# Writing Tips

# (adapted from memoir advice by Evonne Agnello)

Begin today. Make a list of topics to cover, select one, and write a first draft. Don’t worry about how to begin or end or the sequence of stories. Write freely and openly.

The first drafts are sometimes only hints of what you’re really trying to say. In the beginning, you’re simply creating a structure in which – over time – you pour your ideas into – the slow drawing out of the voices.

Learn to quiet the chaos in your mind about how it will all fit together.

Train yourself to trust the process.

Read and revise as many times as you can stand it, then put it away. When you’re ready, return to it for more revision. Rewriting is the true writing process.

Take all the classes you can from a variety of teachers and venues. There’s nothing like a deadline to help you focus. Get feedback from others and find places where you can read some of your work to a live audience. Read lots of books about writing.

Simone de Beauvoir wrote that her first drafts were so “…shapeless that it seemed impossible to go on, right up until the moment - always imperceptible … when it becomes impossible not to finish it. Each page, each sentence, makes a fresh demand on the powers of invention and requires an unprecedented choice.”

Writers usually have a preferred writing mode – usually the computer, so try writing in different modes from your usual. Try dictating, writing on yellow pads, or like the Marquis de Sade, write on bedsheets.

Continue to simplify, always working to omit needless words. Rewriting is the true writing process. Simone: Then I correct each sentence so that it will fit into the page as a whole, then each page so that it has its place in the whole chapter; later on, each chapter, each page, each sentence is revised in relation to the work as a whole.

John Irving wrote that “the only job as a writer is to make the reader turn the page.”

Once I had most of the writing done, I took a lot of time on how to begin. The reader wants a sense of where the story will be going. In the beginning, you want to tantalize them but not tell all.

Wallace Stegner describes a writer as “a synthesizer, a blender, and everything he has ever heard or seen or read or known is potentially there, available for the creation of his story. It all melts and fuses." Marie Arana says, “It’s like throwing a lump of clay on the page.”

Russell Baker wrote to his children, “… I tried to convey to them some sense of how different the world was from that I had come from; to tell them about their forebears, who had lived and died before they were born … I wanted my children to know that they were part of a long chain of humanity extending deep into the past…”