

Sky Canyon's

## Top Ten Tips for Writers

Greetings friends and perhaps new friends:

There are a lot of advice books, e-books, articles, blogs and more for writers. If you're serious about your writing - whatever genre you're in - you may spend time perusing and learning from these sources.

Because I've been writing in one form or another for over 40 years, from non-fiction to business documents, marketing copy, screenplays, as well as editing in all of these genres, including novels, I decided to share my version of *Top Ten Tips for Writers*. Perhaps some of what I share below is similar to what you've seen already, or perhaps there might be a gem in here that is a new inspiration for you.

I've helped many authors with writing, editing, marketing and promotion – sometimes even complete re-writing. Some created a career, fame and fortune from our work together. I've advised CEOs and entrepreneurs on their marketing materials, business documents, capital raise presentations and more. I have a broad perspective on artistry and business and how they work together. It's a great feeling to help others realize their dreams; maybe we'll have a chance to further yours.

“I would advise anyone who aspires to a writing career that before developing his talent he would be wise to develop a thick hide.”

—Harper Lee

I like the above quote; it's true for every artist – whether you are a writer, musician, actor, painter or do any form of creative expression. The world is full of critics and every one of us encounters them if we're expressing our talent. The most important recognition is to stay true to your artistic expression and move forward.

### **Why listen to me:**

I was president and publisher at New World Library in the company's formative years, building it from a fledgling operation in an apartment closet to international distribution and licensing with bestselling books in self-improvement/self-help and other genres. I am a co-author of the company's first book. I developed our distribution, marketing and P.R., training the first publicist I hired; edited books, oversaw design, book titles and sub-titles, set up all of our book printing with printers across the USA, created our foreign licensing program, licensed mass market rights to New York publishers, and wore every hat one can wear in the early days of a venture.

As to my own creative pursuits: I am marketing my dramatic comedy feature screenplay. I'm also writing and recording jazz tunes; they are out on streaming media – Spotify, Apple, Prime, and everywhere else.

With that, I still love helping creative people grow their skills and careers.

While I provide expertise in multiple ways, I ALWAYS engage professional feedback and support for my own writing. I need other eyes on my creative process to see obvious issues that have become invisible to me after several re-writes. This is true for most writers – it's a bit of tunnel vision which can be rectified with a new, fresh view on your work. I encourage you to do this with your writing, even if it is – or at least you believe – quite good.

Great is the next step after “quite good.”

If any of my *Top Ten Tips* are helpful to you, let me know; your comments will help me refine these over time to help you and others have a great writing experience.

**Contact me here: [sky@skycanyonassociates.com](mailto:sky@skycanyonassociates.com)**

Let me know about your writing experience.

See more at: <http://www.skycanyonassociates.com/>

Meanwhile, enjoy, and savor this advice from Henry David Thoreau:

“Write while the heat is in you. ...The writer who postpones the recording of his thoughts uses an iron which has cooled to burn a hole with.”

## 1) Write what you know about? Maybe, but. . .

**BETTER:** Write what you're passionate about, write what you love, write what's exciting to you.

This is a lengthy tip because I'm going to share a personal story in the **EXAMPLE** below that exemplifies writing about something you know about and writing about something you are passionate about – and don't know how to do.

Sometimes you write just because you need to express something. It has nothing to do with turning it into something marketable – like a book, screenplay, course or other commercial project. You write because you are passionate about writing something. Always allow this to have expression. It may turn into something commercial. Or not. Let that be a discovery process.

“To gain your own voice, you have to forget about having it heard.”

– Allen Ginsberg, WD

What about when you have a specific goal in mind? Like writing a novel, or a self-help book or course, or a screenplay. And, you intend to have it sell and get noticed by perhaps a large number of people.

Great - you may already be writing about something you know about AND are passionate about. Keep going. That said, I've met a lot of people that write about something they know about, yet have no passion about it. Perhaps the topic is old news for them, they've “been there, done that,” and it just doesn't interest them anymore. Have you experienced this?

This is important, because it's going to be with you for a long time. If you're passionate about the topic, that will sustain you; if not, I might start to feel like a chore, like the tail wagging the dog.

Have you ever met someone who runs a business and has no passion for it? Or worse, they hate their business and feel dragged along by it? The message is: Love. Your. Topic.

Or, perhaps you know you want to write, and you haven't figured out what to write about.

If that's the case, then “write about something you know,” may be a great first step. You'll discover if you're passionate about it. Otherwise, you may be writing on a topic that feels “safe” – something you have learned in school, at a job, or in life, which is not to suggest that writing about life learning is either safe or easy. Rather, examine if your writing might just be regurgitating facts that you've accumulated. I've seen this happen a lot, and it's one of the reasons that there are a lot of books on certain topics that do nothing other than create clutter.

That said, it may be the perfect way for you to develop your writing skills, or perhaps get paid for writing about an area of expertise. You always want to determine the potential benefits of taking on your writing project. Not everyone is meant to write a best seller or the “Great American Novel” as their next project. Therefore, examine

your goals with your writing, start somewhere, and remind yourself to review – is what I'm doing taking me towards my goal?

*In addition, I encourage you take a risk:*

Forget about what you know for a moment, and reflect on what excites you. If they are the same, then you're on your way. If you've found something you love, and perhaps don't feel like an expert, or even knowledgeable, then *challenge yourself* to learn about it. Perhaps it is something you want to develop expertise in. You can jump in at any age; we've all seen articles about a 70- or 80-something individual starting a new career they are passionate about. Learning is a life-long experience. Great writers are always learning.

### ***What about passion with zero skills – what to do? My own personal experience:***

I've been writing and/or editing everything from business documents to marketing materials, novels to non-fiction and more for thirty years. Yet in 2011, a film idea I'd been sitting with for a long time became quite active in my attention, based on a true story. I had **zero** experience with screenplays; I didn't know the first thing about writing one, other than it seemed like speaking Greek while signing in Chinese (neither of which I have a clue about).

However, I was excited about the idea of this story becoming a movie. So I combined something I know about and was passionate about – the story – with my desire to turn it into a script (something I knew nothing about).

What followed was a *big learning curve*:

First, I wrote a narrative of the story – I wrote and wrote til I had everything down about the story that I could think of. It didn't read like a screenplay at all; rather, it was a collection of events in chronological sequence. Nothing fancy, just a lot of facts and details. Anyone can do this, nothing special about this part of the process.

*Next was "OK, now what?"*

I began to read articles and books about screenwriting and story development – I became a student of the art of screenwriting. At that point I was convinced that if I could just get the semblance of the story together in the form of a Treatment (more on that below), I would then find a screenwriter and sit by their side telling them what I wanted to have happen. Seemed like a reasonable plan. I had no intention of writing the script – again, this seemed WAY beyond my skillset.

However, with all this learning, I still didn't understand what kind of movie I was creating. Meaning, is this a drama, is it a comedy, is it adventure, or what? I was not clear on what the genre of this "movie" was, even though I knew the story.

"I don't need an alarm clock. My ideas wake me."—Ray Bradbury

Then one 4:00 am, in the midst of a head cold, I was up and restless, and jumped online. I started searching for more info on types of screenplays and found a great article on romantic comedies. I read the article and a light bulb went on – my story

made sense as a romantic comedy. All of a sudden I understood how to orient the story, and spent more time shaping the original “narrative” that I had written.

Shortly after that, I realized I needed more specific help, as this was based on a true story, and I wanted to understand what that involved in structuring the story. Again, in the middle of one night I went online and found an article about a script coach who had written a book about turning true story into screenplay. Just what I needed. I emailed her and after an initial call, hired her to coach me.

First thing she asked me to do was write three paragraphs – one for each Act of the story, in the classic Three Act format. I worked on it, version after version with her feedback, and ended up with a good overview of the story – in the form of a beginning, middle and end.

Next, she directed me to write a *treatment* – about 10 pages. A treatment is the story in detail, without the dialogue. It shows us, paragraph by paragraph, the scenes of the movie. When you read a good treatment, you know what the movie is, even though you’re not reading the dialogue. Now it was back and forth with my coach for feedback until I had a treatment that told the story.

Next, she asked me a question:

“Who’s going to write the screenplay?”

I reiterated my brilliant idea of sitting with a screenwriter, with the treatment, and telling him or her, blow-by-blow, what I had in mind for the characters, dialogue, etc. I was still in the headspace of “*I’m not a screenwriter,*” and therefore someone with skill was required for that important job.

She replied quite simply: “No, you need to write the script.”

Long pause, gulp, then, “Uhhh...what?”

“Yes,” she continued, “the story has to be infused with your vision, EVEN IF IT SUCKS.”

A pause, then I responded, “O...K...” I agreed to take on this new, insurmountable task.

*Now the heat was turned up.* I bought books on screenwriting; I attended online programs, I got screenwriting software, I continued with my coach; in essence, even though I have deep writing and editing skills, I had to make myself knowledgeable to enter this foreign territory called screenwriting, because it is NOTHING like other writing.

*I did it because I was passionate about this story and doing it right.*

I wrote the first draft of the script in about 30 days by taking the treatment, scene by scene, and turning it into action and dialogue. I turned it in to my coach.

Then came the feedback. It did suck; *but not all of it.*

Some of it had merit. I took her **red line** comments throughout the script to heart, and did revision #1. This went back and forth – multiple revisions – each time refining and developing characters, action, dialogue, story line and structure.

What's interesting about writing true story, more so if it is your own true story, is that it takes immense effort (IMHO) to remove oneself from the "facts" of the story so that the *truth* underlying the story – *what you want it to convey* – can come through. This occurred in layers for me. It may be the case for you if you're writing true story material in any format.



“But it happened that way!” Or, “that’s exactly what he said, really!” I was attached to the *facts*. Some of them were great and they worked, but I needed to learn to see the story in a greater context, so it would become engaging to a reader/viewer.

In screenwriting, it is: “Show me, don’t tell me.” Hmmm...as a writer, how often do you apply this awareness to your writing? Whether it is screenwriting, a novel or non-fiction? How do you make flat information come across in a visual or emotional way, to capture your reader? How much attention do you put on **ENGAGING** your reader? Give them something to respond to that engages their emotional buy-in.

Where have I come to with my screenwriting? For one, it’s given me valuable insights and tools to use with other writing that I do. I’ve developed my skills, co-wrote a second, well-polished screenplay that I’m marketing, and have provided feedback to other screenwriters (sometimes re-writing their material), which they find supportive. As I said, it’s never too late to learn new things and develop your skills.

### **Summarizing TIP #1:**

Write about what you are passionate about, whether or not you know how to do that. Let your passion drive everything else - your research, your skill development, your ideas for how to present – all the learning that will be required to turn an idea into something real. It’s no different than starting a business. You may have expertise at something, then there is the rest that comes into play along the way to realizing your dream.

**2) Become a *good* writer, even a GREAT writer – always strive to make it better.**

Always challenge yourself to make it better. Sloppy execution does not make up for a good concept. Likewise, great execution does not make up for a mediocre concept. Pay attention to the entire process. Key elements of writing:

- |                       |                |
|-----------------------|----------------|
| a. Great concept      | e. Punctuation |
| b. Sentence structure | f. Excitement  |
| c. Grammar            | g. Nuance      |
| d. Spelling           |                |

These are the basics. You **HAVE TO** learn these. From there, anything is possible.

Have you ever watched a movie and come away disappointed? What was it about the movie that didn't live up to the promise:

- The concept was weak?
- The writing was mediocre (or worse)?
- The acting was bad – it was like the actors were acting the part, rather than being the part?
- The ending fell flat?

It's not enough to have a great idea. It's the follow-through on all the elements that make it a winner for your audience.

*Here's an analogy:*

In addition to my writing and publishing background, I'm a jazz musician (and other genres as well). However, for me to learn to play jazz, I had to learn:

- Chords – major, minor, 7ths, 6ths, 9ths, diminished, augmented, etc. – this is your grammar
- Scales on those chords - spelling
- Rhythm (I was already a drummer – a big plus) - punctuation
- How chords go together for jazz, blues, rhythm changes, and more – this is your paragraph and sentence structure

Now, knowing all the above does not make one a good jazz player, any more than knowing the elements of writing makes one a good writer.

This is the technical stuff, the basics – the grammar, spelling, punctuation, paragraph and sentence structure.

*How you express it is the artistry, the excitement and nuance.*

Once you know the technical foundation, you can break the rules. Jazz improvisation is a great example of this: It's about knowing the foundation well enough to also know when a G# fits if it's not in the basic chord, and why, and how to use it in a juicy way.

When you write, you use your technical foundation as a springboard. Poets break the rules in spades. Sometimes you do things that are not structurally correct.

*But they work.*

*Like this and the prior sentence.* They communicate the nuances of the point you are illustrating.

When you read authors whose writing you love, ask yourself these questions:

- What do I love about it?
- Does it excite me?
- Does it make me feel a certain way?
- Does it trigger memories?
- Does it inspire me or turn on my imagination?
- What do they do that I can learn from and make my own?

*Examples:*

- If you write serious material, might you engage your readers by adding humor from time to time? Notice that many dramatic films have humor laced throughout to break the tension. It works.
- Do you tell stories and miss important facts?
- Are your explanations too verbose or technical that you lose your readers?

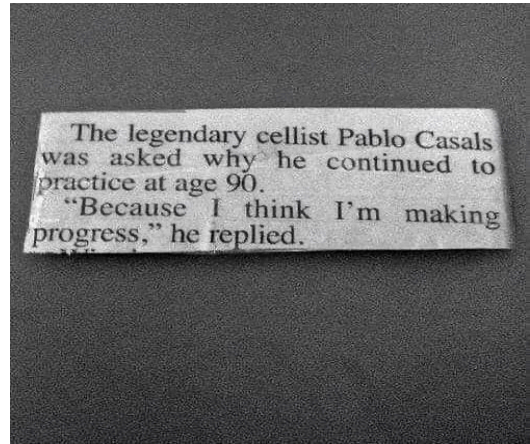
*Again, the music analogy:*

There are many different interpretations of the same song. Do you have a favorite? Why do you like one version but not the next? Is one more melodic? Is one hard hitting, fast, aggressive? Is another a soft ballad – gentle and full of feeling?

All of these interpretations are the art of telling the story. What kind of writing speaks to you? Perhaps you love a comedic format. Maybe it's more poetic. Learn from the writers that speak to you *and* develop your own voice.

The world does NOT need more bad writing.

Rather, *elevate your writing so you elevate your readers.*





**3) It's tempting to edit your work as you write. DON'T. It's OK if *your first draft sucks*. What's important is that you write it.**

Don't be in a hurry. It might take 87 re-writes to get to the final version. I've done that many re-writes on some projects. It was worth it. As well, I've had to train myself to NOT interrupt my own writing with editing.

In fact, unless you are the notable exception, you should EXPECT to go through many drafts. Your vision, your understanding, your ideas evolve all the time; each time you come back to your prior writing, you see a better way to express, or important material to add, or an aspect of the structure or sequencing of your material that doesn't quite make sense.

If you get stuck, go where you receive inspiration – the steam room at the gym, a hike, the beach. Ask strategic questions about your work as a whole, or any particular detail. If you're stuck on a specific topic or way to explain a concept, leave it, air out your mind and ask for clarity. The universe delivers, and you don't need to be new-agey cosmic about it.

“Writing a book is a horrible, exhausting struggle, like a long bout of some painful illness. One would never undertake such a thing if one were not driven on by some demon whom one can neither resist nor understand.” – George Orwell

Working on my first screenplay, I was often woken up at 3 or 4 am with ideas. Once, an entire sequence for a scene came to me – I scrambled into the bathroom with a pen and pad, turned on the light, scribbled notes complete with arrows showing the order of events. It was a brilliant, hilarious scene, and had I not jumped to the task IMMEDIATELY, I would never have remembered all the details in the morning.

After you've written your “final” version, give it a rest, come back and make the post-final tweaks. They will show up. Sometimes you'll see even more changes than you expected.

However, this is not a suggestion to forever re-write your book to avoid completing it. At a certain point, you'll want TRUSTED others to read your work and provide feedback. This may, and in most cases SHOULD include a competent editor.

I like to take it as far as I can first, before sending it for feedback, unless I've got structural or other foundational issues I'm unclear about. Then it's good to get feedback from someone – like an editor or experienced writer, or even an experienced reader – who can help you brainstorm elements of your material – whether non-fiction, fiction, screenplay, etc. – so that you have genuine confidence in the story you are building. In other words, you are building *authentic confidence along with competence*.

Remember, it is a journey, and that means you are learning along the way, developing your writing voice and perfecting the recipe.

**4) If your perspective is unique, it doesn't matter that there are 30 other books on the subject.**

If you're telling an original story, do some homework to at least see if there are books out there that are similar. If so, what kind of twists can you incorporate to make yours *original*?

The point is, don't parrot what's out there: instead, reshape, resize, re-invent. Determine if you're adding something to the world with your perspective and approach. Sometimes there is more than enough out there on a topic. You may be excited about what you know and have learned, but make sure you have something different.

“We're past the age of heroes and hero kings. ... Most of our lives are basically mundane and dull, and it's up to the writer to find ways to make them interesting.” – John Updike

Writing a book just to be “a published author” has value – it's a great business builder, you can have “expert” credibility, etc; however, it is preferable to be a “published author” because you have something new or unique that is of real value to share.

One category of writing that we are inundated with is the “How To” realm. This could be “how to” about health, making money, building an internet business, dating and other popular topics. If this is what you want to write about, it is important that you do your homework and discover if one or more “experts” have already done what you are planning to do.

If so, take the time to determine what is unique about your approach, and if you can make that obvious to your potential customers. Otherwise, you might be better off being an affiliate of the other experts, drive business to them and make commissions from the referrals.

In the self-help world, there are thousands of books. Many of them repeat similar information, inspiration, techniques, processes, etc. Why do some of them “hit” and others get minimal attention? See if you can discover what it is that makes your presentation special. Anyone can say “My friends all love my writing!” That's a start, but take it further; you want people you don't know to love your writing.

**5) Anything is possible, however, that doesn't mean your book will be a bestseller because you're an open cosmic channel for the universe.**

Did you ever watch American Idol audition shows – especially in the earlier days, where there was always a guy or girl in the parking lot who “knows” that they are “meant to be a star and win the competition, after all, *everyone* says they've never heard anyone as good as me. And God told me I would be a star.”

At first, you don't know for sure: Maybe they are talented. You kind of hope that they are – wouldn't that be terrific? Then they get on stage, and cannot sing on key, their voice is terrible, and it's a good laugh for the audience as you realize they were in serious delusion.

Are you a good writer? Get feedback from those that know what they are talking about, meaning not friends and family unless they happen to be professionals. Or run your work by people that are interested in your topic (not friends and family) and see what kind of response you get. Ask them to give you straight-forward, honest feedback. “I'm looking to improve my work, what thoughts do you have that would help me do that.” This is better than, “I hope you love my work, let me know!” There is always someone (family or friends) that loves your work; that means you'll sell three copies of your book. Maybe.

“The freelance writer is a man who is paid per piece or per word or perhaps.” —Robert Benchley

The point of this is: Don't live in a fantasy about the fame or fortune that your creative expression is going to bring you. That doesn't mean it can't happen, just do a reality check – determine if your ego has taken control of your perception about your work.

If you have a great idea, first, make sure it's a great idea. That means doing some investigation to see if you are the first person that has thought of this great idea, or the ten thousand and first person? If it is something new and different, then are you willing to learn and grow your skills?

The instant author, instant bestseller programs that flood your email and social media – take a breath and feel the level of hype in all of that – is that the kind of energy you want to run in your own body and your life?

*If you decide to do one of these, set honest expectations for yourself.*

That means that not every book is meant to be a bestseller. You may need to get over your own possible “delusion,” however, don't get over your passion for writing.

*Examples:*

When I was president of New World Library, I saw hundreds of book submissions come in, and some of these folks said pretty much the same thing in their cover letter: “unique,” “different,” “special,” “the best,” and on and on. Then I would read

the first page, although it often took just the first paragraph, and it was another “delusions of grandeur” submission. Terrible writing, and/or nothing original, and/or interesting concept with no ability to execute.

Another example, similar to the above - when I ran Rising Sun Records, most submissions were awful. We had conversations in the office, wondering how it was possible that these “artists” thought they had something of value? Their discernment was missing. No reality check on any level. What they could have done is develop their skills and talent to where they had something worthy to submit, and that’s no guarantee that they would ever get there. Some will, some won’t.

*Here’s what you might not want to hear, but I’m more interested in what’s real, not massaging your ego:*

Not everyone is meant to express their deepest most inner world through writing. However, everyone has talent or skill: it might be music, sculpture, painting, teaching, science, technology or some other craft or ability with people, or something else.

This is by no means to discourage you; rather, I’m saying *write because you are inspired, because it is the RIGHT expression for you*. Even if it is not good writing and/or not publishable, if you are inspired to write, then do it. Just don’t assume that because you are writing, you are writing marketable material. If you want it to be marketable, DEVELOP YOUR SKILLS like anyone would do in any trade or profession. If you want to be a doctor, you don’t graduate from high school and hang out a shingle. I was not a professional musician the day I started with music lessons. It took focus, practice, learning, making mistakes, taking chances and a lot more to get there.

The core message here is:

Find the form(s) of expression that you derive joy from. If writing gives you joy, and you’re not a great writer, be a learner . . . acquire skills. . . and continue to write. You will find the appropriate channel(s) for your writing if you keep with it.

**6) If you want to be read, be willing to bite the bullet and engage in marketing yourself.**

“Lazy” is the new “black” when it comes to publishers; they want you to already have a developed “platform” already.

Even when I was publishing, I heard horror stories from published authors about their New York publishing house: no support. Book published, then nothing. It still happens – all the time.

Today there are many opportunities, venues and channels for marketing yourself. Between social media, targeted email lists, affiliate marketing programs, Amazon and more, there are a lot of ways to get seen. There are expert courses on building an email list, making offers, funneling people from a FREE product to expensive products.

You can spend a little or a lot or in between on marketing. Just decide that you are going to do at least some marketing because today it is difficult to be seen above the mass of promotion and information that comes our way. It’s fine to start modestly if that’s what you can do. Make effort, and over time grow it.

“As marketers, we should be changing the mantra from ‘always be closing’ to ‘always be helping.’” – Jonathan Lister

I like the above quote: Isn’t that what we’re attempting to do with our writing (or any creative expression) – helping others, inspiring others, creating a better world?

*Surprise yourself:* When I started releasing jazz singles on streaming media a few years ago, I didn’t want to put on the marketing hat – I was having too much fun *creating*. Yes, I was lazy about marketing.

Getting over my resistance, I started to market and promote. I had a goal that my five jazz tunes (four are originals) could get to 10,000 streams collectively on Spotify. That’s not even a blip on the radar, but at the time, I figured, “It’s classic jazz, that’s a small niche, plus I’m not out gigging all over to build an audience,” so to me, 10,000 was a lot more than 10, 20, or 100 streams.

I kept at it, and today in late 2022 I’m over 210,000 streams between these five tunes. My goal has changed: I know I can hit over a half million streams; and perhaps over a million. LESSON: Let your vision of what’s possible expand as you learn and grown and achieve new milestones.

This **Ten Tips for Writers** is one example of marketing: I’m giving it away, because I know that you might find some of it valuable enough to want to do a private consult with me, and/or perhaps even work with me at a deeper level to help you elevate your work. Perhaps you might have a friend who can benefit from working with me.

If you’ve got a larger budget to work with, you might want to find someone or a company that specializes in book marketing.

## 7) Self-publishing might be better than being published by a real publisher\*.

*To self-publish or not to self-publish: that is the question.* At least it's a hot topic for many writers; and perhaps for you. I'll give you a brief background on this, and we'll look at the pros and cons of each.

When I built New World Library, we were self-publishing when we started. There was **no internet, no cell phones, no computers**. You might be thinking:

- "How did they publish?"
- "How did anyone write and edit without a computer?"
- "How did they create ads and promotion, or get anything done?"

Amazing, right? Yet, we created our first bestseller, *Creative Visualization*, by Shakti Gawain, while still in the stone age.

From there, we grew to become a publisher with bestsellers, international distribution, and licensing. It was an organic, learn-as-you-grow process to get there.

Going with a publisher might be a great choice for you. A close friend of mine received a \$105,000 advance for his book, and there was a reasonable chance the publisher might help with marketing and promotion. His book will have instant distribution to the stores, and there are special sales channels that apply. It's nice to have the publisher footing the bill for this.

At the same time, he still needed to build his "author platform" – meaning, build a following and a good mailing list, create various offers – programs – to engage his constituency, etc. However, being published by a "real" publisher adds tremendous value to one's work. In this case, it was Simon and Schuster – providing him with "expert" credibility.

The other thing to know is the difference financially between going with a publisher and self-publishing. A publisher will pay you a royalty on book sales. Typical royalties are about 12-20% of the NET revenues they receive. If the book retails for \$20, and most of their sales are to distributors at a 60% discount, then the publisher receives about \$8, and you'll see perhaps \$1 to \$1.50 on those sales. You won't get rich on royalties, unless your book sells tens or hundreds of thousands of copies. However, once you get to sales of even 10,000 copies – which is not even a bestseller – you will still have good visibility and credibility, with a growing constituency that you can market to with other products and services, and further build your brand and career.

I did this back in the 90s with an author and we built quite a successful business based on the traction that came from the first 10-15,000 copies sold. It is amazing what is possible with some focus and effort.

If you self-publish, you keep all the money, after the distributors and stores and Amazon get their cut off the top. Of course, you are paying for all the upfront costs to edit, design and print books, and you will pay 100% for your promotion and marketing costs, but you can still build a nice business on self-published books, and

as you grow your constituency, you can still do the same marketing of other products and services to them.

Often, in fact, a book is no more than a fancy business card; opening the door to everything else that you have to offer.

### *Advantages of self-publishing:*

Today, anyone can self-publish – using various all-in-one services and endless tools for marketing and promotion through the internet, landing pages, affiliates, webinars, etc.

You'll get your book out faster; you'll have more control. You might make more money. And, you may not even find a publisher that wants you.

If you want a legit publisher, just know that it will be 9-18 months from the day you sign your contract to when your book comes out. Need it a lot sooner? *Self-publish.*

Self-publishing a novel is a challenge; novels are harder to market, and even a first-time author published by a major press may only sell a few thousand copies. Unless you have a large constituency familiar with your work (from something else) who will buy it just because it's you.

\* Note: there are "vanity publishers" who will charge you to "publish" your book. Usually not a good choice although there are exceptions. Check them out if you want to go that route. You can often do it yourself – better and with lower cost.

## **8) Public response doesn't always reflect quality.**

Sometimes phenomenal works get little attention; on the flip side poorly written books sometimes become bestsellers. Just look to the political landscape or the prevalence of toxic food ingredients as an example of the relationship between quality and popularity.

You don't always know what's going to "hit" with the public. Marketing is the focus in today's book world. You'll find books without tremendous substance that sell well because of aggressive marketing, such as through affiliates with big email lists, for example.

We now have a glut of books that are not unique, not well-written, and only serve to clutter the landscape and make it harder to find the outstanding works.

“Literature is strewn with the wreckage of men who have minded beyond reason the opinions of others.” — Virginia Woolf

Important: Maybe I'm old-school about this, but just because your topic is hot, don't let that be an excuse for you to write a poor-quality book, thinking you'll make up for it through brilliant marketing. You might, but wouldn't it be more satisfying to be someone who contributes value?

People want – and appreciate – content that makes a difference for them. And you might want to have your work be a legacy rather than more “throw-away” content.

There are too many books today that are lots of flash and little or no substance. *Be different – be substance.*

With all that said, do your best; you know you are on track when your overall experience results in a sense of accomplishment and feeling good about yourself.

- This includes writing that brings up painful memories – creating an opportunity for deep healing. Embrace it. It may – or may not – be appropriate for the public. Perhaps it is just for you.
- If you receive feedback that you've provided value, changed, or inspired someone's life, take that in. Sometimes it's what YOU need if you're having doubts.
- Find appropriate people – at least one or more professionals – to give you feedback about your work. You want specific, clear, non-judgmental comments from those who want to support your efforts.



## 9) Less is more. Almost always.

Now that everyone wants info the size of a tweet or text, we want information quickly so we can move on to action. A novel is different: We want the luxury of immersion in the story.

“The lecture was enjoyed by the audience.”

“The audience enjoyed the lecture.”

The above is a basic example of keeping it simple. Notice that the second version has more impact.

Along these lines, reduce your use of adverbs as much as possible. These are words that often end in -ly or -y. Examples: “very,” “expertly,” “regularly.” They don’t add value to the sentence.

“I want a very big piece of cake.”

“I want a big piece of cake.”

In the above, what did “very” add? It added fluff. It has no value in the statement.

Here’s a big example of “less is more:” I made an outrageous error when I was the publisher at New World Library, and to this day I am certain that it cost us thousands of books that would have been sold had I understood “less is more” at the time.

A noted bestselling author walked in the door one day; said he was tired of New York publishing; would we like to publish his next book?

The author had written a bestseller on wellness; this was a great topic in the early 1980s. The word *wellness* was new in the health arena.

His new book took the concept of wellness to something anyone could re-orient their life to in 14 days. A potential game-changer in the world of health, and the right concept at the right time.

It was an excellent book, but here’s the problem: It was 350 pages. I was young and naïve; I didn’t see the disconnect between “14 days” and “350 pages.”

Hey Sky, are you an idiot? It would take some people more than 14 days to read 350 pages. It was way too long; it should have been condensed to 150 pages or so – about 10 pages per each day. It needed to be a manageable action for the reader.

Nevertheless, the book did well; it sold in the tens of thousands of copies. How much better would it have done if it was short and to the point?

“When your story is ready for rewrite, cut it to the bone. Get rid of every ounce of excess fat. This is going to hurt; revising a story down to the bare essentials is always a little like murdering children, but it must be done.” — Stephen King

*General rules for non-fiction:*

- Keep it simple and understandable to the public.
- If your topic is technical or scientific, break it into plain English, bite-sized concepts.
- If you have a lot of material, consider breaking it into more than one book.

I assisted an author who was writing a book for doctors. When I read his material, it became clear that this was a book that would be of interest to the public. I said, “Write this for the general public; if it’s good, it’s good for the doctors as well.”

He took my advice, I found him a publisher, and the book did well – it sold 50,000+ copies and launched his speaking and seminar career.

*Novels are different:*

A great novel consumes as many pages as it need to for the story to be told: 300 pages, 500 pages, even 800 pages. If it’s good, it’s good at any length. The point is, make it a compelling, engaging story.

“There are no laws for the novel. There never have been, nor can there ever be.” – Doris Lessing

“If a nation loses its storytellers, it loses its childhood.”  
– Peter Handke

*Screenplays are even more different:*

A feature-length script is usually 80-120 pages; about one page per minute. “Less is more” is crucial, because watching a movie is different pacing from reading a book. Going from novels or non-fiction writing requires that you shift from “telling the story” to “showing the story.” It’s a visual medium.

“Each writer is born with a repertory company in his head. Shakespeare has perhaps 20 players... I have 10 or so, and that’s a lot. As you get older, you become more skillful at casting them.”  
—Gore Vidal

If this is your venue, you’ll need to get up to speed with screenwriting skills and techniques. There are great books on screenwriting, and great courses. I recommend [www.screenwritingU.com](http://www.screenwritingU.com) – they offer many programs, including a six-month professional series that is *fabulous*. I’m an Alumni of the series, and the difference it has made in my script writing is tremendous.

There are other fantastic resources, many that are free, for aspiring screenwriters. The other thing for you to know is that screenwriting requires a focused understanding of the business of film as much as the creative side.

## **10) Your voice is YOUR voice; make it count.**

This can be the hardest thing for a writer – believing that we have something unique to express. Same goes for artists of all kinds.

There are a lot of reasons that we put things off, including our creative expression:

- Fear that it's not good enough,
- Skepticism as to whether anyone will pay attention even when we think it's good,
- Thinking that there are too many others writing about similar topics, so why bother?
- "I'm too busy, I'll eventually get to it,"
- I don't know how to market and it seems overwhelming,
- "I have an idea, I just can't figure out how to organize it."
- . . .and you have other reasons. They might even sound reasonable.

Therefore, there is one answer. Start. Fall on your face if you must. It's OK.

"Who wants to become a writer? And why? Because it's the answer to everything. . . . It's the streaming reason for living. To note, to pin down, to build up, to create, to be astonished at nothing, to cherish the oddities, to let nothing go down the drain, to make something, to make a great flower out of life, even if it's a cactus." – Enid Bagnold

As I mentioned, my first screenplay sucked. The concept was good, it was based on a true story, but I lacked the skills to pull it off. Some parts of it were good, but overall, it didn't hold together. My second script had the benefit of my going through a professional screenwriting program, as well as getting professional industry feedback (coverage) to elevate it at every level. I did MANY re-writes, and it reads well and has caught the attention of a few producers.

If you heard some of the first versions of my jazz tunes that I've been releasing on the streaming media, well, you won't, because they were so "in their infancy" that I went through many versions of each, elevating the quality every step of the way. You can check them out here on **my Spotify page**:

<https://open.spotify.com/artist/5PU58SkiKxuuMAMsd0tVBI?si=ls31AQ0bRt6ak84IJ9C1mw>

The important thing that I KNOW without question, after decades of creative and business activity, is that EVERYONE is unique in their creative expression. If you doubt that, start anyway, and take the time to learn, grown and elevate your work.

**Have a great writing project, yet frustrated with your skills?  
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**If big writing is up for you – a novel, non-fiction book, or screenplay – we start with a powerful consultation:**

- Review of your writing and/or concept – highlight your strengths and weaknesses;
- Immediate ways to elevate your work;
- Valuable, practical advice about defining and reaching your market.

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“Your suggestions for my storyline were fantastic! I rode the wave of appreciation for the rest of the day! Sky provides exceptional creativity, clarity and acumen!”

– GL, Boulder

“Sky blends surgical precision and an amazing eye for detail with a tremendous ability to ‘grok’ the big picture – a strategic thinker AND pleasure to work with!” – JD, Boulder

“With innovative and balanced mentoring, Sky brings a courageous ‘out of the box’ mindset: bold, imaginative, experienced; filled with a rare degree of emotional intelligence.” – GM, San Francisco

**Why work with me:**

- Former publisher of international bestsellers (millions of books/many languages);
- Editor of bestselling books / published author / former literary agent;
- Writer and editor of numerous business and marketing materials;
- Feature film screenwriter (ScreenwritingU.com Pro Series Alumni);
- Business coach/consultant to businesses and artists for over 35 years;
- I *love* guiding authors and helping them *elevate* their work.

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I look forward to supporting YOUR impactful, make-a-difference writing.

Warmest regards,

*Sky Canyon*