



*HowMaster explains with published examples exactly how effective writing happens.*

## **HOWMASTER: THE WRITER'S GUIDE TO BEAUTIFUL WORD CRAFTING - Revised Edition**

by Linda M. Gigliotti

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R E V I S E D   E D I T I O N

# HowMaster:

The Writer's Guide  
to Beautiful Word Crafting

How Effective Writing  
Happens

**Linda M. Gigliotti**

*"Linda Gigliotti has created a guide for those who want to write and want to write well and want to keep writing. Filled with tips, ideas, suggestions and easy-to-take lessons, HowMaster can help even the most reluctant writer put pen to page or get fingers dancing on the keyboard. And it's all done with good humor and the kind of understanding only someone who's been there can give."*

— **Judy Reeves**, author of *A Writer's Book of Days*  
and *Wild Women, Wild Voices*

REVISED EDITION

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## **DEDICATION**

To those who have that burning itch to pour their souls onto the page. May our flaming pens blaze forever.





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## INTRODUCTION

Ideas and in depth analyses were natural to me as a kid whose constant how come and but why frustrated her grownups. It didn't help that teachers tattled to them with report card comments regarding wild imagination and gave ordinance that Linda should settle down. As if that wasn't enough to rattle my family they didn't know what to make of my knack for imitating every one of them. Accents. Mannerisms. Favored gestures. None of us knew that ability to emulate personal attributes is integral to a writer. Priming begins early. We only have to nurture the seed.

That started at the age of 12 with a first novel committed upon a batch of orange edged paper ends stapled together. The tale no longer comes to mind except that it included a nurse, a police officer, and a bad guy. For some reason every time the word *Sergeant* was written there had to be three stripes beside it. When asked what she thought my mother replied, "It's good but you start out with a story and end with a play," to which this budding author responded by stomping out in the usual prepubescent huff. Writing like any job requires training and practicum because nobody just grabs paper and pen and in four hours writes the Great North American novel and then best-sells it. Nobody. It takes patience, persistence, practice, and supportive souls telling us truths we don't wanna hear and sorely need to.

A writer's desire is to make words sing inasmuch as it isn't as simple as staying on key. There's a lot of inner work that

precedes that kind of music and while it's important to observe the behaviors of others that doesn't stand alone. In order to make characterization work we have to know and understand the emotional chemistry that drives an individual to do as they do. We have to recognize, understand, and translate our own behaviors before we can inject life into our characters. It's about getting visceral and the best place to do that is in the writer's staple, the notebook. Its entries and prompted writings can be a storehouse of ideas that could find their way into stories, articles, novels, and books.

There are innumerable books and articles whose purpose is to discuss the various types of articles and fiction as well as the specifics of formatting and polishing a work. *HowMaster* aims to show how effective writing happens in order to get there.

# ONE

## Set Yourself up to Write

### Tools and Other Accoutrements

Many writing sessions begin with the lighting of a candle to sign the silence. Habituated to think out loud the strike of match to wick keeps us quiet for an entire hour. Had our parents only known. The flame reflects on the stones and their call summons our writing spirit.

Stones? Yes. The humble rock resonates with firsthand knowledge of the ages. It holds the sounds of creatures, wars, airplanes, and water. It understands the cry of hawk and screech of train, voice of the ages and the whispers of God. And it finds intimacy with the whistle of wind and the wild thunder of horse and buffalo no less the buzz of bee and the sigh of opening blossom. Stones are patient. Their humble presence vibrates strength and endurance.

Plants are another blessing as they provide visual fodder and bring steady joy to a room. Imagine looking up from the page to see the light and dark leaves of nephthytis sprawl over the deep tone of peace lily and the greens and reds of prayer plant. They radiate stillness while they thrum with life. Those low light plants are happy even in darker corners of a writing space.

The scent of oranges is said to stimulate creativity and while that claim isn't written in one of those stones the zing can lift the spirits. Deep in winter more serious fragrances such as vanilla are in order while in warm seasons or during a cooling

rain an open window lets in the boggle of earthy greens. Music too is beneficial as you write unless it drives you to put down the pen and dance around the desk. Whatever means of receiving sensory information is best for you is best for you as you write.

It's like this: with timeworn wiles of love we set up a romantic dinner in a quiet corner. We create a hearts and flowers mood with candlelight, good red wine in crystal glasses, and soft music. We make sure there will be no interruptions. Writing works the same way except we leave the wine for later and entertain the writing spirit rather than a human love interest. That spirit or muse if you will is honored with ceremony while the candle holds a constant torch and the stones in the tray around it whisper ancient secrets. The place setting holds for the writer not plate and fork but notebook and pen.

What we write with is significant. As much as those big fat juicy fountain pens with the thick blue ink are fun they make themselves felt. That awareness makes it awkward to become one with the writing. Sigh. A long thin pen with the cap off works best although unfettered it wants to race and leave words the eyes have to squint to read.

Paper is not all equal. Cheap notebook pages curl under hands in the heat and humidity of summer and soak up ink which in turn smears and blots all over you and everything you touch. If you can rip the page with no effort it's too weak to write on. Poor quality is however fine in those cheap little hard cover notebooks that prop well on the desk while you copy handwritten notes into the computer. A bonus is that paper is so awful we don't have to feel guilty for shredding it when you're done. Quality paper is tough and resists tearing unless you really rend on it. That's the best kind for journaling, prompts writing, and other notes that beg to be saved for later manuscript inclusions.

A note about notes is that confusion and reluctance to work can happen when you jot those on bits of paper at random to add to the manuscript. Those tend to be set aside until later



whenever that is and then you might not know where they fit. It's best to work a manuscript in order. Sentence by sentence. Page by page. Getting lost is masochism.

### **The Scribe in Practice**

After we set up we're all ready to jump into the page and play. We'll do this every morning at this same time and for so many hours. Yes. Not. Funny thing about the brain is when we try to set a new pattern it gets its dander up. It wants to work the way it always has. Happily life gets in the way of regimentation or we'd give up after a week. If you love your writing you won't boss it around any more than you'd tell your weights they have a week to form your body into that set of muscles on the fitness site. It works to have order but not in a rigid way since that invokes rebellion instead of writing spirit. Once there's a sense of flexible order the brain nudges us to get out the writing paraphernalia. It doesn't seem to care that you got up yesterday at 5:00 and today at 6:45. The brain knows by rote the next item on the agenda just like it knows when to stop pouring coffee even when you look away. Habit is shaped deep inside even while we're not paying attention.

You'd think after all the preamble that you could sit with notebook and the pen will rip across the page. That's the least it could do for goodness sake. Not quite however. Right away your brain gets excited and thinks it knows everything. Entity unto itself it wants to take over and think the story onto the page instead of exploring its invitations. It's like painting a wall or paving a driveway and not knowing what little cracks and holes hide in the surface until you get up close. Let the story inform you as you discover it. You know how people talk. They start to tell a story and it reminds them of another one so off they go. Next thing we know they forget the beginning because the interruption led to a new track. We do that with writing too when we put pen to paper and let it run ahead of us. The writing spirit gets oiled so we can accept its gift easier. Art projects

turned up in my notebook that way as well as the answer to a decorating scheme along with ideas to add to writing works.

While you write your notes or your first draft don't worry about English rules. Yes we have to utilize those rigid little annoyances but for now the story has to get on the page. If you write they instead of those or we instead of us just leave it as is for now. Don't stop to edit. That's ordinance from the left brain hemisphere which serves you later when you edit. For now swim with the creative flow of the right hemisphere.

### **Nurture the Flow**

There are times when nothing happens no matter what you scribble onto the page. We want to pull out hair while looking with fondness at the delete key. We threaten to throw the computer off the balcony. Stop. Put the writing away and provide some fuel for the muse. Like us it can be bored with same old and want change.

Writing runs on creative fire fuelled by other forms of art such as the drawings my friend Trish, artist, photographer, writer, and crafter, inspired and encouraged me to do. My inner kid has a blast because for a change it doesn't have to color inside someone else's lines. Creativity is after all about making our own thing.

Doing our own thing is necessary as Julia Cameron of *The Artist's Way* advises us to set up solo artist dates. Restlessness is after all a sign that our senses crave stimulation. We need those expeditions as well as others that take us out of our usual writing place.

A weird thing happens when you and your notebook go out in nature. Your writing changes. That's because fresh air and verdure work your soul and you feel at one with the thrum of life. During my camping trips when I knew about the bears but not the cougars my watch would slow. So did the pulse it sat on. The outdoors is where you train yourself to observe with all your senses. Inhale and the fragrance of rotting leaves and

undergrowth will smack you right in the olfactory nerve center. Listen to the chirps and calls all around you. Those aren't all bird sounds. Identify them so you'll know for your writing the difference between a robin and a woodpecker. Your feet feel the difference on a surface that isn't asphalt or cement. And for your eyes are layers and layers of green beyond which is black where the sun doesn't reach. Let your imagination run wild as the forest and consider what goes on deep in the woods when the sky is dark except for a cut of moon. Taste natural air mingled with the tang of willow and field flowers under hot sun. Take it in with all your senses and your writing spirit soars to the tallest poplar and swoops to the hills before it returns invigorated. If you're like me and imagine four footed fur bearing claws and fangs at every turn of forest path there's hope. Community parks and your own back yard have the same writing pull when you be still and notice. Even a city apartment balcony laden with urns of blossoms has magic if you sit there at dawn or after dark.

### **Eating Places are Food for the Writing Spirit**

Morning brew at home or in a coffee shop is fun to write over. There's nothing at least in our house that could rival that humble first coffee of the day. Savor the first sip as it enflames the entire being and makes a person want to dance around the coffee maker and sing its wonders. Note which part of your morning beverage grabs you the most, the taste, the heat, or the way it strokes your tonsils when you swallow. Pay attention. Your characters like their daily first fuel too.

Coffee shops and restaurants are great. Chatter of customers and clatter of dishes are not directed to you so they go to the background. The writing spirit likes that and wants to make your pen move. If you get acquainted with management and explain what you're doing you may even be that writer they expect every Tuesday at 2 PM. They won't appreciate it if you bring your candle though.

They had candles, music, and atmosphere at the Greek place we visited for dinner. For some reason nobody will explain they and most other dining establishments like to plant their patrons atop one another. No respectful space is afforded so I learned to direct the host to a table away from people trying to have a bit of privacy. That time however diners came in after me so I couldn't very well move. That's as rude as the man was. The woman was gussied with great care and you'd think he could at least keep his eyes on her but no he had to yap into his cell throughout the entire meal. Odds are he did not taste what he ate. He ignored his companion as if she wasn't there while her face went from irritation to murderous intent. A couple of characters in a novel could burn a page with such an episode. Or be written into an article about relational near death experiences.

Another visit this time to a pizza place saw a little kid go to each table and grab the tips while his parents, apparently coaching him, enjoyed their food. The young servers were in the back having fun instead of attending customers so I didn't feel too sorry for them although I did clue one in as my tip went directly into their hand. That type of parent could be featured in an article about teaching children how to get a police record before they reach puberty.

## **Go Mobile**

Wait is a four letter word we're forced to experience daily. Especially those of us who don't do it well. Bus trips were a source of aggravation until I decided to bring my soother, the one with the lined paper. While time seems to go faster when the mind is occupied there should be a way to keep pen on paper when the ride gets erratic. Sometimes a trip gets a tad nerve bending like it did that time a tiny car cut in front of a Greyhound in fog blinded mountains. Our driver, I know because one eye was on my notebook and the other on him, practically walked the bus along with the exactitude of a neurosurgeon. Eye opening and out of place in this era the

women stopped chatting while the men talked back and forth as if they'd known one another for years. Fear stayed at low level under that steady rumble of amiable conversation in the ancient ritual of woman takes back seat while man brings calm. We'll get through this, the cadence of their voices said. The driver knows what he's doing.

My written record disappeared with the notebook when I went into a tidy up frenzy but the event lives in my mind 20 years later. There's another thing about that trip. Just like the letter carrier delivers despite snow and sleet and hail the scribe writes through fog, fear, and insane drivers who dare buses.

### **Cherish the Writing Life**

You're a writer. Remind yourself of that. Have a notebook every place in the house where you spend time. My work bench sometimes used as the dining table has at least one notebook on it. Coffee and bedside tables always have room for notebook and pen. Writing books are on the shelf where their cuddly write vibes call as I walk by.

The idea is to honor and nurture the writing spirit. Treat it as you would a cherished visitor. Take it places and proffer new experiences. Offer candles and music. Dance backwards around the living room and see what the spirit does with that. Turn your day and your life upside down to accommodate it. Be available when it comes by. Love it. It's yours. Draw its picture and hang it over your work space. Ignore it and it might go away.

## **Notebook Corner**

- Describe in your notebook the writing space of your dreams. Include plants with their names and colors. Write what you'd like to see beyond the window. Decide what would hang on the wall, perhaps one of your own creations. Detail the colors and fabrics you prefer to have around you.
- Tell notebook where else you want to take it. A park bench perhaps or that nice coffee shop you discovered on a walk last week or even the town next door.
- Write a list of places you plan to visit for an artistic afternoon. Leave a page or two blank and ongoing so you can add ideas.
- Enter other forms of creative endeavor you think you'll enjoy.



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