**How to write ~~good~~ better prose.**

**Suggestions from NOTL Writers’ Circle authors.**

Here’s our suggestions... and just like medication the doctor prescribes, just use them as needed...one at a time. Best taken with food and drink.

**1. Stephen King, On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft. Scribner, 2000**. If you don't read another book on writing but this one, you could do worse. It reads like a novel and covers all the tools of the trade. Provides a fascinating account of his own writing process and his 'journey' as a writer. Strongly recommended for anyone who wants 'the whole story'.

**2. Stanley Fish, How to Write a Sentence and How to Read One. Harper Collins, 2011**. Another favorite, this book explores the craft of writing anything, examining the prose styles of the great writers and gleaning the qualities of good sentences v crap sentences (that often pass for good sentences). It's also an excellent guide for anyone who wants to know what to look for while reading great books.

**3. John Gardner, The Art of Fiction. Vintage Books, 1991.** Probably too academic for many tastes and requirements but it has a section devoted to common "howlers" in writing that should be avoided at all costs.

**4. James Wood, How Fiction Works. Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2008.** Another favorite, though a familiarity with some classic literary writers is an advantage in reading this book. Sections on character, dialogue, language, etc.

**5. Harry Bruce, Page Fright. McClelland & Stewart, 2009**. This is a must-read for anyone who writes. No rules for writing better but a fascinating account of the 'foibles and fetishes' of great writers. Hilarious at times, but mostly just absorbing and enlightening. Whatever weird habits and rituals you have when writing, you are not alone.

**6. Bill Bryson, The Penguin Dictionary for Writers and Editors. Viking, 1991.** A handy reference to correct usage, spelling and meanings of troublesome words. Easy to use, not at all pedantic, and most helpful.

**7. Meredith Maran (ed), Why We Write. Penguin, 2013.** Twenty acclaimed writers talk about why they write and how. Insightful and a joy to read.

**8. Barnaby Conrad and Monte Schulz (eds), Snoopy's Guide to the Writing Life. Writers Digest Books, 2002.** No joke! This is a wonderful book, illustrated with all the comic strips of Snoopy at his typewriter, from the beginning ("It was a dark and stormy night"), with each followed by a famous writer commenting on the aspect of the craft touched on. So you get Danielle Steele, Ed McBain, Ray Bradbury, Julia Child, William Buckley Jr. and a host of other writers talking about every aspect of writing you can think of.

**9. John McPhee, Draft No. 4. (On the Writing Process). Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2017**. Apart from a chapter where he provides a diagrammatic account of the writing process, this book has much to offer, especially on the importance of writing many drafts and revisions. Fascinating look at writing from this Princeton teacher with a lengthy history with The New Yorker.

**10. Moira Allen, Writing to Win: the Colossal Guide to Writing Contests. Vinegar Hill Press, 2012.** Comprehensive guide to fiction, non-fiction, poetry contests worldwide (in English), with, most importantly, the websites so you can check the current status of the competition. This book is invaluable if you want to put your work out there: novels, short stories, memoirs, poetry...it has everything. Be prepared to hear nothing back from your submissions, but always be open to surprises!

**11. Nancy Sakaduski, How to Write Winning Short Stories. Amazon, 2015.** This is as close to a writing manual as I can offer. I ordered a copy for the NOTL library some time ago. It's not gimmicky at all, quite liberal with the "rules" of writing, and very useful for the writer who wants to know the main pitfalls in writing as well as the objectives and techniques.

**12. Anne Lamott,** **Bird by Bird**. A beautiful read, this book is full of wisdom and joy. Worth reading even if one is not an author.  My absolute favourite.

**13. Ursula K. Le** **Guin,** **Steering the Craft**. Contains many prompts and exercises, and as you would expect from this author, beautifully written.

**14.** **Zoe Fairbairns,** **Write Short Stories** **and get them published**. Excellent content but she expects you to work. There are many opportunities and prompts to write your stories.

**15. Robert Olen Butler,** **From Where You Dream**. Very different, thought-provoking. A series of lectures transcribed by adoring students of a prof who would not put his advice to paper.

**16. Douglas Glover, Attack of the Copula Spiders.** The first essay on writing short stories is worth the price of the book

**17. John Gardner, The Art of Fiction.**

**18. Francine Prose, Reading Like a Writer.**

**19. Renni Browne and Dave King, Self-Editing for Fiction Writers.**

**20. Joseph M. Williams, Style - Toward Clarity and Grace.**

**21. William Strunk Jr and E.B. White, The Elements of Style.** You probably used this one in school, but it’s still a classic.

These links from The Guardian are an invaluable source of tips.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/feb/20/ten-rules-for-writing-fiction-part-one>

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/feb/20/10-rules-for-writing-fiction-part-two>