

## Top Writing Tips

### Desmond Kon Zhicheng-Mingdé inspires writers with his top tips...

1. Be open to experimentation. Dabbling in other writing genres helps you understand structure in unexpected ways. I've discovered new ways of entering a poem by attempting a dramatic monologue, automatic writing, speculative fiction. Even a specific exercise like fleshing out a flat character in a novella, then rewriting it in heroic couplets.
2. Tap into border crossings. I love to write about liminality, of what it feels like to be between places, whether it's geographic, temporal, psychological, ritualistic, or metaphysical. Transitions allow for great drama and reflection. It could be moving into a new apartment, a sabbatical from work, the death of a relationship, being a first-time parent. There's a deep well of energy in such border crossings. Explore it. Use it.
3. Don't worry over whether you have a discipline. Some writers pen a line or a page everyday. Some write in bursts of fire, and complete a book manuscript in two rigorous weeks. You should simply be self-aware of your productive moments, and attend to them. Do you write better before noon? Do you need a quiet room or some background noise? Does a particular type of music help? Think Kerouac as the jazz poet in *Mexico City Blues*. Do you need to get away, to put the final polish on your manuscript?
4. Check out literary journals. This helps you keep up with contemporary writing, from both established and emerging writers. There's absolutely breathtaking work being made out there, writing that goes beyond the Chaucer and Shelley and Yeats that we're accustomed to reading in literature classes. Some of my favorite journals include *Agni*, *Chicago Review*, *Fence*, *Gulf Coast*, *Tin House*, and *Virginia Quarterly Review*.
5. If you're serious about writing as a profession, it would be good to find a community of writers. It could be a book club or a workshop group. It's always helpful to subject your writing to scrutiny, to see what your potential reader has to say about it.
6. Attempting to get published can be a punishing affair. Many writers feel undermined by the onslaught of impersonal rejections, which is common in the trade. You have to learn to take care of the self as author even as you weather this process. Julia Cameron has a lovely prompt for this. Believing the "best antidote to the fame drug is a healthy dose of self-worth", she asks writers to spend half an hour making a list of 50 things for which they value themselves.

7. I think the most useful advice for writers is to just keep writing. It's been said countless times, but bears repeating. I like these lines from Samuel Beckett's *Malone Dies*. Beckett wrote this: "I have tried to reflect on the beginning of my story. There are things I do not understand. But nothing to signify. I can go on." This is important for the writer. We need to keep writing even if we don't know where we're going, where the writing is leading us. We need to retain that honest sense of wonder.