

Be a PRO Writer TODAY

Writers are the most self-effacing people on earth. While showing the utmost respect to bookkeepers and beekeepers, doctors and fashion models, they treat their writing work as if it were a frivolous pastime. And society is quick to help us feel that way: “Are you still writing?” people ask at parties. Do they ask dentists if they’re still drilling teeth, or ironmongers if they’re still pouring pipe?

So we all feed the notion that writing is a hobby. But authors who *produce* are people who take themselves and their work seriously. They write every day unless they’re interrupted by auto accidents or honeymoons or giving birth, and they don’t apologize for their profession.

Yes, writing is a profession. A great one. When people ask what you do, don’t say, “Well, I work part-time at a restaurant, and I’m trying to write.” Say, “I’m a writer.” And follow the next ten suggestions to help yourself believe that. And here’s a guarantee: Read and practice them every day for three months; if, at the end of that time you aren’t writing better and longer, you can have your old work style back.

Here are some tips on writing as if you’re a pro:

- Remember that writing is your true vocation. Writing is what you *do*. Anything else you do to pay the bills is simply support of your vocation. Whatever your conscious view, *you’re called to write or you wouldn’t be trying to do it*.
- You don’t have to have flair, talent or a wild way with words to be a good writer. . Your calling as a writer might or might not include some natural talent. It doesn’t have to. What you need is *craft*. That means honing your skills by reading books about writing (and putting what you learn into practice), attending writer’s conferences, joining a critique group, submitting yourself to good criticism when possible, and polishing your manuscripts until they shine.
- Good writers treat their work like *work*. It takes some time to learn to work at home.
- Good writers don’t talk out their ideas. When people ask what you’ve written, say, “At the moment I’m working on—“ But remember you have only a certain amount of energy connected to any writing enterprise and you can dissipate all of that energy by talking.
- Build up a writer’s library. Buy some writing texts, including *The Writer’s Market*; acquire a good thesaurus, Strunk and White’s *Elements of Style*, Annie Dillard’s *The Writing Life*, and a dictionary.
- Read as much as you write. Read the great classic writers, such as Tolstoy and Virgil and Homer. Read the novels of great living literary writers like Barbara Kingsolver and Margaret Atwood. Read the writers of best-sellers—writers like John Grisham and Tom Clancy. Read *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* by Annie Dillard, and *Crime and Punishment* by Dostoyevsky.
- To show the seriousness of your work, save it carefully and submit it constantly. Your work is like a toothbrush: it won’t do you (or the world) any good, lying in a drawer. Or in a computer. You’ve got to use it.