

TIPS ON SUCCESSFUL WRITING FROM STEPHEN KING'S MEMOIR
ON WRITING

(Translation for Composers by Dr. Ethan Wickman)

1. **First write for yourself, and then worry about the audience** (*Be true to yourself, and those seeking authenticity will find you.*)
2. **Don't use passive voice** (*Where is this motive/phrase/section going? Is it dynamic? Does it have a purpose? Be mindful of your syntax.*)
3. **Avoid adverbs** (*Get to the point.*)
4. **Avoid adverbs, especially after "he said" and "she said"** (*Again, get to the point.*)
5. **But don't obsess over perfect grammar** (*Theory will help you solve problems, but it won't write music for you*)
6. **The magic is in you** (*You have something to say, and there is a place for your voice in the economy of art and creativity*)
7. **Read, read, read** (*Study scores, study scores, study scores*)
8. **Don't worry about making other people happy** (*Tell the truth, and see #1 above.*)
9. **Turn off the TV (S.K.: "TV—while working out or anywhere else—really is about the last thing an aspiring writer needs) ('Garbage in/garbage out'—you will digest what you consume)**
10. **You have three months** (*Deadlines give structure and focus to creative work*)
11. **There are two secrets to success. (S.K. "I stayed physically healthy, and I stayed married.")** (*Physical and emotional health directly correlate to creative health. We all have challenges both physically and emotionally—be kind to yourself.*)
12. **Write one word at a time** (*One note, one chord, one phrase, etc.—notes on the page daily make for finished work*)
13. **Eliminate distraction (S.K. "There should be no telephone in your writing room, certainly no TV or video games for you to fool around with).** (*Your creative time is sacred—protect it*)
14. **Stick to your own style** (*See #1 and #8*)
15. **Dig** (*Explore your motives for all of their potential/possibilities—open up your material, drill down, see what it can do*)
16. **Take a break** (*Edit your drafts after you have been away from them for some time. Detach from your work mentally and emotionally.*)
17. **Leave out the boring parts and kill your darlings** (*Helpful in the editing phase. Arnold Schoenberg allegedly said that the composer's most useful tool is the eraser.*)
18. **The research shouldn't overshadow the story** (*Or the pre-compositional plan, or the algorithm, or the topic, etc. The piece must stand on its own an intelligible and moving work of art*)

- 19. You become a writer simply by reading and writing** (*Do you want to be a composer? Study scores and write music*).
- 20. Writing is about getting happy** (*It's not about fame, popularity, wealth, bragging rights, etc. According to S.K., it's "about enriching the lives of those who will read your work, and enrich your own life, as well. It's about getting up, getting well, and getting over. Getting happy, okay? Writing is magic, as much as the water of life as any other creative art."*)

My favorite quote:

"There is a muse, but he's not going to come fluttering down into your writing room and scatter creative fairy-dust all over your typewriter or computer. He lives in the ground. He's a basement kind of guy. You have to descend to his level, and once you get down there you have to furnish an apartment for him to live in. You have to do all the grunt labor, in other words, while the muse sits and smokes cigars and admires his bowling trophies and pretends to ignore you. Do you think it's fair? I think it's fair. He may not be much to look at, that muse-guy, and he may not be much of a conversationalist, but he's got inspiration. It's right that you should do all the work and burn all the mid-night oil, because the guy with the cigar and the little wings has got a bag of magic. There's stuff in there that can change your life. Believe me, I know."