

The Adequate Writer: Writing 101

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Here are some tips for folks who are getting pieces together to submit (to the antho I'm editing or elsewhere).

1. Write like a motherfucker. Full out. Don't stop. A good way to do this is to not allow your pen off the page, or your fingers off the keyboard.
2. Wait. Two days, minimum. A week.
3. Start editing.

EDITING:

1. Announce your topic right off the bat. You don't need to be shy because the reader is eager to be situated. You can be blunt: *This story is about a girl whose mother doesn't love her.* There are 10,000 subtle ways to do this, too, but however you do it, do it.

2. Get [specific](#).

3. Use your senses. What does your narrator (even if that is you) see, smell, taste, hear, feel, touch? Is there a pebble by his feet? Are the leaves streaming down off a nearby tree? Does it smell like cinammon? If you want readers to be there with you, you need to tell them this stuff.

4. Look at each paragraph. Are they tight and organized there at the beginning, or are they flabby? Lots and lots of people do something called "pre-writing." Novelists find the intro to their novels five chapters in and toss out the first four. Short story writers find them a third of the way in and chop that preamble. Did you just write a bunch of paragraphs before you really got down to business? Cut them. (You won't die, trust me.) Cut them mercilessly.

5. Look at each sentence you've written. How can you make it shorter? What words are not pulling their weight? If you drop, say, the first four words, could the sentence be stronger for it? Or the last four? Or four in the middle? Chop your sentences back. Get used to looking for the good parts in a sentence. Keep those parts, toss the rest.

The thing is, your brain is an always-running font. You don't have to save what you cut, because your brain will generate something new. Toss liberally.

6. Use active tenses. John was jumping. WRONG. John jumped. RIGHT.

7. Look for academic language (buzzwords like intersectionality, cisgender), clichés and jargon and cut them. Yes, this means you cannot use the word "authentic." Apply this rule: You cannot use any terms you heard in therapy or university; it's all flab with little

communicative value. Your job with creative writing is to think of a fresh and unique way to say what you want to say.

8. **I wasn't kidding.** Really. Go through sentence by sentence and think up a new way to say what you just said. This is all about re-inventing the world, folks.

9. Kill the adverbs. (We're assholes, we editors. We hate adverbs.) Pretend you are a spy and your job is to rout out adverbs. Start with your own writing, then do us a favour and get rid of them in the whole world.

10. Invent some imagery (metaphor/simile). We use either the same or connected imagery through a piece. Through a short story. Through a whole novel, even. It is one of our super secretive ways to create connections that the reader doesn't notice. You need imagery because imagery is an individual author's interpretation of the world. [Similes](#). [Metaphors](#).

11. Kill the adjectives. (Yup, we're really demanding assholes.)

12. Stick to "he said, they said, she said" to indicate speech. "Don't look at me like that," young svelte Becky chortled gleefully. WRONG. "Don't look at me like that," Becky said. RIGHT.

13. Strive for clear, clean, icy, sharp. Could your writing knife somebody?

14. Can you go home now? Well, not quite.

The piece as a whole has to make cohesive sense. The beginning starts somewhere and marches towards an end. The piece still has to hang together as a logical whole. There are things called narrative arcs. Here is a simple explanation: [Arcs](#)

15. There. You probably got rid of 50% of your text, or more. Pat yourself on the back. That is supposed to happen. That means you're doing it right.

16. Yay, you.

Somebody's going to be thinking, "What does she mean?" They're going to be thinking that calm and reflective writing, writing that could rub somebody's back is real writing, too, not just sharp and edgy stuff. I'm going to agree with you, whole-heartedly, because none of what I was just talking to you about has to do with style. You will have your own style. You are allowed to kill your reader with beauty as well as daggers. Good sentences come in a thousand varieties. Some are hard and jabby. Some are long and windy. Some are one-worded. Some are mockers. Some are like old driftwood, full of holes and craziness. Some are blasé. Some melt the reader like microwaved butter. Some are like bullets. Some are squishy like cream cheese. Some are sticky like toffee. Some are popcorn. Some are so soft they creep by on baby feet.

Whatever use sentences are put to, though, whatever mood you create, you still need to care that each individual sentence is pulling its (considerable) weight. And that they're pulling in a piece that makes sense and carries a reader through it. Readers have a choice of a gazillion cnf pieces, poems, short stories. Why should they read yours? Because you did the work.

17. One more thing. Rules are made to be broken.