be overcome with paralysis... Think of a jigsaw puzzle—one of those vexingly complicated puzzles that comes in a big box... Build a corner. That is what people who are good at puzzles do. They ignore the heap of colors and shapes and simply look for straight edges. They focus on piecing together one tiny corner. Every book, story, and essay begins with a single word. Then a sentence. Then a paragraph.

~ Dani Shapiro

On Overcoming Writer's Block

"Sometimes when I was starting a new story and I could not get it going, I would sit in front of the fire and squeeze the peel of the little oranges into the edge of the flame and watch the sputter of blue that they made. I would stand and look out over the roofs of Paris and think, "Do not worry. You have always written before and you will write now. All you have to do is write one true sentence. Write the truest sentence that you know." So finally I would write one true sentence, and then go on from there. It was easy then because there was always one true sentence that I knew or had seen or had heard someone say. If I started to write elaborately, or like someone introducing or presenting something, I found that I



could cut that scrollwork or ornament out and throw it away and start with the first true simple declarative sentence I had written.”

~ Ernest Hemingway

On When to Stop

The best way is always to stop when you are going good and when you know what will happen next. If you do that every day when you are writing a novel you will never be stuck. That is the most valuable thing I can tell you so try to remember it.

~ Ernest Hemingway

On Conveying Emotion as Concrete Action and Sensation

I was trying to write then and I found the greatest difficulty, aside from knowing truly what you really felt, rather than what you were supposed to feel, and had been taught to feel, was to put down what really happened in action; what the actual things were which produced the emotion that you experienced.

~ Ernest Hemingway

On the Benefits of Doodling

I started to doodle, and the doodlings turned into sentences, and sentences into paragraphs... and before I knew it, I was writing a story.

~ Suchen Christine Lim

On Stakes

“Find out what each character cares most about in the world because then you will have discovered what’s a stake. Find a way to express this discovery in action [in scene], and then let your people set about finding or holding onto or defending whatever it is. Then you can take them from good to bad and back again, or from bad to good, or from lost to found. But something must be at stake or you will have no tension and your readers will not turn the pages.”

~ Anne Lamott