

Top Writing Tips

Ten Writing Tips: Tried and Tested by Verena Tay

The Preparation

1. Scratch that itch.

Respect the desire to write down that burning impulse/image/idea, lest you go crazy not having scratched the itch.

2. Start from what you know or have experienced.

Invest your personal insight within your work. Then the text will resonate with your audience because they will sense the lived truth behind your words.

3. Incubate.

Take time to reflect, research, discuss, draft and test out your ideas before actually writing, if your work is to have depth and breadth.

4. Observe the world.

Listen. Look. Read. A lot. Only then will you have tons of material to choose from, distill and craft into usable text.

5. Keep two journals.

Note down your ideas, observations and research in one book. In the second, do four pages of free writing per day (as recommended by writing/creativity gurus, Julia Cameron and Natalie Goldberg). Free writing is writing whatever comes into your head in a non-judgemental way. This daily exercise allows you to practise writing (however raw) and to process your thoughts.

The Writing

6. Be a Chinese ink painter.

Make each stroke on the paper/screen count. Evoke and grab your audience's attention. Hence, be minimalistic: use direct tenses, cut adjectives/adverbs, craft dialogue, shorten sentences, etc.

7. Cut to the chase.

Go straight to the action. Don't get lost in setting up your back story/exposition. Show, don't tell. Always move the plot forward.

8. Exploit each character/action/setting/image to the utmost.

Limit your character/actions/settings/images. Instead, explore the potential of each element as deeply as possible. Your audience will appreciate your magnifying focus on a chosen few details.

9. Beware of repetitive words/phrasings.

Break out of your habitual thought patterns that make you repeat words/phrases unconsciously (e.g. I used to use "but" a lot). Be more inspired when expressing your thoughts. Use repetition consciously only to create a desired effect.

10. Rewrite. Rework. Revise.

Remember that writing is a craft. After completing a draft, leave the text alone and then return to it sometime later. You are bound to find stuff that you can improve.