



GERAINT SMITH
PHOTOGRAPHY

❖ 'Ten rules for fiction writing' : The Guardian

In 2010, the British newspaper 'The Guardian' asked a set of writers to capture their 'ten rules for fiction writing'. Enclosed below are a few selected responses ...

Anne Enright

- 1 The first 12 years are the worst.
- 2 The way to write a book is to actually *write* a book. A pen is useful, typing is also good. Keep putting words on the page.
- 3 Only bad writers think that their work is really good.
- 4 Description is hard. Remember that all description is an opinion about the world. **Find a place to stand.**
- 5 Write whatever way you like. Fiction is made of words on a page; reality is made of something else. It doesn't matter how "real" your story is, or how "made up": what matters is its necessity.
- 6 Try to be accurate about stuff.
- 7 Imagine that you are dying. If you had a terminal disease would you finish this book? Why not? The thing that annoys this 10-weeks-to-live self is the thing that is wrong with the book. So change it. Stop arguing with yourself. Change it. See? Easy. And no one had to die.
- 8 You can also do all that with whiskey.
- 9 Have fun.
- 10 Remember, if you sit at your desk for 15 or 20 years, every day, not counting weekends, it changes you. It just does. It may not improve your temper, but it fixes something else. It makes you more free.

Neil Gaiman

- 1 Write.
- 2 Put one word after another. Find the right word, put it down.
- 3 Finish what you're writing. Whatever you have to do to finish it, finish it.
- 4 Put it aside. Read it pretending you've never read it before. Show it to friends whose opinion you respect and who like the kind of thing that this is.
- 5 **Remember: when people tell you something's wrong or doesn't work for them, they are almost always right. When they tell you exactly what they think is wrong and how to fix it, they are almost always wrong.**

6 Fix it. Remember that, sooner or later, before it ever reaches perfection, you will have to let it go and move on and start to write the next thing. Perfection is like chasing the horizon. Keep moving.

7 Laugh at your own jokes.

8 The main rule of writing is that if you do it with enough assurance and confidence, you're allowed to do whatever you like. (That may be a rule for life as well as for writing. But it's definitely true for writing.) So write your story as it needs to be written. Write it honestly, and tell it as best you can. I'm not sure that there are any other rules. Not ones that matter.

AL Kennedy

1 Have humility. Older/more experienced/more convincing writers may offer rules and varieties of advice. - Consider what they say. However, don't automatically give them charge of your brain, or anything else – they might be bitter, twisted, burned-out, manipulative, or just not very like you.

2 Have more humility. Remember you don't know the limits of your own abilities. Successful or not, if you keep pushing beyond yourself, you will enrich your own life – and maybe even please a few strangers.

3 Defend others. You can, of course, steal stories and attributes from family and friends, fill in filecards after lovemaking and so forth. It might be better to celebrate those you love – and love itself – by writing in such a way that everyone keeps their privacy and dignity intact.

4 Defend your work. Organisations, institutions and individuals will often think they know best about your work – especially if they are paying you. When you genuinely believe their decisions would damage your work – walk away. Run away. The money doesn't matter that much.

5 Defend yourself. Find out what keeps you happy, motivated and creative.

6 **Write. No amount of self-inflicted misery, altered states, black pullovers or being publicly obnoxious will ever add up to your being a writer. Writers write. On you go.**

7 Read. As much as you can. As deeply and widely and nourishingly and irritatingly as you can. And the good things will make you remember them, so you won't need to take notes.

8 Be without fear. This is impossible, but let the small fears drive your rewriting and set aside the large ones until they behave – then use them, maybe even write them. Too much fear and all you'll get is silence.

9 Remember you love writing. It wouldn't be worth it if you didn't. If the love fades, do what you need to and get it back.

10 Remember writing doesn't love you. It doesn't care. Nevertheless, it can behave with remarkable generosity. Speak well of it, encourage others, pass it on.

Philip Pullman

My main rule is to say no to things like this, which tempt me away from my proper work.

Helen Simpson

The nearest I have to a rule is a Post-it on the wall in front of my desk saying "*Faire et se taire*" (Flaubert), which I translate for myself as "Shut up and get on with it."

Zadie Smith

- 1 When still a child, make sure you read a lot of books. Spend more time doing this than anything else.
- 2 When an adult, try to read your own work as a stranger would read it, or even better, as an enemy would.
- 3 Don't romanticize your "vocation". You can either write good sentences or you can't. There is no "writer's lifestyle". **All that matters is what you leave on the page.**
- 4 Avoid your weaknesses. But do this without telling yourself that the things you can't do aren't worth doing. Don't mask self-doubt with contempt.
- 5 Leave a decent space of time between writing something and editing it.
- 6 Avoid cliques, gangs, groups. The presence of a crowd won't make your writing any better than it is.
- 7 Work on a computer that is disconnected from the internet.
- 8 **Protect the time and space in which you write. Keep everybody away from it, even the people who are most important to you.**
- 9 **Don't confuse honours with achievement.**
- 10 Tell the truth through whichever veil comes to hand – but tell it. Resign yourself to the lifelong sadness that comes from never being satisfied.

Rose Tremain

- 1 Forget the boring old dictum "write about what you know". Instead, seek out an **unknown yet knowable area of experience that's going to enhance your understanding of the world and write about that.**
- 2 Nevertheless, remember that in the particularity of your own life lies the seedcorn that will feed your imaginative work. So don't throw it all away on autobiography. (There are quite enough writers' memoirs out there already.)
- 3 Never be satisfied with a first draft. **In fact, never be satisfied with your own stuff at all, until you're certain it's as good as your finite powers can enable it to be.**
- 4 Listen to the criticisms and preferences of your trusted "first readers".

5 When an idea comes, **spend silent time with it**. Remember Keats's idea of Negative Capability and Kipling's advice to "drift, wait and obey". Along with your gathering of hard data, allow yourself also to dream your idea into being.

6 In the planning stage of a book, don't plan the ending. It has to be earned by all that will go before it.

7 Respect the way characters may change once they've got 50 pages of life in them. Revisit your plan at this stage and see whether certain things have to be altered to take account of these changes.

8 If you're writing historical fiction, don't have well-known real characters as your main protagonists. This will only create biographical unease in the readers and send them back to the history books. If you must write about real people, then do something post-modern and playful with them.

9 Learn from cinema. Be economic with descriptions. Sort out the telling detail from the lifeless one. Write dialogue that people would actually speak.

10 Never begin the book when you feel you want to begin it, but hold off a while longer.

Jeanette Winterson

1 Turn up for work. Discipline allows creative freedom. **No discipline equals no freedom.**

2 Never stop when you are stuck. You may not be able to solve the problem, but turn aside and write something else. Do not stop altogether.

3 Love what you do.

4 Be honest with yourself. If you are no good, accept it. If the work you are doing is no good, accept it.

5 Don't hold on to poor work. If it was bad when it went in the drawer it will be just as bad when it comes out.

6 **Take no notice of anyone you don't respect.**

7 Take no notice of anyone with a gender agenda. A lot of men still think that women lack imagination of the fiery kind.

8 **Be ambitious for the work and not for the reward.**

9 Trust your creativity.

10 Enjoy this work!

❖ 'The Hunger' : By Hugh MacLeod

The Hunger will give you everything,
and it will take from you, everything.
It will cost you YOUR life,
and there isn't a damn thing you can do about it.
But knowing this, of course,
is what ultimately sets you free.



@hugh

About 'Treasures'

It's a compilation that I put together every once in a while, of things that I have found to be beautiful and meaningful.

Do share it with others who you think will enjoy it.

Drop me an email at shaileshd.email@gmail.com if you want to add someone to the circulation list.

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