**1. First write for yourself, and then worry about the audience.** “When you write a story, you’re telling yourself the story. When you rewrite, your main job is taking out all the things that are*not* the story.”

**2. Don’t use passive voice.** “Timid writers like passive verbs for the same reason that timid lovers like passive partners. The passive voice is safe.”

**3. Avoid adverbs.** “The adverb is not your friend.”

**4. Avoid adverbs, especially after “he said” and “she said.”**

**5. But don’t obsess over perfect grammar.** “The object of fiction isn’t grammatical correctness but to make the reader welcome and then tell a story.”

**6. The magic is in you.** “I’m convinced that fear is at the root of most bad writing.”

**7. Read, read, read.** ”If you don’t have time to read, you don’t have the time (or the tools) to write.”

**8. Don’t worry about making other people happy.** “If you intend to write as truthfully as you can, your days as a member of polite society are numbered, anyway.”

**9. Turn off the TV.** “TV—while working out or anywhere else—really is about the last thing an aspiring writer needs.”

**10. You have three months.** “The first draft of a book—even a long one—should take no more than three months, the length of a season.”

**11. There are two secrets to success.** “I stayed physical healthy, and I stayed married.”

**12. Write one word at a time.** “Whether it’s a vignette of a single page or an epic trilogy like ‘The Lord of the Rings,’ the work is always accomplished one word at a time.”

**13. Eliminate distraction.** “There’s should be no telephone in your writing room, certainly no TV or videogames for you to fool around with.”

**14. Stick to your own style.** “One cannot imitate a writer’s approach to a particular genre, no matter how simple what that writer is doing may seem.”

**15. Dig.** “Stories are relics, part of an undiscovered pre-existing world. The writer’s job is to use the tools in his or her toolbox to get as much of each one out of the ground intact as possible.”

**16. Take a break.** “You’ll find reading your book over after a six-week layoff to be a strange, often exhilarating experience.”

**17. Leave out the boring parts and kill your darlings.** “(kill your darlings, kill your darlings, even when it breaks your egocentric little scribbler’s heart, kill your darlings.)”

**18. The research shouldn’t overshadow the story.**“Remember that word *back*. That’s where the research belongs: as far in the background and the back story as you can get it.”

**19. You become a writer simply by reading and writing.**“You learn best by reading a lot and writing a lot, and the most valuable lessons of all are the ones you teach yourself.”

**1. Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.**

This sounds easy, but in practice is incredibly difficult. Phrases such as toe the line, ride roughshod over, stand shoulder to shoulder with, play into the hands of, an axe to grind, Achilles’ heel, swan song, and hotbed come to mind quickly and feel comforting and melodic.

For this exact reason they must be avoided. Common phrases have become so comfortable that they create no emotional response. Take the time to invent fresh, powerful images.

**2. Never use a long word where a short one will do.**

Long words don’t make you sound intelligent unless used skillfully. In the wrong situation they’ll have the opposite effect, making you sound pretentious and arrogant. They’re also less likely to be understood and more awkward to read.

When [Hemingway](http://www.ernest.hemingway.com/) was criticized by [Faulkner](http://www.mcsr.olemiss.edu/~egjbp/faulkner/faulkner.html) for his limited word choice he replied:

Poor Faulkner. Does he really think big emotions come from big words? He thinks I don’t know the ten-dollar words. I know them all right. But there are older and simpler and better words, and those are the ones I use.

**3. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.**

Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree ([Ezra Pound](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ezra_Pound)). Accordingly, any words that don’t contribute meaning to a passage dilute its power. Less is always better. Always.

**4. Never use the passive where you can use the active.**

This one is frequently broken, probably because many people don’t know the [difference between active and passive verbs](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_actpass.html). I didn’t myself until a few months ago. Here is an example that makes it easy to understand:

The man was bitten by the dog. (passive)The dog bit the man. (active).The active is better because it’s shorter and more forceful.

**5. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.**

This is tricky because much of the writing published on the internet is highly technical. If possible, remain accessible to the average reader. If your audience is highly specialized this is a judgment call. You don’t want to drag on with unnecessary explanation, but try to help people understand what you’re writing about. You want your ideas to spread right?

**6. Break any of these rules sooner than saying anything outright barbarous.**

This bonus rule is a catch all. Above all, be sure to use common sense.These rules are easy to memorize but difficult to apply. Although I’ve edited this piece a dozen times I’m sure it contains imperfections. But trust me, it’s much better now than it was initially. The key is effort. Good writing matters, probably more than you think.