“Go to the pine if you want to learn about the pine or to the bamboo if you want to learn about the bamboo. And in doing so, you must leave your subjective preoccupation with yourself. Otherwise, you impose yourself on the object and do not learn. Your poetry issues of its own accord when you and the object have become one…”

- - Nobuyuki Yuasa
This book is dedicated
To you…
Acknowledgements

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Finally, without you, the reader, this book would not be possible.

Thank you, one and all.
Introduction

You can learn how to improve your writing talents because the potential or seed for improvement already exists within you. All it needs is some attention. Whether you argue that a writer is born and not made, or vice versa, is simply academic. Every person on this planet is born with the capacity to be creative. Scientists in the human potential movement are proving that fact again and again. Some of us become creative because of fortunate, though accidental, childhood experiences, and some of us have learned to consciously choose to be creative. This book is for those who choose to be creative – who choose to grow.

Offered in *Zen and the Art of Writing* are the best techniques, suggestions, ideas and practical methods for improving writing and creative abilities. It is the result of ten years research, study and experimentation in the creative process.

A glance at the Table of Contents page will suggest to you the wide range of ideas and techniques covered in the book. From discoveries in science and psychology – such as Neuro-Linguistic Programming, a new and powerful communications technique being used by writers, educators and therapists – to discoveries in right/left brain research – including the brilliant new technique called “Clustering” – *Zen and the Art of Writing* has it all. No other book contains as much new and valuable information for writers.

The material in this book, though written simply and clearly, is highly advanced. The focus is on learning to transcend your normal, limited ways of thinking, seeing and being. It is written to help you drop the old idea of a writer having to be poor, miserable, alcoholic and suicidal in order to be creative. For years, I drank too much because I wanted to be like the famous authors I had read and admired – Jack London, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, and the rest who wasted part of their lives with drink.

*Zen and the Art of Writing* is designed to transform old ideas. You do not need to have psychological problems in order to write, though many writers did use sour past experiences to create worthy fiction. This book is here to tell you that you can be happy, whole and prosperous – and be creative. In fact, when you are whole and alive, fit and serene, that’s when your writing blossoms.

In this book are ideas far deeper – and maybe far “weirder” – than normally found in popular publications for writers. Much of the information presented is from the fields of transpersonal psychology, new science, and “new age” thought. That is not to say the book is profound or beyond understanding. Rather, this book is a useful stepping stone to aid your own spiritual and psychological growth. As many famous writers have pointed out, unless you grow your writing will not grow.

As a writer, you need to be open to all ideas and all experiences. You may not accept all ideas or live all experiences – that’s another matter – but you do need to be willing to entertain new ideas and new theories in order to enrich your writing and yourself. To
continue your art and remain ignorant of certain new concepts in creativity is to fill the essence of your art with ignorance.

Find wisdom in yourself and wisdom will appear in your writing. To continue in old patterns of thinking and being and writing is to keep running in the same circles, down the same beaten trails. Now is the time to branch out into the woods, try new trails, make new paths and discover the joys of being creative, original and totally alive.

No matter what sort of problems you may be having in your writing, and even if you are not having any problems, and no matter what your level of interest or skill, *Zen and the Art of Writing* can be of service to you. There is something of concern for every writer in this book – and the material presented is the best of what is available for your use. Just in case you need or desire further information about an idea or technique explained in the book, there is an annotated bibliography at the end of every chapter so you can more deeply explore the ideas presented on your own.

Finally, let me address the question “*Zen and the art of writing?”*

There are many ways to Zen, but there is only Zen. When someone asks me what kind of Zen am I teaching in my book, I reply that I am not teaching a way or a kind of Zen – I am teaching Zen.

Zen is what is. This book deals with what is. When you take away all your techniques to creativity, all you have is creativity. You don’t need a way there because you are there. We need and beg for techniques because we forget our own inner essence – our own Zen-nature.

Mozart used to have to eat a large dinner and go for a walk before he could compose. Schiller used to smell rotten apples while he wrote. Balzac dressed in the robes of a monk. Those were ways to creativity that may or may not have worked for those artists – but those were unnecessary methods. If Schiller had known how to “tune in” to his own inner creative connection – to his own Zen-nature – then he could have thrown the apples out. But he wasn’t aware of his Zen – of his creativity – of his true inner nature. In an important sense, Schiller missed out on a great deal of life.

Writers who unconsciously (or consciously) feel the need to be poor and starving in order to be creative are also as off the mark as Schiller in terms of knowing how to be truly creative. When you are wealthy, you have more freedom to write. When you are prosperous, you are also psychologically balanced – you accept yourself more readily – and others accept you – and your writing is clearer and wiser. (Since this book isn’t intended to be a financial seminar, I suggest you read Eric Butterworth’s masterpiece, *Spiritual Economics: The Prosperity Process*. It will help you drop that romantic but non-productive image of the starving author.)

*Zen and the Art of Writing* means “the essence” of writing. It is natural, relaxed, effortless, honest, honest, original, alive and breathing writing. It is writing that grows
from within in the same fashion a tree grows from within a seed. The Zen-nature of a cherry seed is to become a full-grown cherry tree. The Zen-nature of you is to become whatever you are growing to become.

Leonardo Da Vinci wrote, “Where the spirit does not work with the hand there is no art.” When your urge to write merges with the creative flow of the universe – with Zen or with Spirit – then the result is Art. The result is original, honest, memorable, beautiful and fascinating writing.

If these last few paragraphs seem confusing to you it is only proof that you need and are ready for Zen and the Art of Writing.

The result of reading this book will be a deeper understanding of life and of yourself, increased creativity and spontaneity, a sense of joy, play, and celebration in the “energy-play” called writing, and a changed attitude towards your own writing. You will also learn many techniques for overcoming any writing problems you may encounter, and you will gain the confidence needed to handle any creative writing projects you may choose to undertake.

Zen and the Art of Writing will transform your writing – and also your life. It may be, in its own quiet way, one of the most influential books you will ever read.

M. Joseph Vitale
Houston
1984
Lesson One: Write From the Heart!

The “new” approach the subtitle of this book refers to is not so much new as it is rediscovered. At the most, it may be new to you. Simply stated, all a writer need do to be creative is allow whatever needs to be written to come forth. In other words, act like a medium for the creativity. Stand aside and see what comes forward. Write anything you want on a sheet of blank paper until you either get bored, tired or something possesses you and you can’t stop writing.

This is a workable theory and you can test it for yourself right now. Sit down before a blank page. Relax (tension only blocks your expressive abilities), and allow something to be written on the sheet before you. Write anything. Write a word. Another word. A sentence. Be playful and curious and see what you write. At some point, you will probably latch onto something, an idea or whatever, and you’ll get carried away, swept along by the writing itself. You’ll plug into a creative source, an outlet, and the juice will keep you writing for many minutes.

Try that exercise right now. Don’t be concerned if you have trouble writing anything or if what you write is nonsense to you. Simply let go of your judgments for a few minutes and play. Have fun!

You probably came up with some sort of paragraph from that exercise, maybe even a whole page. Some people tap into an underground well of stored material and end up writing a whole essay or even a book – even when they sat down not knowing at all what they were going to write about!

Where does that writing come from?

I don’t think anybody knows for sure. Some say it comes from your unconscious, others say your subconscious supplies the juice, and still others say it comes from your right brain, that side of your brain which deals with images and holistic thinking. Let’s look at what some creative people have said about this process:

Mark Twain claimed he had a type of creative bathtub in his mind and all his juices were stored there. When the tub was full he was ready to write a book.

Jack London’s classic The Call of the Wild came to him easily and effortlessly daily for about twenty days. He never knew where the inspiration originated and later said he felt as though the book wrote itself.

Richard Bach’s best-seller Jonathan Livingston Seagull came from someplace completely unknown to the author. Bach felt he was the receiver of material sent from another plane of existence and had to ask Seth, Jane Robert’s famous spirit guide, for advice about it.

Erica Jong has said, I don’t know where the first line comes from and I don’t know who says it to me.”
Joseph Heller once said, “I feel like these ideas are floating around in the air and they pick me to settle upon. The ideas come to me. I don’t produce them at will.”

Eliot said, “The idea simple comes.”

Gertrude Stein said, “It will come if it is there and if you will let it come.”

Mozart claimed, “My ideas come as they will. I don’t know how.”

James Dickey said, “It is with great pleasure that I sit down each morning to see what the hell I’m going to say today. Believe me, it surprises me more than it ever could anybody else.”

Stanley Burnshaw, in his book on creativity, *The Seamless Web*, said that the poet begins poetry as a sort of dictation, “…with the poet listening to something that speaks to him…”

Friedrich Nietzsche, the famous German philosopher, has written that inspiration cones when you are a type of “…mouthpiece, or medium of some almighty power.”

Nietzsche added, “The notion of revelation describes the condition quite simply; by which I mean that something profoundly convulsive and disturbing suddenly becomes visible and audible with indescribable definiteness and exactness. One hears – one does not seek; one takes – one does not ask who gives; a thought flashes out like lightening, inevitably without hesitation – I have never had any choice about it.”

When inspiration comes, when the muse takes over, you are no longer there. The writing itself is there. When you are lost in the energy of writing, when you are possessed by creativity, you have no choice because you are not. Whether the creativity that overtakes you comes from your unconscious, subconscious, right (or left) brain, or from God herself – it doesn’t matter.

As long as you do not resist it, you are in tune with it. As long as you accept this urge nudging you towards pen and paper (or brush and paint if you are a painter), then you are doing what needs to be done for the highest good of all concerned. You are then in tune with the creative flow of the universe and a type of synergy occurs – everything works harmoniously and together when you and I accept the call from within to do something – like write.

The may be confusing or too metaphysical for you, so let’s stop a moment and consider the following:

First: Children are the most creative beings on this planet. Put them in a room with no toys, no television, no props of any kind, and in only a few moments they will begin to play. They will perform, act out scenes they create, run, hop, talk to themselves or
imaginary friends, practice standing on one foot, invent games, ore whatever. It seems
crazy to grownups who have lost or buried their own sense of play, but what those
children are doing is being themselves. They are free and natural. They don’t yet have an
“inner parent” in their head saying things like, “Don’t do that!” or “That’s stupid!”

That’s hint number one to creative writing: Learn to play again, to recognize and let go of
your own inner restraints to trying the new, the crazy, the creative.

Second: Ken Wilber, the brilliant author of many new age books, has written Up From
Eden*: “Nobody has ever seen Nature – we see trees and birds and clouds and grass, but
not some specific thing we can isolate and call ‘Nature.’ Likewise, no scientist has ever
seen Matter – he sees what he calls ‘forms of matter’; but nobody, no scientist, layman,
or mathematician, has ever seen a pure bit of just matter…no scientist has ever seen
energy, even though he talks of ‘forms of energy,’ such as thermodynamic energy,
nuclear-binding energy, and so on.”

Nature, Matter, and Energy are all words – symbols – for the “thing” that is in and of all
existence moving existence to higher levels of consciousness. It is spirit moving to spirit.
It is creativity being creative. No one sees creativity, either. What we see are forms of
creativity (like this book). All of these words (Nature, Matter, Energy, Creativity) are
word-symbols for the same “power” that turns infants into adults, that made humans out
of amoebas.

“Evolution,” Wilber writes in Up From Eden, “is not a statistical accident – it is a
laboring toward Spirit, driven, not by happy-go-lucky chance…but by Spirit itself.”

Hint number two to creative writing is this: Being creative means being in tune with the
nature, energy or spirit of the universe. When you are creative you are one with what
might be called God, Tao, Life, Zen or “It.” When you are creative you are allowing
yourself to be used by God for the highest good and advancement of all mankind.

Three: Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, an enlightened spiritual master living today (who is
also my own spiritual teacher), says that all you need to fall in tune with the totality of all
things, with the universe and with creativity, is trust. Bhagwan has said in Only One Sky*:

“If you want to learn anything learn trust – nothing else is needed.
“If you are miserable nothing else will help – learn trust.
“If you don’t feel any meaning because trust makes you feel meaningless nothing will
help – learn trust.
“Trust gives meaning because trust makes you capable of allowing the whole to descend
upon you.”

Hint number three to creative writing: Learn trust!

* Up From Eden, copyright 1983m Ken Wilber. Used by permission
* Only One Sky, copyright 1975, Rajneesh Foundation International. Used by permission.
When you are writing, trust that what you are writing is what you are supposed to write. Don’t fight with it. Don’t judge it. Play with it as a child would, and accept it. Trust that it is right.
Sometimes when we write our ideas come from our past, which might be called our subconscious or unconscious. Sometimes, too, our ideas come from the symbol making side of our brain, the right hemisphere. And sometimes our ideas come from our body/mind. (The body and mind are one, and it contains its own wisdom. Rolfers know this. Many memories from our childhood, like falling out of a tree when you were the age of four, are stored in your body.)

For this course true creativity is when the source is deep within you, at the level of being where you and the universe are one. Giving yourself the space to allow something from the source to reach you is helpful. In other words, sit at your desk in silence, with paper and pen in front of you, and see what comes your way. Listen and wait for something to bubble up from within you. Play and doodle on the paper and see if you can ignite something.

Letting go, pretending you are a three-year old, is also helpful. Dr. Jean Houston has often told her students to run around the room and laugh and sing and play as if they were tiny tots having a ball. Do it and then sit at your desk or writing table and see what you write.

Above all, trust what you do to be right.

And have fun at it!
Suggested Readings

The Creative Process edited by Brewster Ghiselin. This may be out of print but check your local library. It has a gold mine of interesting explanations of creativity by thirty-eight brilliant men and women, including Einstein, Van Gogh, Nietzsche, Jung, Yeats, and so on.

The Orange Book: The Meditations of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. Excellent collection of one hundred techniques for returning to the creative source, including a section on “Work as Meditation” which includes Bhagwan’s insightful and helpful comments on creative work.

Suggested Listening

Sufis: The People of the Path, Lecture #8 by Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. A question and answer discourse; question three is “What is creativity?” Bhagwan discusses the left/right hemispheres of the brain, lack of appropriate education to enhance creativity, drug use as an attempt to be creative, and more. An important, highly recommended tape.

Genius, Creativity, and the Turned-On Mind by Jean Houston. Four one-hour tapes containing brilliant information and illuminating exercises by a pioneer in the field of brain research. Here Dr. Houston talks about and demonstrates altered states of consciousness, imagery, time distortion, and kinesthetic thinking. A fun and useful series.

Ordering Information

Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh’s books and tapes are available from Rajneesh Foundation International, P.O. Box 9, Rajneeshpuram, Oregon 97741.

Dr. Jean Houston’s tapes are available from: The Foundation for Mind Research, P.O. Box 600, Pomona, New York, 10970.
Looking Ahead

In Lesson Two you will learn how to deal with any blocks you may have to creativity. We will explore meditation, imagery, affirmations, music, celebration and silence.
Lesson Two: Six Keys to Creativity

In this lesson you will learn several techniques to overcome blocks to creativity. The methods we will look at here are meditation, imagery, affirmations, music, celebration, and silence.

Meditation

There are many different approaches to meditation but the intended result of any meditative technique is to have the meditator merge with existence. In other words, meditation helps us return to where we originated, the source and beginning of everything, what some call “God,” others call “Zen,” “Tao,” the “Universe,” or simply “Life.”

When you do meditation, like Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh’s original technique, “Kundalini,” what you are doing is throwing out all tension, anxiety, repression, and so forth, so you can later experience total inner peace. You shake in the first stage of Kundalini to “throw off” all your stuck energy, all the accumulated tensions in your body/mind. In the second stage is where you can merge with existence. After ridding your body/mind of stuck repressions, unexpressed emotions, and other “psychic junk,” you are ready to allow the last stage of meditation, if you have given in to the activity of the meditation technique, then you and the universe will be one. At that point, you will not have any resistances or blocks to creativity. You will be creativity.

It is easier to understand meditation by doing it rather than by reading about it. It is suggested that you purchase a copy of Bhagwan’s kundalini meditation tape and do the meditation. (The tape comes with directions and has four stages on it; each stage has its own music and is separated by silence. Listening to the tape will free you from having to watch a clock to time each fifteen minute stage of the meditation, and the music is lively and helps you shake and dance with total abandon. See ‘Ordering Information’ at the end of Lesson One.”

Another meditation, also developed by Bhagwan and of particular interest to creative people is “Devavani.” This technique helps loosen the left brain’s dominant control over creative urges, so it is an excellent one to do before trying to write anything.

Devavani also has four stages, each of fifteen minutes duration. In the first, sit quietly with gentle music playing. Just enjoy that space. In the second, start making nonsense sounds. Allow any sort of word-like sounds to arise. Do not cry, shout, laugh, or scream. Simply let these sounds surface from your right brain. In the third stage, stand up and continue to speak. Allow your body to move softly in harmony with the sounds you make. In the last stage, lie down, silent and still.

Be sure to keep your eyes closed throughout this meditation and don’t be surprised if you need some sleep after doing it. It is very relaxing. (Devavani is described more thoroughly in The Orange Book. See “Suggested Reading” at the end of Lesson One.)
Choose a meditation that intuitively feels right to you, and do it every day, preferably at the same time of day. By doing a technique on a daily basis you will continuously allow creativity a chance to come to you. You will also be clearing yourself of all blocks to creativity with your regular body/mind cleansing.

It is said that God is always trying to reach us, the problem is that we aren’t home. We are so busy worrying, doing, trying, regretting, and wishing, that we don’t give the universe or God a chance to say anything.

Meditation, then, is an opportunity to let God (Creativity) speak to you.

**Imagery**

Can you imagine yourself creative? Can you see yourself writing a lovely poem, or a pointed work of prose, or – or what? If you can imagine it, you can do it.

Visualization is a cure for blocked creativity because it helps you realize you can do the thing you want to do, and it subtly starts your body/mind working for you. There are cancer specialists right now who are their patients to visualize themselves, healed – and it works! Dr. Carl Simonton in Dallas, Texas, is proving over and over again that when you can successfully visualize yourself the way you want to be, you start your mind and body working to heal and change yourself.

If Dr. Simonton and his patients can use the imagery to cure and alleviate cancer, why can’t you use it to overcome creative blocks?

There are numerous ways to use imagery. The simplest may be to just relax, breathe evenly, deeply and slowly, and then picture in your mind the thing you want to do, be or have. In this case, you may want to conjure up an image of yourself sitting at your writing table, writing the thing you most want to write (or just see yourself writing). As you watch this mental image, enjoy it. Feel the bliss and peace you expect to feel when you do actually go to write. Make this mental image as real as possible, bring all your senses into play if you can (maybe see yourself drinking tea while you write and really taste that tea and smell its aroma), and then – after you have created a visualization so real you know it will happen – let go of it. Turn your attention elsewhere and forget the image for a while.

When you sit down to write later on you will probably write just the way you pictured yourself writing!

It’s not magic, just a simple mental technique to get your mind to work for you rather than against you!
Affirmations

The thoughts and images in your mind are what control and create your reality. A pessimist is one who continuously thinks and sees life as lousy. An optimist is one who sees the same life and lives on the same planet but who sees it all as being very, very good. The pessimist has thoughts of doom and gloom and so his life is one of negative events. He creates those events with his thinking. An optimist thinks high thoughts about his life and so he creates a very enjoyable existence about himself. Said another way, if you awaken in the morning thinking you’ll have a rotten day, you will most likely have a rotten day. Your mind will tend to create what you think about.

This is true for every one of us, only most of us are not at all aware of what we think. Each of us has a mental programming – just like a computer program – and that programming runs our lives. Unless we become aware of the way we think, and of what we think, our minds will continue to control and guide us – and lead us right into places we may have no desire to visit.

One excellent way to begin reprogramming your mind is through the use of affirmations. Affirmations are positive statements which you repeatedly write or say to yourself in order to change your reality. Probably the most famous affirmation ism, “Every day in every way I am getting better and better.” When you write that affirmation ten or so times every morning, it helps to alter the way you perceive the world. Suddenly, you begin to feel you are indeed getting better and better in every way! And when you start feeling better, you start acting better.

As with visualizations, affirmations are not magic. It is another technique to help you take control of what usually runs wild and crazy and in all directions – your thoughts. Following are some important points to remember when writing affirmations. (These guidelines are from Shakti Gawain’s book *Creative Visualization* and are discussed at length there. See ‘Suggested Reading’ at the end of this lesson.)

1. Always phrase affirmations in the present tense, not in the future. It’s important to create it as if it already exists.
2. Always phrase affirmations in the most positive way you can.
3. The shorter and simpler the affirmation, the more effective it will be.
4. Always choose affirmations that feel totally right for you.
5. Always remember when doing affirmations that you are creating something new and fresh.
6. Affirmations are not meant to contradict or try to change your feelings or emotions.
7. When using affirmations, try as much as possible to create a feeling of belief, an experience that they can be true. Temporarily suspend your doubts and hesitations, and put your full mental and emotional energy into them.

Here are a few affirmations which are helpful in overcoming blocks to creativity:

*I now feel deep inner peace and serenity.*
I am now an open channel for creative energy.
Creative ideas and inspiration are coming to me every day.
I am the creator of my life.
My inner wisdom is guiding me now.
Creativity comes to me easily and effortlessly.
__________________
(fill in the blank) comes to me easily and effortlessly.
I am a radiant being, filled with light and love.
Every day in every way I am getting better and better.

Choose an affirmation that feels good to you and write it, either early in the morning or late in the evening, about ten or twenty times. Really think about each word as you write it and feel the truth of what you are writing. Put your first name in the affirmation and try writing it in the first, second and third person. For example:

I, Manjushri, now accept myself.
Manjushri, you now accept yourself.
Manjushri now accepts himself.

Besides writing your favorite affirmations, you can also say them to yourself, put them on tape and play them back to yourself, sing them as if they were holy mantras, or put them on cards which you can stick up at various places around your home and at work.

By playing with affirmations ten minutes or so a day you will go a long way in changing your mental programming. You will also begin to experience the reality you want to experience. You will no longer be a victim of life; you will be the one who has the controls!

Music

Music is a right brain experience. Its sounds and rhythms cannot be enjoyed by the left brain (that half of your brain which is very logical and very suppressant of creativity). By listening to music as you write you begin to seduce the left brain into sleep and you tease the right brain out of hiding. I am at the point right now where I cannot write a word unless gentle, soothing music is playing in the background. Right now, as I write this, I am listening to “Ecstasy” by Deuter.

I find piano music aids my flow of creativity best. Others say classical music helps. You will have to experiment and discover what works for you. In general, I doubt that music with lyrics is very helpful as the left brain comes back into play when it hears words. At any rate, you will need to listen to a variety of music and be aware of what it does to you. Once I was listening to some wonderful piano by George Winston when I suddenly realized that he, being an improvisationalist, often played the same series of notes twice or more. When I checked my writing I found that I had repeated myself in many places (probably at the very same places Winston had repeated his music!)
Music has a tendency to guide your writing, so choose your listening pleasure with care. Listening to the Rolling Stones while writing a poem will probably give you a poem completely different than one you would have created had you been listening to Mozart.

Some of my favorite music is:
- “Breathe” by Jon Bernoff and Marcus Allen
- “Petals” by Jon Bernoff and Marcus Allen
- “Ki” by Kitaro
- “Golden Voyage” by Bearns and Dexter
- “Chariots of Fire” by Vangelis
- “Celebration” by Deuter

**Celebration**

Dance, sing, laugh, act, juggle, tumble, jump, play, smile, giggle – do anything and everything that makes you feel totally alive.

The master key to life and creativity is celebration. You can either prepare to celebrate or you can celebrate right now. You can either work towards having or being or doing something that will help you celebrate, or you can choose to celebrate all you do right now, *while* working towards having, being or doing something.

When you celebrate everything, you are grateful for everything. You are also happy, blissful, joyful *and* creative. NOT celebrating is one of the best ways to block creativity. When you aren’t happy, you are stuck. Your energy is stuck in you someplace and nothing will flow through you, especially not creativity, until you free yourself.

When you are feeling down and lousy, melancholy and sick, *dance*! Put on some music, move your body and let go! Move to the rhythm you hear and before you know it your energy will not only be flowing through you, it will be totally overwhelming you!

Try it!

**Silence**

Silence is where you are after you have overcome any blocks to creativity you may have. Silence is home. Silence is that place in you where you and the universe are one. When you are totally silent inside, creativity will come easily and effortlessly. All of the techniques given in this lesson are to help you reach the silence inside yourself. Silence, then, is not a method to creativity, it *is* creativity.

Practice sitting in silence. Watch your thoughts as if they were birds flying through a sky. Sit and tune in to the music of silence, the voice of creativity.

When you are at peace with yourself – silent inside – your writing does not come from your neurosis, it comes from the source of creativity itself. Silence allows creativity to
rise from your Zen-nature, and not from your ego. Silence is the essence of creativity, the essence of Zen and the essence of you.

**Summary and Exercises**

In this lesson, we looked at several methods of helping us overcome blocks to creativity, methods that are designed to have us reach that silent space within that is our essence and seat of originality.

Play with any or all of the techniques given and be aware of what happens. Meditate, write affirmations, experiment with imagery, listen to music, dance your feet off, or sit at your desk in silence and wait for something to come to you. Choose a method that feels good to you, that seems to attract you, and delve into it.

You might also consider keeping a journal and recording what you do and what you write afterwards. It may be a helpful way to monitor the effects of these exercises.

**Suggested Reading**

*Creative Visualization* by Shakti Gawain. This is probably the very best book around on imagery and on affirmations. This best-seller is simply written, clear, and very loving. Highly recommend.

*The Book of the Secrets* by Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. Five volumes. Here Bhagwan describes 118 simple but powerful methods of meditation. You don’t need to read all five volumes to benefit from Bhagwan’s guidance.

**Suggested Listening**

*Creative Visualization* by Shakti Gawain. A tape of affirmations and imagery exercises based on Shakti’s book. Extremely helpful.

*Affirmations For Writers* by Lawrence Block. One hundred affirmations, with background music, on a sixty-minute cassette.

**Ordering Information**

Shakti Gawain’s book and tape are available from Whatever Publishing, P.O. Box 137, Mill Valley, California 94942.

Lawrence Block’s tape is available from Write for Your Life, Suite 226, 95 Horatio Street, New York, New York 10014.

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Looking Ahead

In Lesson Three, we will look at some of the reasons why we block creativity on a deep, unconscious level. This next lesson will be very helpful in enabling us to recognize the “enemy” within, that inner voice of doubt which often stops us from writing a single word.
Lesson Three: The Unseen Inner Enemies

When I was in the ninth grade, I failed algebra. The next year I took the course again, this time with a different instructor, and this time around, I received nothing but perfect scores on all my tests. I ended the year with a 4.0 in my algebra class.

What happened? My own answer is that my second algebra instructor was an infinitely wiser teacher than my first ever could hope to be. My second teacher was very clear, very knowledgeable, had a good rapport with each student, and he knew what made students fail. For him, the enemy that destroyed all possibly good algebra students was a being he called “Mrs. Ruth.”

Mrs. Ruth never existed as a single person in some school room, but she was a fictional composite of all that was bad in a teacher. Mrs. Ruth knew how to destroy a student’s talent, now to frustrate him, belittle him, ignore him, bore him, and so on. Mrs. Ruth was the teacher who looked like a kind old lady on the outside but was a burning fire of hate on the inside. She knew nothing of love, patience, kindness or good will. She loved to put big red X’s on your paper when you made a mistake, and she enjoyed having you stand in front of the class when you said something out of turn. Mrs. Ruth is the old lady who does more to ruin all that is good in a human being than anything else you can think of. And Mrs. Ruth was always given good stuff to work with – young children vulnerable to the insane workings of an old maid. She would take the plastic of their minds and work it into confused, misshapen nothingness.

My second algebra teacher, the one who taught me more about learning than any other teacher I had previously, was successful because he helped his students realize just who Mrs. Ruth was. I found out that my first algebra teacher was a lot like Mrs. Ruth. Frustrated by my inability to learn algebra through her methods, too set in her ways to try some other approach with me, she opted on failing me. That’s exactly what Mrs. Ruth would have done.

By becoming clear about Mrs. Ruth’s traits, I began to learn that I was not at fault for failing algebra. The teacher was at fault. A good professor will try various approaches to convey his material to a student. He or she won’t keep doing the same thing over and over again because his students are not the same. Somehow or other the instructor has to send his message to as many people as possible in as many ways as possible. The teacher who failed me in algebra (the teacher who failed in teaching me algebra) taught algebra one way – strictly by the book. As a result, the students who were good at learning by the book did very well in her class. Those like myself who didn’t tune in to a book, failed.

My learning that Mrs. Ruth was a rotten teacher, and not that I was a rotten student, freed me to go on and really learn algebra. (As I’ve already noted, as a result of my second professor’s instruction I made straight A’s in algebra. I later studied trig with him and did equally well.)

How does all this relate to writing and creativity?
Like this: Just as there are Mrs. Ruth school teachers around spoiling the skills of many great students, there are invisible fictional editors in us who are blocking our writing. Right now, in your mind someplace, there is an editor who is as mean and vicious and unloving as Mrs. Ruth could ever be. Right when you begin to write something, whether it be a poem or a letter to a magazine, your Mr. Editor begins to speak in your inner ear.

Why do you want to write that? He asks you.
That’s a lousy idea!
You’re not a writer!
That’s stupid!
Stop writing and go do the laundry!
You’re spelling everything wrong!

Mr. Editor’s voice comes and says many different things, but the result is usually the same: you stop writing.

If you think about it for a moment, you will realize you have a Mr. Editor inside yourself. Think back to the last time you tried to write anything important. Remember those thoughts you kept telling yourself? Remember arguing in your mind about what you were going to say and how you were going to say it? Who were you arguing with?

It will help our writing to become more acquainted with Mr. Editor. Take a page or two of paper and write a profile of him (or her). Imagine what this person looks like, what he thinks, how he behaves, and write it all down. Write a short biography of your own Mr. Editor right now so you can better understand him later on.

Knowing a few things about your own Mr. Editor will help you identify him. He isn’t all bad, you see. In Lesson Five he will come in handy for helping you edit and revise your work. But right now, in the early stages of any writing you do, his voice of doubt will always try to plug your creative juices. So it helps to get to know him.

Another approach you can use to contact Mr. Editor is to have a dialogue with him. On another page write your name. Beside it ask a question or say something to your Mr. Editor. Then listen or imagine his response and write that down. Keep the conversation going. Try to make a deal with your Mr. Editor. If he tells you to go out and wash the car, tell him you’ll do that IF he lets you write a few pages of uninterrupted material. Or maybe get him to agree to be silent until you have written something, and tell him you will invite him back afterwards to help you with the editing and revision. Do your best to make peace with Mr. Editor. Take a few minutes to do that right now.

There are ways around Mr. Editor, of course. Many writers drink a great deal of alcohol to drown out that inner voice of criticism. You don’t need to do that! Here is an easier way to overcome Mr. Editor:
Since early judgment kills originality (you can’t begin writing anything new if you –
rather, Mr. Editor – keeps doubting it!), one way to beat the voice of doubt is to ignore it.
Just write spontaneously and keep writing and forget all about Mr. Editor and forget all
about what you are writing. Let go and write! When you are finished, when you have
something on paper, then let Mr. Editor talk his head off. I think you will find that Mr.
Editor is much quieter after you have written something than beforehand.

Another method you can play with if Mr. Editor is getting on your nerves and won’t let
you write is this:

Address whatever you are writing to either your mother or your best friend. If you’ve
ever noticed, whenever you write somebody you love and who loves you, creativity
flows. Most of us find writing home pretty easy. But writing an essay – that’s hard! All
you have to do is write “Dear Mom” at the top of the page and the “With all my love…”
sign-off at the bottom, and what you have left is the essay you couldn’t write earlier!

It works every time! Once I had difficulty writing a long book review because my own
Mr. Editor wouldn’t shut his mouth. Finally, I wrote the review as a letter to my spiritual
teacher. After I wrote “Beloved Bhagwan” the rest was easy!

Try it!
Summary and Exercises

Mr. Editor is the enemy of creativity. Knowing his voice and personality will help you identify him and watch out for him. Having an inner dialogue with him may even help you create some sort of peace treaty so he will allow you the freedom to write.

As described earlier in this lesson, write a profile of your own Mr. Editor, and then write (and have) a dialogue with him.

Also, play around with writing something of your choice by first writing it spontaneously, ignoring Mr. Editor’s chatter, and then writing it as a letter to someone you love.

Be playful and witness what you write!

Suggested Reading

*Overcoming Writing Blocks* by Karin Mack and Eric Skjei. Excellent work on the psychology of blocking. Contains many techniques for overcoming creative blocks, as well. Very helpful.

*What We May Be* by Piero Ferrucci. An extremely well-written collection of psychological and spiritual growth techniques taken from psychosynthesis, a psychology and philosophy of self-actualization. In psychosynthesis, it is felt that each has “sub-personalities,” characters within us who often dominate us. The “Mr. Editor” and “Mrs. Ruth” we spoke of in this lesson are sub-personalities. Knowing more about them, and doing the exercises in this excellent book, will help you open to creativity.

Suggested Listening

*Writer’s Hypnosis: Creative Stimulation Programming* by Dick Sutphen. Here Sutphen places you in light hypnosis and gives you suggestions and affirmations to aid your flow of creativity. I have found this tape very helpful and used it before writing this lesson.

Ordering Information

Both books listed above are published by J.P. Tarcher, Inc., 9110 Sunset Blvd., Los Angeles, California 90069.

Dick Sutphen’s tape is available from Valley of the Sun Publishing, Box 38, Malibu, California 90265.
Looking Ahead

In Lesson Four you will learn a half-dozen innovative techniques for helping you write even when you can’t seem to write anything. Playfully subtitled “Ways to Gently Force the Universe to Talk,” Lesson Four will be about six different ways to step through any writing blocks you may still have so that you may soon experience – if you haven’t already – the Zen way to creativity.
Lesson Four: Still Blocked?

Despite everything said in previous lessons, there are going to be times when you will feel like a dry sponge when it comes to ideas. The blank sheet of paper in front of you will remain blank no matter what you do. The block you feel at those times will probably seem to be a boulder. You’ll sit at your desk and doodle and think and try several approaches to writing something that makes sense, but nothing will happen – unless you count increased frustration, disappointment, and rage as “something.” You will no doubt feel, at those times of intellectual poverty, that you haven’t a thing to write about.

Take heart, friend. Whenever you find yourself sweating at the typewriter rather than smiling, stop. Stop and take a deep, long breath…and let it out as you would a heavy sigh…ahhhhhhh.

When you encounter blocks that resist all polite caresses, know that something of immense value is forming deep within you. You can’t write anything because the very thing you need to write isn’t ready yet! It is still cooking. It is still incubating. It is growing and becoming stronger someplace inside you.

And it isn’t ready to come out yet.

Here are a few things you can do in those situations:

“Open-End”

This is a technique to use when you sense there is “something” lurking in you, ready to be set free. You can also use this method to “peek” into the incubation process going on when you have a major project developing within yourself.

“Open-End” is a simple method developed by Peter Elbow (and discussed in his excellent book Writing With Power.) All you do is write for ten minutes straight without stopping or thinking about what you write. It is a writing “free-for-all.” Be spontaneous, open and free, and let go.

Do an “Open-End” right now. Just start writing and don’t stop, no matter what. Write anything and everything you think of, whether it makes sense or not, and do it for ten minutes or so.

GO!

Now re-read your writing. There may be a lot of driftwood and ramblings, but do you notice a dominant theme or idea trying to show its face? If so, consider that theme or idea and write another “Open-End” with it in mind. If you could not locate a central idea trying to get your attention, that’s okay, too. But you still have to write another “Open-End”!
Read-Set-GO!

Good! Now re-read your second writing. Anything of value there? If so, keep it in mind and do yet another “Open-End.” And, if this writing looked as bizarre as the first, don’t be concerned. It doesn’t matter. We’re only doing this for run any, right?

So, do a third “Open-End” now. Let go and write anything and don’t stop for nothing until the ten minutes are up!

Go!

Okay! By now you might see how important and helpful this method can be. With it you can sift for gold, You may write a lot of apparently worthless stuff with this method, but you may also run right into a treasure-chest of ideas. By doing “Open-Ends” you may uncover a story or poem that was hiding just under your awareness. This method is sort of a flashlight to help you look for jewels in the back of your mind!

Clustering

“Clustering” is Dr. Gabriele Lusser Rico’s ingenious technique for bypassing the dominant left brain to allow the right brain freedom to play and create. As in art, your creative talent is in the right hemisphere of the brain, what Rico calls (in her book *Writing the Natural Way*) the “Design” mind. Clustering gives direct access to the Design mind, your unconscious mind. Though you may have no idea where you are headed when you begin to cluster, your Design mind does know. If you keep playing with the word-balloons of clustering you will quickly arrive at a hot subject to write about, and when you reach that live idea your left brain (“Sign” mind to Rico) will jump in to help you express your wisdom.

An example will make this clear. Take a sheet of paper and a pen or pencil and follow Rico’s directions. For the “nucleus word” use any one word topic such as DIET, FEAR, SEX or whatever.

“To create a cluster, you begin with a nucleus word, circled, on a fresh page. Now you simply let go and begin to flow with any current of connections that come into your head. Write these down rapidly, each in its own circle, radiating outward from the center in any direction they want to go. Connect each new word or phrase with a line to the preceding circle. When something new and different strikes you, begin again at the central nucleus and radiate outward until those associations are exhausted.” *

From that clustering session came the following poem:

This is a poem to my wife,
Whom I have loved and
Learned to love more
Whose meditative cat eyes
And golden hair
Have given me love
And romance and beauty
Of a spiritual nature.
I have learned from your
Giving, selfless behavior,
Your total power to give
Without wanting return,
And I have learned from
Your love for all
To love more.
Your sunrays of being
From your inner beautiful light
Have tanned my soul
And made me whole.
Is it any wonder that I
Call you Goddess
The flower of my life?
Manjushri
Goddess Lover
March 6, 1983

I find clustering a brilliant and original technique for temporarily escaping the left brain and visiting the unconscious. The way Rico has designed the method, both halves of the brain get to play in the creative process. The difference is your right brain gets a chance to introduce new ideas to you before the left brain has a chance to step on them.

Clustering is an excellent method for overcoming blocks. All you need to begin is a nucleus word (or sentence). Make up a nucleus word right now, do a cluster and see what happens!

**Focusing**

You have already done focusing. In the “Open-End” section, when you wrote a free-for-all ten minute spurt of writing and then re-read it hunting for a main idea or theme, you were focusing on the main line of your writing. You were seeking a statement in the writing which you could concentrate, or focus, on. If you take six paragraphs and read them, and then boil down the essence of those paragraphs to a single sentence or statement, you will have focused on the main idea or heartbeat of those six paragraphs.

If you do a clustering process six or so times, and then look over the clusters (or the paragraphs you wrote as a result of the clusters) and pick out a single, central statement that seems to have the essence of all six clusters in it, then you will have focused on the central idea or message of those clusters.
When you have a “focusing statement” – the main idea of the writings and clusters you looked over – you then have a powerful sentence to aid your writing.

An example may help:

Take the three “Open-End” writings you did earlier. Read each of them. Place them all in front of you and scan over all three. Do you sense a particular idea or central theme trying to come to life here? If you had to put the essence of all three writings into one sentence, what would that sentence be?

Write out that sentence or that main idea. That is your focusing statement. What you can do now is put that focusing statement at the top of a clean sheet of paper, and then begin to write with it in mind.

Because the focusing statement is the boiled down, fat-free essence of several different writings, it is powerful. It is a loaded sentence. It is a potent magic spell. Because it appeared in several separate paragraphs as the main thought in those paragraphs, it has magic in it. Having it in front of you while you write will keep your creative fire burning. That statement will keep you focused on your topic, and it will feed you ideas and stamina.

Here’s another example:

Do several clusters on the word “love.” After you have three or four sets of cluster-diagrams with the word “love” in the center of each (or use the paragraphs you wrote that resulted from doing the clusters), study all of them and be aware of any dominant theme or idea. Relax and wait for an idea to come to you spurred on by the clusters (or paragraphs) before you. Take a few minutes to do this. Don’t rush the process.

When you catch a main thought, or the essence of all the clusters, put it into words. Write it out as a single sentence.

Now you can either do another cluster with that focusing statement as the circled nucleus, or you can just write that power-packed sentence at the top of a new page and begin to write with it in mind.

You may be surprised to find how much inner power you have when you use a focusing statement. Armed with this kind of magic spell, blocks to writing just melt in your path.

**Improvisation**

Imagine, if you will, a stage. There are two chairs on this stage. In one sits a young television talk show host. This is a kind, popular, inquiring man (or woman, it’s your fantasy), who is known to be receptive, perceptive, witty, and to the point. His (or her) guest today is a famous author of many award winning works of art: you.
Take the seat beside the interviewer. Say hello. Smile. And now participate in a fast-paced, revealing interview. The host will ask you about your latest work. You’ll talk about it. It doesn’t matter if in reality you aren’t writing a check, let alone a book. What does matter is your sincerity in playing this theatrical game. By getting into the role, you might learn something about yourself. You might, in fact, learn that there is a famous book in you waiting to get out. By telling your TV host all about it, you will be telling yourself all about it.

You can play this game in your mind, strictly as a visualization, or you can write it out on paper as it takes place. You are of course playing both parts. Just let go, be spontaneous and write out the dialogue you hear in your mind. Here is a quick example I will do right now to illustrate this game:

INTERVIEWER: Good day, Mr. Rembrandt! I understand your new book is about dwarfs.
FAMOUS AUTHOR: It’s about the sex habits of dwarfs, to be exact. It seems the little people have some big problems when the lights go out.
INTERVIEWER: Oh? Like what?

I think you get the idea.

It doesn’t matter, either, if (as with the short example above) the dialogue you write is useless and unrevealing. What matters is that you write it. By writing this, you loosen yourself up. You free your mental restraints to allow other and better ideas to come your way. With a game like this, you not only free your expressive powers to say anything they want, and you not only get practice in writing, you also have fun!

Go ahead and write a playful, bizarre dialogue between a TV host and yourself. (What can you lose?) Just take pen and paper and begin writing – do it fast, without thinking, and keep it going until you feel it is time to stop. Don’t worry about what you write. Feel free to be stupid, weird or stunning. Entertain yourself!

(This game, by the way, is an adaptation of one presented in Keith Johnstone’s marvelous book Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre, a book I strongly urge you to read. It will teach you much about psychology, creativity and the use of theatre games to stimulate freedom of thought and movement.)

NLP

Another technique for overcoming persistent blocks is from Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), a relatively new discipline which combines psychology and neurophysiology into a powerful behavior model for learning and communication. Because NLP deals with communication, it is an excellent source for strategies in working through writing blocks.)
When you are absolutely blocked and cannot write a word, yet have to write something for a boss, teacher, newspaper deadline or whatever, you can use the following NLP method:

First, think about the subject you are going to write about (use “television viewing” for now). Notice if your ideas about the subject are primarily pictures (images, sights), sounds (voices, dialogue), feelings (emotions, sensations), or mental self-talk (talking to yourself).

Research has shown that each of us tend to place our eyes in a certain position when we think in a particular way. When you think in pictures or images, your eyes look up. When you think about sounds, your eyes look to the side. When you are mentally talking to yourself, your eyes look down and to the left. And when you are thinking about feelings, your eyes will look down and to the right.

Knowing what category your ideas fall into will tell you where to position your eyes later on when and if you encounter difficulty in writing. For example, if you are writing a description (picture), then keeping your eyes up will help you write easily and more creatively about pictures. If you are writing dialogue (sounds), you would want to look to the side to increase your ability at writing for the ear. To write about emotions (feelings), place your eyes down and to the right. The following chart will help:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SOUNDS</td>
<td>eyes to side</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PICTURES</td>
<td>eyes up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEELINGS</td>
<td>eyes down and right*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MENTAL SELF-TALK</td>
<td>eyes down and left*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*reverse if you are left-handed)

Now choose a beginning sentence to start your writing. NLP suggests you literally state the response you want to elicit from your reader. Some sample beginning sentences for our subject might be:

- Television viewing is harmful to children.
- Television viewing is educational.
- This composition is about television viewing.

Write your beginning sentence on a sheet of paper. At the end of that sentence, write one of the following “prompt words”:

- BECAUSE
- BEFORE
- WHILE
- AFTER
- WHENVENEVER
- IN THE SAME WAY THAT
Read your beginning sentence to yourself silently. Then say the prompt word. Now fill in the sentence with whatever comes to mind. By saying the prompt word, you begin a new sentence that itches for completion. Write out your second sentence in response to that prompt word and to complete the new sentence. An example:

Television viewing is educational. BECAUSE it teaches us what is happening in the world.

Just keep adding a prompt word of your choice at the end of every sentence you write. Do that until it becomes difficult to think of another sentence. At this point, you may have a paragraph that looks something like this:

Television viewing is educational. BECAUSE it teaches us what is happening in the world. BECAUSE television can show us programs and people and ideas we may never meet in our lives. AFTER the radio, television is our greatest technological advancement. WHENEVER someone turns on the TV, they turn on the power to grow and learn…

All you have to do now is go back and take out all the prompt words that do not grammatically aid your writing. Without the “connectives,” the above paragraph looks like this:

Television viewing is educational. It teaches us what is happening in the world. Television can show us programs and people and ideas we may never meet in our lives. After the radio, television is our greatest technological advancement. Whenever someone turns on the TV, they turn on the power to grow and learn…

The result of all this is a paragraph of writing where one previously did not exist. To expand this single paragraph into a full page, simply continue repeating the process you used to get you this far: write a new beginning sentence, add a prompt word, finish the sentence, add a prompt word, finish the new sentence, add another prompt word… and so on.

If you get stuck at any one point, place your eyes in the position you earlier decided they need to help you think about your topic. (See chart earlier.) Positioning your eyes to elicit a certain mental response will help you move through any blocks you may encounter.

When you are finished writing, go back and remove all the connectives or prompt words that do not make grammatical sense.

You now have a completed work on the subject of “television viewing!”

Though NLP may appear difficult and confusing at first, it is actually a brilliant and fun way to play with creativity. Take a subject of your choice and use the NLP methods described to write a page or two about it. And, above all, have fun!
Tune In Tomorrow

That’s the last technique offered here as a way to force the universe into talking when you seem blocked with lead: *accept* your being blocked.

Let go of your desire to write anything today and go for a walk or see a movie. Do something else! Tune in tomorrow and see if your baby is ready to be born then. If it isn’t, don’t worry about it. You don’t want your special idea brought to life before its time, do you? Relax and let go. When the time is right, your inner child will kick to be born!

Summary and Exercises

There are many ways available to aid removal of writing blocks, but sometimes the best thing to do is nothing at all. The trick is in knowing when you have something hiding in you, or when you have something *growing* in you. Any of the techniques given in this lesson will help you glimpse into your center of creativity without killing whatever may be growing there. If, after using these methods, you still feel blocked – then given in. Let go of your urge and tune in tomorrow!

Re-read the sections which appealed to you most and do all the exercises given. If you want, invent other exercises to give you further experience in the method(s) you like best.

Suggested Reading

*Writing the Natural Way* by Gabriele Lusser Rico. If you only read one book this year, let it be this one. I cannot recommend this highly enough. It is brilliant, clear, enjoyable, original, therapeutic, wise, well written, informative and enlightening. It is also a masterpiece. For me, it is the best book to ever be published on writing. Don’t miss it!

*Writing the Natural Way, copyright 1983. Gabriele Lusser Rico. Used by permission.*

*Applications of Neuro-Linguistic Programming* by Robert Dilts. The section on NLP in this lesson is only a small slice of the many different strategies available. (There are even computerized NLP strategies to help you create your own stories!) For more information, read this well written book. So you know, only one essay in this volume is about the use of NLP in writing; other chapters are about the application of NLP in Business, Sales, Therapy, Philosophy, Education and Health. All are worth reading, however.

Ordering Information

Dr. Rico’s book is published by J.P. Tarcher, 9110 Sunset Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90069

Robert Dilts’ book and other NLP material are available from Meta Publications, P.O. Box 565, Cupertino, CA 95014
Looking Ahead

In Lesson Five we will answer the question, “Right or Re-Write?”

There we will learn several helpful ways to examine and, if necessary, repair our writing. It is a much overlooked necessity in good writing: the ability to edit and revise your own work.

A famous writer (I don’t recall who) once said that there were no great writers in the world, only great re-writers!

See you at Lesson Five!
Lesson Five: Right or Re-Write?
The Zen Approach to Editing

Congratulations! If you’ve reached this far it means you have managed to write something, or even many somethings! Very good! Without writing something, whether it be good or bad, you aren’t a writer. And without any writing you can’t do this next lesson!

Now that you have some writing before you, you are bound to wonder if any of it is any good. It’s a fairly simple question to answer, and you can answer it for yourself. Just read your writing and honestly say whether you like it or not. If you don’t enjoy it, most likely few others will. And if you don’t like your writing, then you need to do some rewriting.

Please don’t be adverse to revision. It is part of writing. Seldom does a work come out perfect or totally acceptable. It may seem flawless as you write it or as you first read it, but a day later you may want to pitch it in the trash.

Rewriting is actually part of the creative process. Most great writers were in fact great rewriters. Even the king of spontaneity, William Blake, rewrote his material. He claimed he was “Secretary” to his poems, that the authors were in “eternity.” Yet he did much revising, altering and deleting.

Walk Whitman, voice for the spirit of man, rewrote nine-tenths of Leaves of Grass. Ernest Hemingway rewrote passages of his books dozens of times. Vladimir Nabokov rewrote every word he ever published several times. Tolstoy said he could not read his writing without wanting to rewrite it – even if the word were already published! He always found room for improvement.

D.N. Perkins, in The Mind’s Best Work, shows that even admired poems like Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan,” which was thought to be written spontaneously in one sitting, was actually created over a period of years.

Perkins also shows that Edgar Allen Poe did not create “The Raven” in one easy week, as was originally thought. Poe labored over the famous verse for two years. At one time, the bird in the poem was to be a parrot, then an owl!

Rewriting, then, is not a shameful, necessary duty to repair bad writing. Rewriting is a way to polish the gems already given, a method to clean the dust off and round the edges of your literary emeralds.

Even a huge diamond or other jewel found underground has to be treated, cleaned, polished, cut and set.

It is the same with your writing. Something has come through you and to you from the beyond. Whether you call the beyond God, Tao, Zen, your unconscious, subconscious or
simply your right brain, your writing has come from your own underground mine – and now it needs your careful attention to help it shine and please the eye.

Rewriting is your chance to transform your dusty jewel into a priceless work of art!

Suggestions for Rewriting

1. **Rewrite it.** That is, take your pen or pencil and do the whole thing over. Copy it word for word (changing the words you don’t like) onto fresh, clean paper. Make a clear copy of what may be a mess. When you can see your work clearly, you can see errors clearly.

2. **Type it.** Similar to the above suggestion, typing helps make your errors glare. Besides, a typewriter copy is much easier to read. The problem with typing is sometimes you think a typewritten manuscript is like carving in stone; you don’t want to alter it or feel you can’t. Don’t get attached to type. It can be torn, marked, and shredded as easily as any handwritten copy.

3. **Forget it.** Put your writing aside for a day or two. A couple of weeks if possible. Look at it later, when you are refreshed and detached. You will be surprised at how helpful this process can be. Your mind will continue to work on the writing even while you are away from it. When you return, everything will seem to easily “fall into place.” You will read your stuff and somehow manage to change and arrange it in the best way possible.

4. **Invite Mr. Editor Back.** Remember Mr. Editor of Lesson Three? Back then, in the early stages of creative writing, Mr. Editor was a harmful pest. But now that you have some writing done, Mr. Editor can be a blessing. Read your writing and let the doubting half of you point out all the mistakes he sees. But please don’t let him rip and slice at your beloved work. What you want is constructive criticism. Read and listen to his comments. Then you – you are not Mr. Editor, remember; he is only a part of you – then you have the choice to follow his advice or say, “Thanks, but I prefer to leave things as they are.”

5. **Read it out loud.** Read the whole thing out loud. Be aware of your voice and speed. Bring your ears into play. If you slow down, stumble, stutter or have to repeat yourself, mark the page! Your vocal changes indicate something in the writing isn’t flowing. You can also read your piece into a tape recorder. When you play it back, listen for those voice changes mentioned above: long pauses, repetitions and so on. These reveal places where your writing may need work.

6. **Read and ask questions.** Read your writing several times and ask lots of questions.

   Does the writing flow? Do you have to stop and re-read anything? If so, why? Maybe it needs to be revised.
Does your attention wander off? If you get bored with your own writing – *anyplace* in your writing – you will certainly bore your reader.

How does it feel to you? Be aware of your senses. Does reading your poem or prose make you feel good? If you feel the writing needs work in a certain area, then it probably does.

Does the piece look good to you? Are you comfortable with what you see? If not, where do you see some work that needs to be done?

Does your writing breathe? Does it seem alive? Does it pulsate with energy? If not, maybe you need to revise or rewrite it. (If your writing seems somewhat “dead,” try suggestion #10 below.)

7. *Consider the reader.* If you know who your readers are to be, pretend you are them and read your stuff again with them in mind. You wouldn’t write for *Reader’s Digest* the same way you wrote for *Playboy*. Readers are different. Ask yourself who your writing is for, and then ask yourself if your writing will be clear and appealing to that type of reader. (Still, you should always write for an audience of one: yourself.)

8. *Get feedback.* Have someone read your work or read it to them. Pay attention to their responses. Listen for the comments that may help. Don’t worry if they hate or can’t understand your writing. You can’t please everybody. Be careful of the person who goes on an ego trip and plays “Expert.” He or she may think everything spoken is a rule, where the truth is he or she is only giving an opinion. If your readers or listeners get rough with you, ask him what he *liked* in your writing. What does he think you do best? What part did he like best? Knowing what you do best is good feedback, too, and will help get a heavy critic off your back.

No matter what your reader or listener said about your writing, say “thank you” for it. Then either use his advice or don’t use it – but don’t argue about it with him or with anyone else! Revision is a matter of opinion. If you have three editors read your stuff, chances are you’ll get three different ideas and suggestions for rewriting. Just listen to what’s said, and choose to follow the advice that *you* feel is most helpful.

9. *Cut-up.* If you seem lost in a maze of paragraphs and ideas in your writing, take a pair of scissors and cut-out each paragraph. Make a pile of paragraphs and then deal them out, making a new pile of paragraphs about the idea or subject “A” in one stack, all paragraphs about “B” in another stack, and so on until you have dealt out all the paragraphs.
Now take stack “A” and arrange all the paragraphs in order of importance, the top being the most important paragraph and the last being the least important. Do the same for all your other stacks.

Next, choose your most important idea-stack (either “A” or “B,” or....) from the various stacks before you. Then choose the next important idea-stack, then the next, and so on until you have decided on the logical order of all the stacks.

Take the stack you chose as the most important and begin to copy, on another page the paragraph the paragraph at the top of that stack. When you have that paragraph copied, put it out of your way and copy the next paragraph. Go through the stack. When that stack is completed, go to the next stack (the one you chose as “second most important” in your writing) and begin again… Do this until all the stacks have been copied and you are left with a new, rearranged work.

This process is perfect for nonfiction writing where many ideas are presented. It helps you organize your thoughts in the most acceptable, logical way.

One way to do this without scissors is to write each paragraph on your article on a separate index card. After your writing is recorded on all the cards, rearrange the cards until you are comfortable with their order. You can experiment with many arrangements this way. Once you have the cards the way you want them, write your article over, using your index cards to help guide you.

10. **Focus and cluster.** If, at some time, a writing seems lost and beyond repair, do a cluster on it. Focus on the piece and write down the focusing statement that best describes the essence of the article, story or poem before you. Use that focusing statement as your nucleus and do a clustering process. The cluster will help you into a new territory and you may well find that what you write as a result will be more alive and energetic.

Note, too, that what you first wrote – what you felt was lost and beyond repair – was necessary in order to reach – new, higher and more original ground. Without your first writing effort the second would never be possible. So don’t think you failed when you write something that needs extensive revision. What you did was break the ice. Your first writing, though maybe not acceptable as it is, has paved the way for better writing!

11. **Experiment.** If you aren’t sure how to rewrite your stuff, experiment. Play with it. Move paragraphs around. Try creating different sentences that say what you want to say. Play with different words. Use a thesaurus or synonym finder, and use it not to find bigger and more impressive words – you’ll just make your writing harder to read – but to find words that more simply and accurately convey your meaning.
12. **Grammar.** Questions about usage and grammar? Check *The Gregg Reference Manual*. I’ve found it to be the best and most helpful guide. There are others available, however, so look around.

13. **Simplicity!** In my opinion, this one word sums up revision: simplify. Take out all your deadwood, all your extra, needless words and phrases. Trim the fat from your writing. Rewrite your stuff again and again until it says what you want it to say in the simplest way possible.

14. **Stop.** Know when to stop. “Perfection” is relative. Writing that seems perfect to me may seem sickening to you. Do what you can with your work to make it the best you can. Then let go. Release what you wrote, give thanks for it, and begin the process again by writing something new…

### The Zen Secret of Rewriting

Remember, though rewriting is an important part of the creative process, it belongs at the back of the process, not at the head of the line. Too many of us have been taught to watch our grammar, usage, spelling and so forth, when we begin to write. That is the best way to block any writing from happening. To write easily and effortlessly, creatively and originally, first forget all about grammar, usage, spelling and so forth. Just write! Later, after you have words on paper, bring in your editorial skills to help clean up what you wrote.

If you sit at your desk armed with rules of grammar and ready to strike the first word you write, it will be like praying for God to speak while ready to fire a gun at the first sound you hear. It makes much more sense to relax… Creativity won’t come to those who fire shots at her.

Later, after the muse has visited you, gently read and revise your work. Even then you won’t need the heavy artillery. If a word or phrase seems inappropriate, put a line through it, erase it or change it. You don’t need to hack and saw at your work. Have some respect for it!

### Summary and Exercises

Rewriting seems to be based on an internal, unconscious set of ideals. When you read, you “sense” something is wrong with a paragraph or a sentence or a word. You cannot have this inner radar for incomplete writing unless you put it in yourself.

One excellent way to do this is to read and re-read the much admired classic, *The Elements of Style*, by William Strunk and E.B. White. It is a tiny masterpiece that will go a long way in aiding your rewriting (as well as writing) skills.

Another way to help train yourself to recognize excellent writing is to read excellent writers. Read the best the world has given us. Read the ancients and the moderns. Read
Thoreau, Twain and Harold Robbins. Read Tolstoy, Montaigne and Kurt Vonnegut. Read as much as possible of a variety of authors and subjects as reading will teach you how words are used as well as misused.

Learn to write your own work. Use the suggestions given in this lesson to polish and redress your stuff. Take what the beyond has given you and transform it with the cleansing rite known as “Rewriting.”

Suggested Reading

*The Elements of Style* by William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White. (MacMillian Publishing.) Buy it and read it!


*The Lifetime Reference Manual* by Clifton Fadiman. (Crowell.) A stimulating guide to over 100 books and authors. This book will get you reading other books – guaranteed!
Looking Ahead

Now that you have a work of polished beauty and originality, what do you do with it?

In Lesson Six we’ll look at some of your opinions, and we’ll learn the guidelines for submitting work for publication. The next lesson will help you find a loving home for your creative writing.
Lesson Six: Now What?

Somewhere near you is a completed work of art which has come through you from the universe (or from wherever you feel creativity comes from), which you have recorded, revised, edited and polished. You have read and re-read it several times. It is, as far as you are concerned, as perfect as possible.

Now that you have it, what are you going to do with it?

In this lesson we will look at some of your options. You will probably think of many other things you can do with your work besides the suggestions given here. If so, good for you! Write and share them with me sometime so I can pass the word to others. For now, let’s look at the avenues offered in this lesson.

Type It

The first thing you should do with any of your finished work is type it. If you cannot type, either learn how or hire someone to do your typing. There is something incomplete about a writing that remains in ink or pencil. Complete your work by typing your final drafts. Whoever reads your stuff will be immensely thankful. After all, do you like to read handwritten stories?

Also, if you are thinking of having your work published, your material must be typewritten. Editors will not accept manuscripts that aren’t typed nice and neat.

In short: Learn to type everything you write. Type them double-spaced, one-inch margins all around the page, on only one side of the page (use regular typing paper, too, not onion skin or anything else), and use either pica or elite type. You will be glad you did.
Gifts

Emerson said the greatest gift we could possibly give is a gift of one’s self.

I totally agree. When I was in college and broke – as all university students seem to be – I wrote my parents an essay about them for their wedding anniversary. Though a pen or a television set might have made more conventional gifts, my essay touched their hearts. Not only did they love it, they chose to share it by reading it to other family members, and even to our neighbors.

It was a gift created for them, directly from my heart, which went straight to their hearts. Though it has been nearly ten years since I wrote that essay, my parents still remember it.

* * * *

In December of 1982, I sat down at my desk and spontaneously write a short story titled “Merry Christmas, Santa! A True Story.” It was a delight to read (if I may say so myself), so I made copies of it and gave it to my friends. I gave the original to my wife. Not only was the story read and loved, it was also shared. Parents read it to their children. My landlady read it to her Sunday school class. And my wife loved it more than any other gift Santa brought her that Christmas.

Giving your creative jewels away is a wonderful way to share love, beauty, truth and bliss. After all, the universe (or whatever) gave the gift to you free of charge. It seems only right to give the gift back to the universe by sharing it with loved ones. Try it! The next time you want to send someone a gift, choose one of your finished writings and send it to your friend instead. Or better yet – write something specifically for your friend! Maybe do a cluster with the nucleus word being your friend’s name, or maybe write him or her a deep, loving letter expressing whatever you feel or want to say in poetry or prose!

Send someone a gift of love today!

Treasures

You can put your work in nice, neat, cleverly labeled or decorated folders and save then as part of your family treasure. Some people save photographs. Every now and then they pull them out and gaze at them and remember…

With writing you can do the very same thing. Can you imagine what it would be like to read your father’s description of his youthful days in the depression? Descriptions that he wrote while a boy in the 1920s and 1930s? The idea is staggering. So many of us grow up not knowing who our parents are or were. Written documents, poems, stories, diaries and so on would be of great aid in helping us know one another.
Consider saving your creative output for your family. Keep a copy of everything you write and place it where you put your other valuable papers. Who knows, maybe ten, twenty or fifty years from now a grandson will get curious about you, dig out those yellowed papers and begin to find out who you were.

Why not take the time to write that unborn grandson a letter right now? Tell him what you think and feel, address it to him (or her), and file it with your belongings so he’ll be sure to find it decades from now.

This exercise can be an interesting experiment for you. You may learn a lot about how you think, and what you feel the future holds for you, when you begin to write your unborn grandson a letter. Do it now and see.

**Therapy**

Writing is therapy because it helps you release stored ideas, emotions and frustrations. It also helps you open to the energy flow that is always trying to circulate in your body, and it helps you tune into your own ideas and feelings about yourself.

Saving your writings and re-reading them now and then is good therapy too because it helps you understand who you are. It helps you keep a record of your own growth and of the changes that occur in your life.

I am not speaking only about diaries and nonfiction writing, though they obviously give you direct information about yourself. When I say your writing monitors your growth, I am including everything you can possibly write – poems, plays, stories, songs, essays, letters and anything else you can think of. It can be used to teach you about yourself.

Five years ago, my writings were full of violence, depression and anger. A novel I wrote back then (which remains unpublished, thank goodness), was about an unbalanced youth who got into fights, drugs, crime and rape. Two years later, I changed and so did my writing. My own inner essence had transformed and now I am writing things much more peaceful. The change in my writing is evident, even when what I was writing before and after my transformation was primarily fictional. (It is interesting to note that once I and my writings went from violence to peace, everything I wrote from then on began to get published and more widely read.)

Dorothea Brande in *Becoming A Writer* has written, “If you can discover what you are like, if you can discover what you truly believe about most of the major matters of life, you will be able to write a story which is honest and original and unique.”

Re-reading your work will help you know yourself and, as this process deepens, your writing will become better and brighter, clearer, more original and more you.

Henry Miller wrote, “Writing, like life itself, is a voyage of discovery.”
Write to discover what you write. Read what you write to discover who you are.

Nothing

“Nothing” means you don’t have to do anything at all with your writing if you don’t want to. In short, you can choose to do nothing.

Writing to write is beautiful. It means you put pen to paper only because you enjoy it. For whatever the reason, you receive great satisfaction from the energy-play known as writing. You write simply to write and to Mars with the results!

Doing that is fine. The act of writing is a process, like life, which probably never ends. Just because I write “The End” at the bottom of one story doesn’t mean another story will not begin. I will write again. The writing continues. It goes on and on and on and…

A rose blooms simply to bloom. It does not seek lovers of roses to smell its aroma. The sun rises because it rises. It does not seek sun worshippers to make it feel complete. Likewise, a writer can write simply to write. It is not absolutely necessary that your work be read.

Writing itself can be enough.

Publication

Having your work published is not all that important. When you think about it (or when I think about it), there is probably only one reason to seek publication – to enable more people to read what you wrote.

There isn’t much money in writing. Rates for published articles and stories haven’t changed in decades. Most professional writers are only professional part-time. They usually have a second and more lucrative job (or a spouse) supporting them. Out of the authors you know or read about, only a tiny fraction live wealthy lives.

There isn’t much, if any, fame in writing either. Only a very few writers get media attention. The rest live relatively quiet lives. The only time an author’s name gets in the paper is when he has a book published. People usually don’t pay attention to the author of a book, play or movie. They are more interested in the experience the author has provided them (and rightly so).

There is also a great deal of competition in seeking publication. Writer’s Digest magazine, for instance, has a paid circulation of 200,000 and an estimated readership of 400,000. It also has a book club, which deals entirely with books for and about writers. Clearly, there is a large segment of the population out there writing and hoping to be published.
None of this is being given to persuade you into forgetting about publication, however. Being published is an excellent way to reach people, it usually does pay something, if not much, and there is usually some sort of recognition. And despite the odds, new writers get published all the time. It isn’t as bleak a picture as it may first seem to be.

The problem with seeking publication is that too many writes seek it to a point where it becomes an obsession. They become unbalanced. They see the printed page as the goal and they forget all other possibilities. When that happens, when all you want is to be a published writer – no matter what – then you have limited yourself. You have created a box and put yourself in it. In a sense, you have cut off your own freedom.

Publication is nice, but so is giving gifts, or creating family treasures, or even doing nothing at all. When all you want is publication, all you will get is frustration, disappointment and great misery. And when (and if) you achieve your goal, you will find it profoundly disappointing. It won’t be enough for you. You will seek higher, more highly regarded, published recognition, awards and prizes.

You will, in essence, never be satisfied. As long as you limit your options to publication, you will continue to miss the other joys you can have with your written work.

**Intuition**

Whenever you are finished with a work and are ready to find a home for it, try doing nothing at all with it. Let go of any hopes or desires you may have for your writing. Wait and see if your intuition will tell you something. Since your creative effort has come to you from someplace beyond the rational mind, give that same source a chance to tell you what to do with your work. Sit in silence for a few moments and notice if you receive an idea, or an impression, or a strong feeling as to how to handle your writing. Consider any guidance you receive, and then decide what to do with your work.

…guidelines for submitting your work to editors, as well as 4,000 places to market what you have written. Other sources you should check out are *The Literary Market Place*, which your library should have in its reference section, and *The Writer’s Handbook* (published by The Writer, Inc.), a 900 page collection of essays by best-selling authors along with many chapters of practical advice and a listing of over 2,000 markets.

**The Nature of Rejection**

Before we go any further, I would like to say something about rejections.

*All* writers who seek publication receive rejection slips. The important thing is to know that a rejection is nothing personal. All an editor has seen when he decides to send a rejection slip is your writing, not you. You are not your writing. It may seem ridiculous to have to say that, but too many writers (myself included) get attached to their work and
feel a rejection of that work is a rejection of themselves. That is not at all true. Burn your latest short story and you will not melt. Stick pins in a book by Norman Mailer and he won’t feel a thing.

An editor sends a rejection for many reasons, but never (unless you know him personally and he can’t stand you) for personal reasons. Maybe the writing you sent him isn’t for that magazine. Maybe he just bought another article on the same subject. Maybe your work arrived at the wrong time of year. Maybe the editor is blind to the value in your work. Maybe the editor was on vacation and the person who sent the rejection was some rookie who was too unsure of himself to publish your work.

Whatever the case, a rejection isn’t a personal thing. Forget about it and move on. Keep sending your work out if you feel to do so. Who knows what will happen? Richard Bach’s famous bestseller, *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* was rejected something like fifteen times before it received publication – by the very same publisher who was the first to reject it!

**The Zen Truth**

You can never tell what will happen when you send your work out. It is similar to sending a note in a bottle from an isolated island. Hard to say where it will land. Years ago I wrote a one-act play and sent it to several theaters. Producers like it but no one produced it. After a certain point, I quit submitting the play, forgot all about it and began other projects. A year or so later a theater director in Houston called me. He had found my play in a stack of old manuscripts in the back of an abandoned theater. He read it, loved it and ended up producing it for an appreciative and enthusiastic audience in 1979!

Another time, after I had stopped circulating an essay on William Saroyan (my favorite writer) to magazines, I had the hunch to send it to a publication which had rejected it a year earlier. I couldn’t explain the feeling. I just knew on a deep, heart-felt level that I was to do this. I did, and the essay was promptly accepted by the magazine and later published.

Seeking publication is a chancy business. It demands knowledge of markets, and trust in intuition. When you allow your inner guidance to direct you, you give in to an energy higher than your own. It is like allowing the same creative juices that helped you write a chance to help you find a home for what you wrote. When you surrender to your intuition, you give away much of the disappointment, frustration and misery competitive writers usually suffer from. You are saying, in essence, that you are open to whatever is right for your work, whatever that might be.

Your writing is not you, and your writing is not yours. There is no need to be attached to an outcome or to demand publication for your stuff. Be playful, loose and relaxed, and allow your work to find its own home. Intuition will guide you if you allow it. All you have to do is get out of the way. You can’t force inner guidance to talk. You can only become silent and still, and listen…
Self-Publication

You can publish your own writing by either going to a copier, copying every page and then stapling it all together, or you can pay a printer to do the whole thing as a nice, neat professional job.

This is a viable alternative. Countless writers find homes for their work this way. What you need is money, time and patience.

Money to pay for the costs of printing your work and to pay for the advertising of it.

Time to check into all the items necessary to publishing your own stuff: advertising, budget, taxes, printers, etc.

Patience because the whole effort to self-publish your work may take time. Not so much time is needed to publish your work, as some printers can put out a small book in less than thirty days, but time is needed to sell your booklets. What happens to many writers who publish their own material (including self-published author Henry David Thoreau), is that all the copies end up in a spare room. If you don’t have an outlet for all the copies you make, be prepared to warehouse your work in boxes someplace.

If you feel strongly about publishing your own work, then self-publication may be a means to an end for you.

Summary and Exercises

There are many alternatives to choose from when looking for a home for your writing. Whether you self-publish your work, give it away as gifts, use it for therapeutic reasons or send it out hunting for publications, the important thing is to not become obsessed with any one approach. Be flexible. Learn to let go and allow your work to find its own home.

Tune in to your intuition and trust the guidance you receive. Practice sitting in silence and waiting for “something” within you to guide your hand. Learn the difference between your mind’s voice and your intuition’s voice. Realize that thoughts, ideas and images that seem to come from in your head are usually suggestions from your mind. Feelings, images and ideas that seem to “bubble up” from deep within you, that seem to generate deep inside your stomach, are usually suggestions from your intuition.

Only experience will help you tin-in intuition and tune-out “ego” thoughts. There is nothing wrong with ego-thoughts, by the way. It’s just that the focus here is on tuning in to the creative energy of the universe, and to do that you need to listen to your intuition, the voice of creativity.

When you listen to your own inner guidance, you merge with the same force that helped you create something from nothing way back in Lesson One. Listening to that voice,
learning to tap the flow of creativity in the universe, is the “Zen,” the title this entire course refers to.

**Suggested Reading**


*Writing for the joy of It* by Leonard L. Knott. (Writer’s digest books, 1983) Alternatives to writing for publications are given in this book.

*The Intuitive Edge: Understanding and Developing Intuition* by Philip Goldberg. (J.P. Tarcher, 1983) Theory and practice to help develop your intuition, that sense needed to tune in to the creative energy of the universe.

**Suggested Listening**

*Shadowdance*, an album of beautiful music by the group Shadowfax. (Windham Hill Records, 1983) Very helpful in relaxing your body/mind and experiencing inner peace. When you are relaxed, intuition can more easily visit you.
Looking Ahead

In Lesson Seven we will take care of “Unfinished Business.” Everything we did not cover in the previous sections – like plotting, agents and word processors – will be looked at in the next and final chapter.

See you then!
Lesson Seven: Unfinished Business

This book has been aimed at offering you a Zen-like approach to creativity, a method of writing that works only when you relax and let go of your overpowering urge to write. This book is probably going to help you the most either when you first begin to write something or after you begin and suddenly find yourself blocked and unable to continue. The material covered is designed to help you get in touch with your creative flow, your innate ability to write easily and effortlessly.

I haven’t spoken about some of the more ordinary topics concerning writing because I didn’t feel it was appropriate for this book. After some reflection however, I feel it may be helpful to say something about some of those subjects at this time.

So, here goes:

Style

Your style of writing is how you use words. One writer may describe a scene one way, another writer may do it in an entirely different manner. The scene each describes is the same, but because the writers are individuals with different perceptions, their styles differ and the scene gets described differently.

Since you are obviously an individual, you already have a style of writing. If you want to enrich your particular style, read as many different writers as you possibly can. Study the way a writer writes. Take a page of your favorite writer’s prose and copy it word for word, then use your feel for that writer’s style and write something. Many satires and parodies are done this way.

The precaution I have about this is that when you love a writer, you lose yourself and become more like him. You begin to write like him (or her) and lose your own natural voice, your own natural style or manner of writing. If tonight you read a novel by Mark Twain and felt it to be great writing, chances are your next writing will sound a lot like Mark Twain. Not that writing like Twain is bad, mind you. It’s just that you should be yourself. You are unique (as was Mark), and your style is unique. Let your style shine forth in the gifts you write for mankind.

Style isn’t anything you need to develop or obtain. You already have it. As you live and grow and continue to write, your style will also live and grow and change. It happens naturally. Some people call it “finding your voice.” Sometimes you see it in the middle of a written work, where a writer suddenly seems to find his style, and settle into a good groove. Then his work flows rhythmically along, like a gentle stream through a forest.

Guard against the tendency to want to write “fancy” or “high class.” Many writers, especially beginners, feel they have to impress people with their knowledge of big words and complicated sentences. Don’t do it. This isn’t you. It’s some distorted image of what you may think a “writer” should be.
Write simply, and your style will rise and flow from within you.

Ideas

About fifteen years ago, when I first began to consider myself a writer, I would sit and fret about ideas. Where do ideas come from? I wondered. How can I find a great idea I can write about? Where are ideas kept?

I now feel that ideas are floating around in the atmosphere in incredible abundance. All I have to do is choose what I want.

Ideas are similar to great discoveries. Gravity has always been here. All Newton did was see it. Things did not float around before Newton experienced the apple’s Zen-wack. All Newton did was discover – or uncover – what has been here since the beginning of time.

Ideas are the same. They are everywhere. All you have to do is open your eyes and see the fruits that await your picking.

Trust your inner guidance. Do you have an urge to write something in particular? Is there a subject that interests you? Is there a burning question you have that can be answered by intense research? Answer these questions and you may discover a topic you can write about.

If you are still unsure of an idea, do a few clustering sessions on the word “writing,” or on “ideas.” Or just pick a topic – say “sex” – and cluster that. Play with it and see what happens.

Or simply do a few “Open-End” writings. It would be good practice, would help open your creative channels, and it may reveal to you unconscious ideas or directions your writing can take.

The creative source within you has already chosen the ideas it feels are best for you. You may not be aware of those ideas, so clustering and spontaneous writing exercises help you get in touch with them. Rather than being limited, your inner source is limit/less. It is infinite.

Most of all, don’t worry about ideas – or anything else! If you are a writer, then write! Write spontaneous free-writings until you hit upon an idea that sets your heart afame. When your passions are high and your energy sours, thoughts of markets and money and ideas and so forth are of little concern. You are too busy having fun writing!

Agents

My opinion is that agents are of little value to you until you have repeatedly gone through the process of creating, writing, editing marketing and selling your work. You can use the
experience an agent might take away from you. Besides that, most reputable agents will
not take on a new client until the writer has been published nationally several times, has
had a book published, and/or is now making a living entirely from writing.

Though an agent could certainly make the job of placing your work easier – you could sit
back and relax and work on other things while your agent acted as a salesperson for your
material – still, that situation is probably not ideal for a beginning writer. It is probably
best to obtain as much experience as possible in the writing world by doing everything
yourself and learning from what you do. Later, when your work is well known and more
widely published, agents will seek you.

I also realize you may be one of those writers who feels a need for an agent now. That’s
fine too. To be sure you pick a good one, trust your intuition and read through the listing
of agents contained in Writer’s Market.

Agents can be of great service to a prolific author – and all they ask is ten percent (or
fifteen percent) of each sale they make for you. Be careful if an agent calls himself a
“consultant” or if he wants you to sign a contract, or if he speaks of “marketing fees.”
Those are danger signals.

The Society of Author’s Representatives (Box 650, Old Chelsea Station, New York, NY
10113) will send you a free pamphlet, “The Literary Agent,” if you send a self-addressed,
stamped #10 size envelope (SASE). The booklet will help explain the role of an agent, as
well as how to get an agent.

Plots and Characters

Plotting and character developing does not have to follow a logical or chronological
system. You do not have to sit down and “plot out” a story or novel. You do not have to
outline or organize your ideas for them to work. You do not have to work on the
biography of each character to make him live and breathe. Those techniques are certainly
effective and helpful, and if you enjoy them, then do them. But the approach her is on
learning a Zen way of expressing ideas by “going with the flow.”

Instead of fighting for ideas or struggling to plot a story, or working to build a character,
why not let it all develop within yourself?

Why not play with some of the techniques in this book and see where you go? You may
suddenly develop a story – or begin a novel – that will lead you to places you never could
have guessed. Outlines and plotting are useful, but so is not outlining or plotting. The Zen
way of creativity is a way of letting your plot and characters develop by themselves,
within you, almost entirely without your conscious aid.

You may have a lot of resistance or skepticism to this idea so I suggest you try this
experiment:
Without any preconceived ideas, sit down at your desk and begin to write. Write anything. Just keep writing until something seems to emerge. At some point, a shape or form or idea will begin to appear like a kitten you didn’t know was in the room who suddenly peeks over a basket. Maybe you’ll move into a poem. Or some dialogue. Or a description. But *something* will happen.

Do two or three of these spontaneous, carefree yet intense writing sessions. Preferably all in a row. Then look them over. Do you detect some sort of direction? Do you sense an idea? Is a thought or story line or character showing up?

Chances are you will have uncovered an inner treasure and are now ready to proceed with more writing. When this happens – when you keep doing free-form writings until you touch a plot or character or theme of some sort – at that moment, you tap into a type of underground or unconscious stream of ideas and suddenly your writing begins to write itself! You don’t have to worry about plots or characters, you simply record what pours forth from your mind – and it all happens easily and effortlessly, without trying or forcing it.

E.B. White has said, “I always write a thing first and think about it afterward, which is not a bad procedure, because the easiest way to have consequential thoughts is to start putting them down.”

Later, after the well has temporarily run dry and you have recorded everything on paper, you can go back and edit, apply logic, outline and so on to be sure what you have written makes complete sense.

So – in the Zen way to creativity – plotting isn’t necessary. It happens as easily as the sun rises.

**Word Processors**

A lot of people think that technology is the enemy of human life. On the contrary, science and technology can greatly enrich our lives. It can aid us in what we do as well as relieve us from mundane chores so we can do more of the things we truly enjoy.

A word processor is a gift from technology to you. With it, your life can be greatly simplified and all the more rewarding. Basically, a word processor is a computerized typewriter. You type your material on keys that are similar to those in a typewriter, and you view a TV-like screen to watch what you type. You can easily delete paragraphs, change words, alter whole pages, rearrange lines and so forth, by touching a few keys. Since your work remains on a disk, you can always store it in a box and come back to it later – no pages to fool with, no pencils to sharpen, no ink to scratch through and no typewriter ribbons to change!
When you are finished typing your material on the computer, and are satisfied with your editing, you can run a program like “Word Plus” and all your spelling errors will be caught!

Then, when you are completely through with the checking of your work – which you do by viewing the screen and pressing buttons – you can press one more button and your manuscript will be typed on a printer perfectly. Just looking at a finished manuscript, typed by a printer, will make you love your work. Think how it must impress editors. If you need other copies, all you have to do is hit a button and the manuscript will be printed again – and it will be another original, not a Xerox copy.

Obviously word processors have a lot to offer. If you can afford them, if you can afford the electricity to run them and if you are willing to let go of your typewriter, then a word processor is for you. You cannot cluster on word processors, but you can certainly write and store and print out a lot of manuscripts in a short period of time.

Technology is here to supplement and enrich your existence. Besides all the other wonderful gifts it has given you, it has now made an invention in the word processor that can delight the lives of writers everywhere.

Still, if you are one of those who prefer pen and paper to typewriter, or typewriter to word processor, then by all means continue with your preference. All I suggest is that you find someone with a word processor to type your final drafts. The finished original will look beautiful and impressive and will show respect for your work.

If you do use a word processor, be absolutely sure to get a printer with a “daisy wheel.” Printers of the dot matrix type are very fast, but each letter is composed of a collection of dots. Printing of this type is hard on the eyes and difficult to read. Some editors and publishers will automatically reject anything printed in the dot matrix format.

Daisy wheel printers, on the other hand, are much slower, although they cost about the same. But they do produce the beautiful copy I mentioned above. (You can get fast daisy wheel printers, but they’re very expensive.)

If you’re thinking about buying a computer, but haven’t yet done so, be warned that some popular computers cannot be connected to a daisy wheel printer. Obviously, you don’t want one of those.

Research

If you have to write an article that requires research – maybe an essay on the biological makeup of a duck – then “Zen” may at first seem of little help. But wait a minute! Let’s consider that idea.

You certainly cannot sit down and spontaneously write your article because you don’t yet have anything in you (about ducks) to write about. So naturally you need to do your
homework. Read and research everything available on your subject. Libraries are the best places to do any form of research. Begin there. Follow leads. Exhaust your resources. Then, when you have totally saturated yourself with facts, ideas and information on ducks, let go.

Take a break. Forget about ducks for a day or so. After a short rest, begin your clustering and free-form writing process in order to generate fresh approaches to your topic. In a short time, you will write that article.

You see, most of the writing we have been talking about in this book falls in the category of “creative art.” That’s where you write whatever you want to write – like poems, stories, plays, novels., But sometimes we are assigned to write research articles – like an essay on ducks. At those times, you can best use the Zen way to creativity by first researching your topic, then taking a short break to allow your inner mind the opportunity to assimilate all the facts, and then you can do whatever techniques appeal to you to create an original, powerful, interesting work.

What’s Zen?

I fully understand that you may still be wondering about Zen. If so, then you may enjoy the following experiment.

Take a blank sheet of paper. In the middle of the page, in big letters, print the word “ZEN.” Circle it. Now begin to do a cluster. Continue your diagram until you either run out of things to write or until you discover a theme or idea or train of thought that begs you to write it down. In other words, do a clustering exercise on the word “ZEN” just to see what you already know (on a deep, unconscious level) about Zen. Do that now.

If, for any reason, you either did not do that clustering episode or if you simply refused to do it, maybe you can try this:

Take a few sheets of paper and begin to write anything you want – anything at all – about “ZEN.” Whether what you write seems to make sense or not, stick with it. Do these “Open-End” exercises until something happens. Do that now.

Okay. If you did not do the clustering or the “Open-End” experiments, now try this. On a blank page write “ZEN IS –“ and then complete the sentence. Write anything you want. Be loose and natural. Let go. Write “ZEN IS -,” and finish the sentence, right now.

Very good! By now you may begin to realize that you already have some thoughts on Zen. It doesn’t matter at all whether those thoughts accurately match other people’s thoughts or not. Your ideas are entirely your own, and they are entirely right for you. Zen is exactly what you feel it is.
For me to say Zen is this or Zen is that is to tell you ideas which I feel are better left to your own discovery. It’s the same with creativity. Life is created in every moment. Life is creativity. Zen is creativity. It’s all one energy.

But what does that tell you?

You can always ask the profound question. What is life? What is creativity? What is energy? What is “what is”?

Though this section may sound like double-talk, it is actually a way for you to dive into your creative self - that part of you which does not question or doubt, but simply receives.

Zen is the essence of life as creativity is the essence of writing. Don’t worry about writing and you can write easily and effortlessly. Don’t worry about Zen and you can live Zen.

Mennet Jacob, a poet who read the manuscript version of this book, told me she could not write about or think about Zen because it was too nebulous for her. I suggested she do a clustering exercise on the word “Zen” anyway. She did, and the result follows:

Essence
By Mennet Jacob

I am.
I exist – a grain at a time,
Touching grain to grain,
Lowly and unsung;
I create my words, my world.
I am

A tight fit in space,
A pinpoint in time –
Grain of many grains,
Dependent on love,
To create –
I am.

I exist –
A grain in time;
Limitless…
I am.

A very Zen-filled poem! It even surprised Mennet!
To help prove every one of us contains an inner knowing about Zen, I went ahead and performed my own clustering experience. After two or three minutes of clustering on the world “Zen,” I came up with the following:

When you are centered without beliefs or illusions or self-limiting ideas; when you are in the NOW, the ever-changing NOW; when you recognize the modern ancientness of the essence of all; when you see the stuff in the air that is not the air but is instead the energy of air; when you notice and know that the electron moves and lives and has its being because of a force deep within it; when you see the non-religious religion that has no dogma for dogmas; when questions and answers originate from the same source and writing and originality come from the womb of the entire present; then and only then will you have an idea of what Zen is. And not a moment sooner or later.

Do a couple of clustering and “Open-End” sessions and find out for yourself your own answer to the question, “What is Zen?”

**Summary and Suggested Readings**

There is much that could be discussed in this chapter that may be of concern to you – too much, in fact, to be contained in this little book. What I suggest you do is subscribe to three monthly writer’s magazines which cover every issue a writer could possibly think of. These magazines will answer questions you may have, stimulate your mind and heart, and keep you posted on current needs and trends in the publishing world. Though they seldom mention “Zen” in their pages, what they have to say in their articles and interviews can help you in your pursuit of “Zen and the Art of Creativity”:

*The Writer*, $15 a year. (8 Arlington St., Boston, MA 02116)
*Writer’s digest*, $15 a year. (205 West Center St., Marion, OH 43306)
*The Inkling Journal*, $14 a year. (P.O. Box 128, Alexandria, MN 56308)
Epilogue

If after reading this book you still have some problems with your writing (or with this book), then I would suggest you do the Zen thing and simply enjoy your problems.

That may seem strange, but what I am saying is that problems are gifts. They are challenges. But instead of fighting them or resisting them, why not try giving in to them? Take a lesson from the martial art Aikido and learn to move with your problems rather than against them. If a rock is falling towards your head, it is probably best to step aside rather than to raise both fists in an attempt to stop the contact.

If any of the material in this work causes you problems, just let it go. Nothing here is mandatory. Use what appeals to you and drop the rest on the side of the road. Someone else coming along the path may pick up and use what you don’t. It really doesn’t matter. Just have fun!
For Further Growth

Your writing talents will continue to grow and expand as long as you continue to read, write and grow. Two helpful books to aid your journey are listed below. Both are informative and fun, packed with sound exercises, and both are set-up as a type of course you can do on your own at home.

*The Right Brain Experience: An Intimate Program to Free the Powers of Your Imagination* by Marilee Zdenek. (McGraw-Hill, 1983) Contains 67 ways to stimulate creativity in a six-day personal program. Some of the exercises Zdenek uses are: Biofeedback Training, Guided Visualization, Sensory Stimulation, Fantasy, Dream Work, Free Association and Affirmations. Also contains interviews with famous creative people including Ray Bradbury and Steve Allen.

*The Possible Human: A Course in Extending Your Physical, Mental and Creative Abilities* by Jean Houston. (J.P. Tarcher, 1983) A highly recommended work by a genius in the field of brain research. Her exercise, “Skill Rehearsal with a Master Teacher,” in which you are guided deep into your own unconscious mind to meet and learn from a “Master Teacher” (a person or thing that is an expert on the subject you wish to know more about) is worth more than the price of the book.
Additional Bibliography

Becoming a Writer by Dorothea Brande (J.P. Tarcher, inc., 1934)

Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre by Keith Johnstone (Theatre Arts, 1979)

Literary Market Place by R.R. Bowker Co. (Up-dated yearly)


Only One Sky by Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (Rajneesh Foundation, 1975)

The Seamless Web by Stanley Burnshaw (George Braziller, 1970)

Spiritual Economics: The Prosperity Process by Eric Butterworth (Unity School, 1983)

Thirty Ways to Help You Write by Fran Weber Shaw (Bantam, 1980)

Up From Eden by Ken Wilber (Shambhala, 1983)

The Word Processing Book: A Short Course in Computer Literacy by Peter McWilliams (Prelude Press, 1983)

Writer’s Handbook by The Writer, Inc. (Up-dated yearly)

Writer’s Market by Writer’s Digest Books (Up-dated yearly)

Writing With Power by Peter Elbow (Oxford Univ. Press, 1981)
Dear Friend:

I hope you enjoyed this manual on creativity. I certainly enjoyed writing it!

In case you are not aware of it, there is a correspondence course available based on the material in this publication. If you are interested in deeply investigating the ideas presented here, write and let me know. The course is a unique and personal way to increase your creative talents.

Also, if you are interested in my other word – tapes, workshops, personal consultations or other books – all of interest to writers and all concerning secrets of creativity, write and say so. I would be happy to send you a note about my other materials.

Finally, if you have suggestions for other books on writing, or questions about this one, feel free to write me. Though I may be slow in answering, I promise to reply as soon as I can!

Sincerely,