

SUE MACY

10 TIPS FOR YOUNG WRITERS

- ① **Practice!** It's the first and most important tip for any aspiring writer. Write letters. Write for your school paper. Keep a journal and write in it as often as you can. The more you write, the more expressive and compelling your work will be.
- ② **Read.** Good writers read—books, magazine articles, anything that will help them develop a critical eye. Read your favorite authors and notice the things that make their writing vivid and exciting.
- ③ **Be honest.** Let your interests and enthusiasm come through in your writing. I'm a fan of women's sports, and that's pretty clear when I write about the topic. Readers appreciate knowing that. It makes my work more believable because they understand where I'm coming from.
- ④ **Write about things you know.** Good writing grows out of a writer's own experiences. If you live in Akron, set your story in Ohio, or Indiana, or Pennsylvania. Don't use all of your energy trying to write a short story about a kid in Tibet. You can write about Tibet later, after you've visited there, or at least read a whole lot about it.
- ⑤ **Use exciting language to make your writing sing.** Employ a variety of active verbs and descriptive adjectives. Consult a dictionary or a thesaurus if you need one. The thesaurus on your word processing program is a great tool.
- ⑥ **Don't start paragraphs with THE.** A teacher once told me this years ago, and I've tried to follow her advice. It's not a hard and fast rule of writing, but there's no denying that the word THE is boring. Seeing it at the beginning of a paragraph is a letdown. It's even worse at the beginning of an article or a chapter.
- ⑦ **Check your facts.** Everybody makes mistakes. I once called Harry Truman the 28th President of the United States. He was the 33rd, as my brother pointed out when he saw the error in print. (Woodrow Wilson was the 28th.) Those kinds of mistakes can seriously undermine a writer's credibility. So check your facts, or have someone like my brother double-check them!
- ⑧ **Don't be satisfied with your first draft.** Writing takes time and attention to detail. After you finish your first draft, put it aside for a few days. When you go back to it, you might find passages that don't work as well as you thought they did.
- ⑨ **Ask for constructive criticism.** Show your work to someone else, and consider all of his or her comments carefully. Sometimes others can see flaws that you missed.
- ⑩ **Make sure your finished work has correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar.** Nothing undermines good writing like sloppiness. Oops, I mean sloppiness.