

## Reflection Paragraphs *On Writing* by Stephen King

### Part One

To start, Stephen King commences his *curriculum vitae*, or his “attempt to show how one writer was formed” (pg. 18) with the statement, “I believe large numbers of people have at least some talent as writers and storytellers, and that those talents can be strengthened and sharpened. If I didn’t believe that, writing a book like this would be a waste of time.” After learning King is a bestselling novelist in the horror genre, I realized compared to any textbook or guide teaching the elements of writing, none could trump this personalized guide on how to write, written from the biographical perspective of a famous author. Through the hardships and definitive moments of King’s life, he read several comics and novels by famous authors, gathering inspiration to produce his own original works, especially during his recuperation period from his childhood illnesses. Particularly, I was inspired after reading, “Four stories. A quarter apiece. That was the first buck I made in this business” (pg. 29). King had composed his first short story and read it to his mother, who commended him for creating a story of impressive quality. Personally, since I was about 10 or 11 years old, I’ve always enjoyed writing, particularly stories about the many characters I used to love to play in video games, such as Super Mario Brothers and Sonic the Hedgehog. Furthermore, in high school, King achieved success through publishing short stories in local magazines, and sold his newest creations such as *The Pit and the Pendulum* within the school, however after being summoned to the principal’s office, he exited with the lesson that not everyone would recognize his talents as a writer; as with any form of art, the author or artist cannot always please the entirety of his/her target audience. During the past three years of being in high school, this lesson has been quite applicable for various essays I’ve composed. While most of the time my teachers would be impressed by the amount of effort and vocabulary, some times my teachers would advise me to revise for length, or to incorporate more details related to the prompt. Nonetheless, King continued to write and sell his works, and in English Lit classes, he dedicated his “fair share of composition, fiction, and poetry classes in college” to his teacher John Gould, who was the first individual to return one of his works with an array of ‘editorial corrections’ (pg. 56). King also learned from Gould one of his most cherished notions of writing, which King reiterates in numerous instances throughout the book: “Write with the door closed; rewrite with the door open” (pg. 57). In my own writing experience, I find myself always being able to concentrate on essays when there is complete silence and the door is closed. After I’m finished with the first draft, I typically ask someone close to read the essay and explain his/her reactions and suggestions. Subsequently, King mentioned when he married Tabby and wrote a novel dedicated to her, “*There’s someone who knows*. Writing is a lonely job. Having someone who believes in you makes a lot of difference. Just believing is usually enough” (pg. 74). With support and cooperation from my parents, I am motivated to achieve anything I set my mind to. Lastly, King explained the significance of his desk being located adjacent to the window rather than in the center of the room, which I’ve always observed in my experience to have a greater effect of motivating me to write better. The author dominates the desk, not vice-versa.

## What Writing Is

Within all types of writing, there exists a certain degree of ‘telepathy’ between the author and the reader. By definition, telepathy is “the supposed communication of thoughts or ideas by means other than the known senses” (New Oxford American Dictionary). The ‘means’ by which an author communicates are through written words on paper, and in the reader’s perspective, the impression translates as if the author is privately telling a story to you, only not face-to-face. In my experiences with reading and writing, I have sometimes felt as if the author is sitting across from me through a portal in the book, and reading the story to me, though I never cogitated the sensation as telepathy. According to Charles William Eliot, “Books are the quietest and most constant of friends; they are the most accessible and wisest of counselors, and the most patient of teachers.” The author doesn’t grow tired of ‘telling’ his/her story to the reader until the reader wishes to stop, despite the established breaks between chapters and parts. Subsequently, King describes the significance of individual interpretation that readers utilize as a vital component of their “mentalist routine not just over distance but over time as well...” (pg. 105). While authors explain the circumstances of their stories through description and narration, sometimes in precise detail, it is up to the reader to utilize his/her imagination to develop ‘snapshots’ of the text to try and analyze it, so that the author and reader can meet on similar terms. In essence, King stated, “you must not come lightly to the blank page,” meaning the written text should be approached earnestly to enable the author to extinguish the ‘ice’ between him/her and the readers. Through my experiences of reading, especially while analyzing stories composed in distant time periods, I found it difficult to understand the text without first translating archaic words and sentences into modern text. Only then could I have developed a ‘telepathic’ connection with the author, to truly comprehend his/her writing style and intents.

## Toolbox

Next, the toolbox is composed of three levels, according to King: 1) The top is comprised of the most common tools of writing, including vocabulary and grammar; 2) The middle consists of the elements of style and form; 3) The bottom consists of the right instruments to create your masterpiece. Together, these three levels create a hierarchy of sorts, resembling an upside-down pyramid, with the most important components on top, moderately important in the middle, and the least important on the bottom. Considerably, after learning King’s viewpoint on components of the toolbox such as adverbs, the passive voice, and straightforward vocabulary, I realized exactly how much room for improvement I have in my writing. Rather than adding an adverb for emphasis, in most occasions the text would appear stronger by simply omitting it. For instance, King explained the differences between “He closed the door,” “He closed the door firmly, & “He slammed the door.” While the first option is grammatically accurate and follows King’s example of direct vocabulary, emphasis is added by consulting the synonym ‘slammed,’ which portrays a greater amount of force applied to the door by the person than ‘closed.’ At the same time, while “He closed the door firmly” and “He slammed the door” seem about the same, the former would display a more conservative form of writing while the latter is convincing and straightforward. Subsequently, I used to write in the passive voice many times throughout my essays, and now I understand how painstakingly meaningless it was to consistently write in that manner. According to King, “The writer threw the rope” is superior to “The rope was thrown by the writer.” It makes sense to suggest using reverse syntax does not improve the writing quality, but rather convolutes

the sentence for the readers, and when inserted within paragraphs, it causes the reader to have to pause and think twice about what the author is attempting to convey before progressing to the next sentence. Essentially, the longer the sentence is using the passive voice, the more confusing it is to understand for the reader and for the writer to compose. Ultimately, of the components within the toolbox discussed by King and used within my writing style, the three I require the most improvement on include adverbs, passive voice, and direct vocabulary.

### On Writing

As stipulated by King, “Writers form themselves into the pyramid we see in all areas of human talent and human creativity. At the bottom are the bad ones. Above them is a group which is slightly smaller but still large and welcoming; these are the competent writers... The next level is much smaller. These are the really good writers. Above them—above almost all of us—are the Shakespeares, the Faulkners, the Yeatses, Shaws, and Eudora Weltys.” (pg. 141) According to the hierarchical pyramid of writers, the caste I would probably fit into might be Level 3, within the group of writers who exceed mere competency. After taking a multitude of advanced writing courses, mostly during my past high school years, I’ve observed the extent to which my writing abilities have expanded and how prepared I aspire to be for college-entrance examinations, such as the SAT, which King mentions. Following this, King asserts that in order to become a writer, one must read a lot and write a lot. Consequently, “Constant reading will pull you into a place (a mind-set, if you like the phrase) where you can write eagerly and without self-consciousness. It also offers you a constantly growing knowledge of what has been done and what hasn’t, what is trite and what is fresh, what works and what just lies there dying (or dead) on the page” (pg. 150). To offer a comparison, in video games, as the player progressively obtains achievements and unlocks new items by adventuring, which expand his abilities to conduct certain actions in the game, such is the same with writing: in order to become a good writer, one must read frequently, so that new vocabulary and stylistic elements become the unlockable items and understanding them well represent the achievements. In this manner, when the player advances to the next level, the achievements and new items from the previous level enable him to attempt levels of greater difficulties; similarly, once the reader fully understands a sufficient amount of vocabulary and stylistic elements from a work, he/she can then attempt to analyze works on a higher standard. The process repeats constantly for as much as you play video games or read books; the more you complete them, the better you become at them. Finally, when you wish to create your own games and written works, your knowledge and experience in either (or both) subject(s) will enable you to implement what you have learned and observed into creating your own original masterpieces. By having a sort of ‘expertise’ in reading, there is a significantly higher possibility of comprehensibly proclaiming “the truth” in whatever subject you are writing about, whether it’s fantasy or science, and being capable of discerning what is “conventional” or “radical,” or even irrelevant, so that the work can be composed as original as possible without inordinately deviating from the supposed classification of that subject. Delving further into stories and novels, King describes the three main components every competent writer must include within their works: narration, description, and dialogue. What people tend to remember the most from a story are characters, usually due to the three main components, which fashion the circumstances of the world they live in, their appearances, and the speech that infuses life into their souls. Whilst writing, I have never really considered these elements to make up an entire story, since I was convinced plot and theme were the superior devices of storytelling.

However, plot renders impractical and the theme baseless if there are neither lines to connect the dots to uncover the end product, nor if the characters cannot communicate amongst one another. Lastly, in order to ensure that all of the dots are connected correctly, without open ends or many unanswered questions [unless you plan to draft a sequel of your story], it is always important to conduct extensive research, so the grammar and plagiarism police won't come charging at you.

### On Living

During the process of writing fiction, the writer lets his/her imagination run completely berserk to create an original piece of work that only makes sense to the reader by engaging in the story's events and circumstances, most of the time entirely unaware as to how the plot may twist. Unfortunately, with non-fiction, the factor of non-predictability is much less present as opposed to that of fictional stories, especially if the reader is an expert on the subject of which the author is conveying. Once the subject is known, sometimes the reader can already foretell what exactly will happen to a certain character, such as a disease/deformity, trauma, or how the elements of Mother Nature will impact him/her either physically or mentally. Throughout my experiences of writing, it almost always takes much longer to compose a research paper compared to a reflective response to a quote in English class, for the most obvious reason being research papers designate the term "research," signifying a obligation to conduct thorough analyses and observations of a number of resources to guarantee the originality and factuality of the topic. On the other hand, reflective responses to quotes encompass a great deal of ambiguity, as each individual answering candidly to the same quote might interpret it differently, based on personal experiences or extent of knowledge regarding current events or academics. Nonetheless, such responses compel the mind to set free, as drafting one's opinions concerning the quote on paper doesn't require much contemplation besides developing a certain point of view, which in fiction correlates to the type of message the author desires to spread through the medium of his/her imaginary characters and circumstances. As stated by King, "Writing isn't about making money, getting famous, getting dates, getting laid, or making friends. In the end, it's about enriching the lives of those who will read your work, and enriching your own life, as well. It's about getting up, getting well, and getting over." Standing proudly beside your story and message is what is the most important, through both joyous moments and tragedies, one of which King explained in this section. If it's consistent throughout all of your works, the readers will begin to associate you with specific themes, which allow new readers to discover your works and delve into them with anticipation. Consequently, having encouragement from others, especially those who are close to you or were the cause of a milestone, stimulates the spirit and appreciation to write. For Stephen King, his wife Tabitha was the one person who inspired him to persevere with his interests, as the miracle performed by Dr. David Brown enabled him to once again realize the longevity and brilliance of life, which in turn, stimulated him to resume writing. In conclusion, my parents have relentlessly encouraged me to achieve my dreams of becoming an architect, and are the reasons why I have promised to never fail my interests with each and every day, [a.k.a. ensuring the train will never derail off the tracks towards success].