



# WRITING TIPS

On pages 9 and 10 of his book *Bagombo Snuff Box: Uncollected Short Fiction*, Kurt Vonnegut listed eight rules for writing:

1. Use the time of a total stranger in such a way that he or she will not feel the time was wasted.
2. Give the reader at least one character he or she can root for.
3. Every character should want something, even if it is only a glass of water.
4. Every sentence must do one of two things — reveal character or advance the action.
5. Start as close to the end as possible.
6. Be a sadist. No matter how sweet and innocent your leading characters, make awful things happen to them — in order that the reader may see what they are made of.
7. Write to please just one person. If you open a window and make love to the world, so to speak, your story will get pneumonia.
8. Give your readers as much information as possible as soon as possible. To hell with suspense. Readers should have such complete understanding of what is going on, where and why, that they could finish the story themselves, should cockroaches eat the last few pages.

## To those I would add:

9. Use active voice. Passive voice weakens your prose.
10. Omit needless words. If you want to soapbox or go off on tangents, do it in your blog rather than in your stories.
11. Write with nouns and verbs. Adverbs are the crutch of the timid writer.
12. Avoid clichés.
13. Emulate the style of your favorite authors. They are successful for a reason. Your own writer's voice will develop over time as you continue to read and write.
14. Discipline and time management are key. If you only wrote one page a day, you could produce a novel each year.
15. Give yourself permission to fail. If garbage is all you're producing at first, don't worry—that's what erasers and delete keys are for. The important thing is that you're writing.
16. Read! Read! Read!
17. Write! Write! Write!

### Essential reading:

*The Elements of Style*  
by William Strunk, Jr.  
and E.B. White  
(Fourth Edition)

### Recommending Reading:

*On Writing:  
A Memoir of the Craft*  
by Stephen King

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