

Stephen King on Writing

Tips

Easy books contain short paragraphs
plenty of white space
paragraphs are "maps of intent"

The paragraph (not the sentence) is the basic unit of writing
the place where words have the chance to become more than mere words
must learn how to use it to write well

Fragments p150

can streamline narration
do not overuse

To be a writer you must
read a lot

if you don't have time to read, you don't have time to write
write a lot

For starting writers

close the door
close the curtains
avoid distractions
no phones

when you write you want to get rid of the world
what you (the writer) knows makes you unique
be brave. Map the enemy's positions, come back, tell us all you know

I put the characters into a predicament

then watch what happens and write it down
I want the characters to do things their way
the situation comes first, the characters come second

"Back Story"

everyone has a history
most of it is not interesting
stick to the parts that are

Research

don't get carried away
readers are more interested in your characters and your story
this is back story too

Pace

each story should be allowed to unfold at its own pace
too fast and you may lose the reader
too slow and they grow restive
can speed the pace by cutting the boring parts
"kill your darlings"

formula for length

"2nd draft = first draft -10%"

"Every story and novel is collapsible to some degree"

Use

use anything that improves the quality of your writing and doesn't get in the way of the story
Use symbolism if appropriate p236

King's Beliefs

Good writing is often about letting go of fear and affectation

defining some sorts of writing as "good" and others as "bad" is fearful behaviour

"The object of fiction is not grammatical correctness but to make the reader welcome, then tell a story. . to make him/her forget he/she is reading a story at all."

Writing is seduction

Answers to "what are the keys to your success?"

good health - he stays fit

stable relationship

When you are writing you are creating your own worlds
writing is "creative sleep"

A good story

pulls them in

keeps them turning the pages

this happens when the reader recognises the people in the book, their behaviour, their surroundings and their talk

when a reader hears strong echoes of his or her life and beliefs

they invest in the story

people love to read about work

use what you know to enrich the story

the job of the writer is to give the story a place to grow

honesty in story telling makes up for a lot of stylistic faults

if you begin to lie about what you know and what you feel, everything falls down

"I think the writer and the reader are participating in a kind of miracle"

The first draft of a book, even a long one, should not take more than 3 months

King wrote "running man" in 2 weeks

his goal; 2000 words a day, 180,000 words in 3 months

only under "dire" circumstances does he do less

start with a goal of 1000 words

set a "concrete" goal

"I believe stories are found things"

Stories are relics, part of an undiscovered pre-existing world

the writer's job is to use his tool box to get as much of the relic out of the ground intact as possible

whether the story is small or large, the method of excavation is the same

"Writing fiction is no job for intellectual cowards"

"I believe every novelist has a single ideal reader; . . .

that at various points during the composition of a story the writing is thinking, 'I wonder what he/she would think of this?'

"I believe each story should be allowed to unfold at its own pace"

Building characters in fiction

again, honesty as per dialogue

the characters grow through the story

if they grow a lot they influence the course of the story

a character, no matter how psychopathic seems to themselves, perfectly sane

make sure the characters behave in a way that helps the story and seems reasonable

let the characters come to life and "do stuff on their own"

Novels consist of 3 parts

Narration

moves the story from point A to B and finally to point Z

do not plot

action

description

creates a sensory reality for the reader

description is not just a question of "how to" but "how much to"

reading helps the "how much to"

only writing can help the "how to"

visualise what you want the read to experience

translate what you see in your mind into words on the page

cause the reader to prickle with recognition

must not be too thin, or too thick

it's important to know what do describe and what can be left alone

description begins with the writer's imagination and ends with the reader's

description begins with clear seeing and ends with clear writing
using fresh images
using clear vocabulary
locale and texture are more important to the reader's sense of actually being in the story than any physical description of the players
good description is just a few well chosen details
usually the first ones that come to mind
use good similes

dialogue

bring the characters to life through their speech
is crucial in defining characters
often what people say conveys more of their character than they realise p211
dialogue is a skill learned by people who enjoy talking and (particularly) listening to others
the key to good dialogue is honesty
doing this you will leave yourself open to criticism
If the character would say "shit" then say it!
let each character speak freely

2 Drafts

First

door shut
download
write as fast as I can
outrun any self-doubt
"I put down the story as it comes into my mind"
written with no help from anyone else
with first draft complete you can show it to other people
on the condition they don't talk to you about it until you are ready to talk to them
take a couple of days off
allow the book to "rest" for at least 6 weeks
however tempted, do not return to it
re-read the entire manuscript noting errors and inconsistencies
there may be big holes!
ask
is the story coherent?
what will turn coherence into a song?
what are the recurring elements?
do they entwine and make a theme?
the outcome
the outcome it to create resonance
something that will ring for a little while in "Constant Reader's" mind after they have closed the book
"I am looking for what I meant"

See also: [add scenes and incidents that reinforce that meaning](#)

Second

door open
add scenes and incidents that reinforce that meaning
"there's apt to be a lot of stuff, especially at the beginning"

Get Feedback

"I send the manuscripts to between 4 and 8 people who have critique my work over the years"

Your writer's toolbox

Vocabulary

use appropriate
genre
You
don't use long word because you are afraid to look dumb if you use short ones

Top shelf of toolbox
Grammar
noun verb
verbs
 active
 subject is doing something
 "The meeting's at 7 o'clock"
 passive
 subject is having something done to them
 avoid this
 "The meeting will be held at 7 o'clock"
p 134
Avoid adverbs
 "He closed the door firmly"
 "He slammed the door"
 The road to hell is paved with adverbs!

Closing Statement of the book

Writing isn't about making money, getting famous, getting dates, getting laid would, or making friends. In the end, it's about enriching the lives of those who will read your work, and enriching your own life, as well. It's about getting up, getting well, and getting over. Getting happy, okay? Getting happy. Some of this book -- perhaps too much -- has been about how I learned to do it. Much of it has been about how you can do it better. The rest of it -- and perhaps the best of it -- is a permission slip: you can, you should, and if you're brave enough to start, you will. Writing is magic, as much the water of life as any other creative art. The water is free. So drink. Drink and be filled up.