

DEBUNKING WRITERS' MYTHS

They look upon us with veneration...with awe...yet tinged with bewilderment. To many, the writer is a unique being with arcane talents. Perhaps a bit of a superhuman to others. To most, the author's prodigious talents are a gift from heaven. We come in many different shades and with a variety of stripes. But underneath the superficial, we are all simple human beings with the same needs, wants and hopes of others.

1. Writers make an easy living without working very hard. Hardly so. With rare exceptions, the majority of writers eek out a living, often supplementing with a side job.
2. The writer's life is loose and free, uninhibited and unscheduled. No way! Without strict adherence to a rigid schedule of work, books and articles would never be finished. The process starts with research, moves on to writing and ends with editing and rewriting.
3. Writers have huge egos, and that's what makes them successful. No, it's not egos; it is the confidence we develop in our own creative abilities.
4. The writer's life is glamorous and fun. Lots of parties and socializing with the elite. Quite the contrary. Our lives tend to be a bit solitary at times. Glued to a desk and a computer, tucked away where the household noises can't penetrate, Most of us cherish our time alone. It is when we are most productive.
5. Writers are born, not created. Not so. With proper study and a lot of hard, solid work at the computer, almost anyone can become a writer. You may not reach the best seller lists, but neither do the majority of published authors.

Writing can't be learned. There is no substitute for innate creative ability, nor for the curiosity or perceptiveness that a good writer must have. But the craft can be learned and honed to a fine point with practice.

6. The best way to learn to write is to study and then copy the style of a successful writer. That's decidedly the wrong approach. You have to develop and enrich a style that comes from within. It must be you, not Hemingway or Didion, Tom Wolf or Saul Bellow.
7. There is nothing original to write. That's true. Someone has written on just about every subject possible. The originality comes, and there a great deal of room for it, from the treatment the subject receives from each individual writer. It's much like copyright: you can't copyright a subject, but you can protect your treatment of that subject against plagiarists.
8. There are dozens of old saws promulgated by writing instructors and school

teachers that should be debunked. Here is just a short sampling of those myths. *Don't use contractions.* Heck, they help set a tone when used properly. *Don't leave a preposition hanging at the end of a sentence.* That's good advice, but sometimes it's the only way the sentence will flow. *Never start a sentence with a conjunction.* Again, good advice. But on occasion that helps coordinate your sentences and ease the flow of the text. There are lots more of these. Enjoy discovering them.

9. WRITER'S BLOCK. The worst of the myths! Overused as a crutch, an excuse for poor quality writing that results from either inadequate research or a lack of confidence. When you face that empty computer screen and it returns your look and challenges you to write, you have two choices. If you haven't researched adequately so you can put meaningful words on paper, go back and do it. If it's a matter of confidence, plunge ahead. Start writing no matter how stilted your words seem. You can always go back and rewrite, edit or start from scratch again.