

## A LETTER TO STUDENT WRITERS

*- a student asked me for tips because she loves to write. I'm assuming she means that she wants to keep writing, learn to write better, and perhaps someday get published. Here are some ideas:*

- 1) **The best writers are readers too.** Read books and read the kind of books you love. When you write, you may want to start writing this kind of material too.
- 2) **Remember things**– two ways to do this. Prompt yourself with favorite smells, colors, word associations. Assign yourself to remember things that you had an emotional reaction to – things that made you feel joyful, angry, embarrassed, sad, protected. Write them down. It can just be notes or you can remember in detail. Remember things every day.
  - a. Journal – this is not so much memories as writing what you are thinking of right now. Two years from now your journal will be filled with memories – as though you were first experiencing them.
- 3) **Listen.** Become an eavesdropper. Listen to the way different people talk. Does one of your friends always say, “You know?” at the end of sentences? How do people who were raised in other states or countries talk? Do they switch their word order? What are words that only old people use? The more you listen, the more fluid and realistic your dialogue will be.
  - a. Tip – your major characters should sound different from each other. You should be able to guess who’s talking by what they say and how they say it!
- 4) **Rest and Revise.** When you are writing, don’t be afraid to put a piece away for a day or a week or a month. Then look at it fresh. Lots of times writing that I thought was great when I wrote it was almost impossible to understand when I re-read it. Then you can change it to include what you really meant.
  - a. Revision is not just polishing words. Sometimes it means changing around whole scenes, changing the plot or adding or taking out a character. Don’t be afraid to play around with what you’ve written. If you work on a computer, you can save the original and experiment with a copy. Then keep the one you like.
- 5) **Support each other.** Find a friend who likes to write too. Read each others’ work and respond to it. Be sure this is a person you trust and don’t always

be smiles and sweetness but *never* be mean. If that person or you wrote something, it's important to them. Ask questions like "What kind of person is this character?" Or make statements like "I'm a little confused on this page." If someone is mean about your writing don't listen. They are being mean. If they have something to say about your writing like, "You use a lot of adjectives and I don't think you need them." That's not mean, that's just a statement. Learn to tell the difference. Use the comments that ring true to you to improve your writing.

- 6) **Do Stuff.** Nothing helps a writer like having experiences that make him/her unique. Do what you love. Volunteer at a soup kitchen. Go to sports events. Hike. Whatever it is, get out and do things. That gives you the ideas for your writing.
- 7) **Don't give up.** If you love to write, you'll probably need to keep doing it anyway. But don't beat yourself up if you get stuck or if you don't like something. Writing takes practice and some things are great and some things aren't. That's the way art is.
- 8) **Take a class.** If there is a creative writing class for kids at your Community College or County Extension give it a try.
- 9) **Do some research.** There are terrific online sites where you can learn about writing. Try the [www.haroldunderdown.org](http://www.haroldunderdown.org) The *Purple Crayon* site has information on publishing realities and is a good place to learn about the publication process.

*My best advice?* This isn't a race. Learn everything that you can. Write. Read. **have fun.** Soon you'll find you have writing that you love. That's the best place to begin.

Best Wishes, Suzanne Morgan Williams