

The CRAZY NAKED TRUTH cheat sheet for Writing with All Your Heart

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In her book *If You Want to Write*, Brenda Ueland says: “Everybody is talented, original and has something important to say”. She goes on to explain: “Everybody is original, if she tells the truth, if she speaks from herself. But it must be from her true self and not from the self she thinks she should be.”

I've discovered the 'rules' of life are a lot like the guideposts for writing (and vice versa). At least the guideposts I use.

Perhaps you want to write your hurt, heal your wounds through writing or tell your story. Go for it. But I also say write for the sheer pleasure of it – not necessarily to purge your demons. Trust me – that will happen anyway. Perhaps you have no interest in writing at all – well, of course that's okay too. But some of these stand-by suggestions may work for just plain being in the world.

Over the years of writing both for 'my eyes only' in the form of journaling and for the public in the form of plays and articles, I have begun to see I follow (somewhat haphazardly) a core stem of 'rules' when it comes to putting pen to paper or as the case may have it fingers to keys.

Take what you like and crumble up the rest (that's actually a good rule to follow too):

The CRAZY NAKED TRUTH Rules of Writing Practice:

1. Don't compare. If you are writing in a group, don't worry if others are writing more or less, faster or slower than you. If you are writing alone, don't set your words against those of authors you are reading. What matters is you are writing. Remember: writing is an act of courage.
2. Always give yourself credit when credit is due. If you wrote for five minutes and before you couldn't or wouldn't even grab a pen – congratulate yourself. May seem small, but the toughest barriers are often the ones we can't see.
3. Keep your eyes on the paper, but don't forget to breathe. Focus on the page. Pausing for extended amounts of time is usually your inner critic's sneaky way to gain control. Do like Nike. Just do it.
4. Be specific. If Uncle Joe drove a car...was it a red Buick or a silver Miata? If you ate dinner, did you have Bavarian smokies with broad beans or your mom's recipe for her chili con carne?
5. If you don't know or feel stuck...don't worry: make it up and make it specific.

6. Write from your fire. Write about what makes you mad, happy, excited, gleeful, playful, silly, sad, randy...you get the idea - anything that feels like something other than flatness. And if you only feel flatness (as the case may be when in the turmoil of depression) write about that.
7. If writing feels bad – stop. If you find yourself overwhelmed with negative feelings or vibrating with anxiety – stop. Writing is not meant to be a punishment. It's meant to be a liberator. It can be hard – but when starting out – let it be easy and gentle and kind. You want to want to go back to it.
8. Give yourself permission to fail and succeed. Both are important to good writing. As in life.

Natalie Goldberg's (*Writing Down the Bones*) Rules of Timed Writing Practice:

1. Keep Your Hand Moving. (Don't pause to reread the line you have just written. That's stalling and trying to get control of what you're saying.)
2. Don't cross out. (That is editing as you write. Even if you write something you didn't mean to write, leave it.)
3. Don't worry about spelling, punctuation, grammar. (Don't even care about staying within the margins and lines on the page.)
4. Lose control.
5. Don't think. Don't get logical.
6. Go for the jugular. (If something comes up in your writing that is scary or naked, dive right into it. It probably has lots of energy.)

Final Thoughts:

When you start to write throw open the doors, offer yourself to the world and let your hand and pen and the paper take you. You are larger than you could ever imagine. Your stories are important. Your voice is needed. Who you are is already enough. Your writing doesn't have to be grand or lavish, just something that is important to you. That is originality.

“Be yourself – it's a hard act to follow” – Anonymous



ABOUT ME

I'm a speaker, mental health educator, playwright & actor, but more than anything I'm a CHEERLEADER. I love helping people embrace all parts of themselves: the bland, the messy, the beautiful. www.victoriamaxwell.com