

Practical Tips for Writers

by Joy Jones

"Planning to write is not writing. Outlining... researching, talking to people about what you're doing, none of that is writing. Writing is writing."

-E. L. Doctorow



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Everybody says they want to write a book. Great idea, but it needs to be supported with some solid practices. Here are some that have proven their worth in my own work.



- **Make a habit of writing.** Keep a journal. Always have a project in progress. If you can't write a lot, then write a little. Early in my writing career, I felt that I had to set aside big blocks of time to do my work. That's good if you can manage that, but I can seldom manage to do that. So, I write when I can. Over time, the words, the phrases, the pages add up. Eventually, you have a completed work.



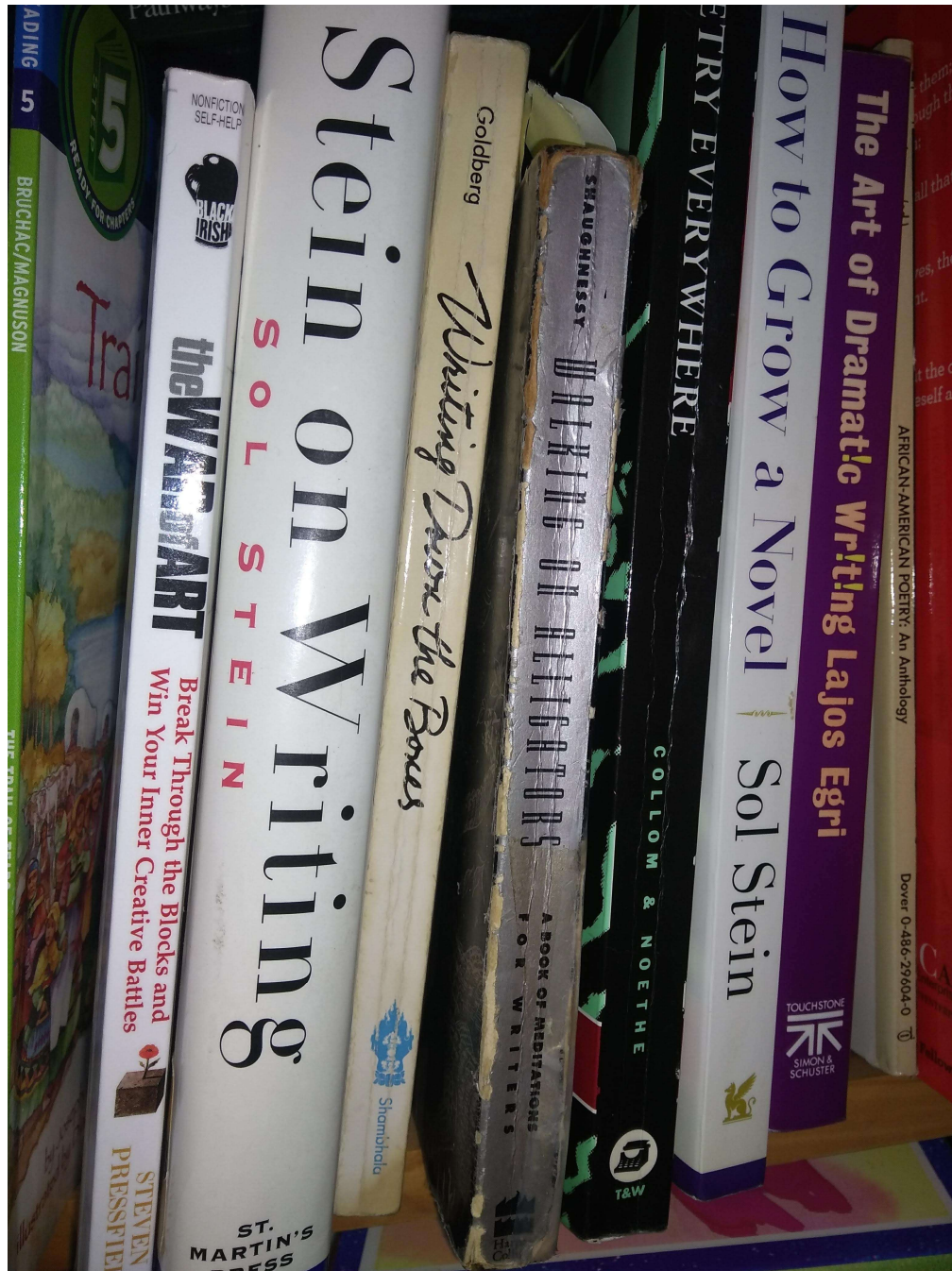
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- **What are you scared to talk about?** That may be the very thing that you need to write about. Good writing taps into the issues that are deep and meaningful. Working through what your place in the world is and what your personal issues are often resonates with others.

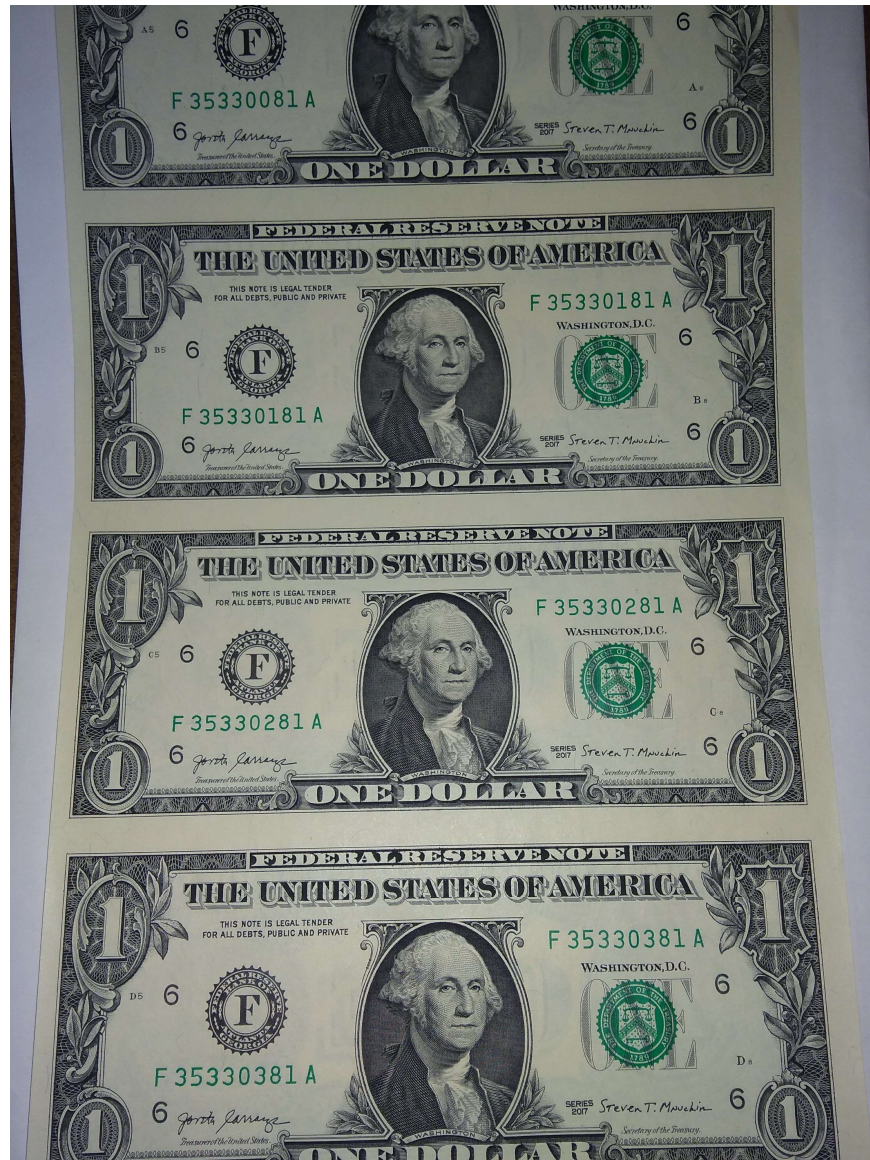


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- **Join a writer's group.** Being around others who are writing encourages you to keep going. I know I would not have finished my novel if I had not been in a writing group. Knowing that I have to produce a chapter at the next meeting spurs me to get that chapter written. Especially since I have to read and critique the work of everyone else in the group. No way am I going to read your work and miss out on having my work read and reviewed, too!

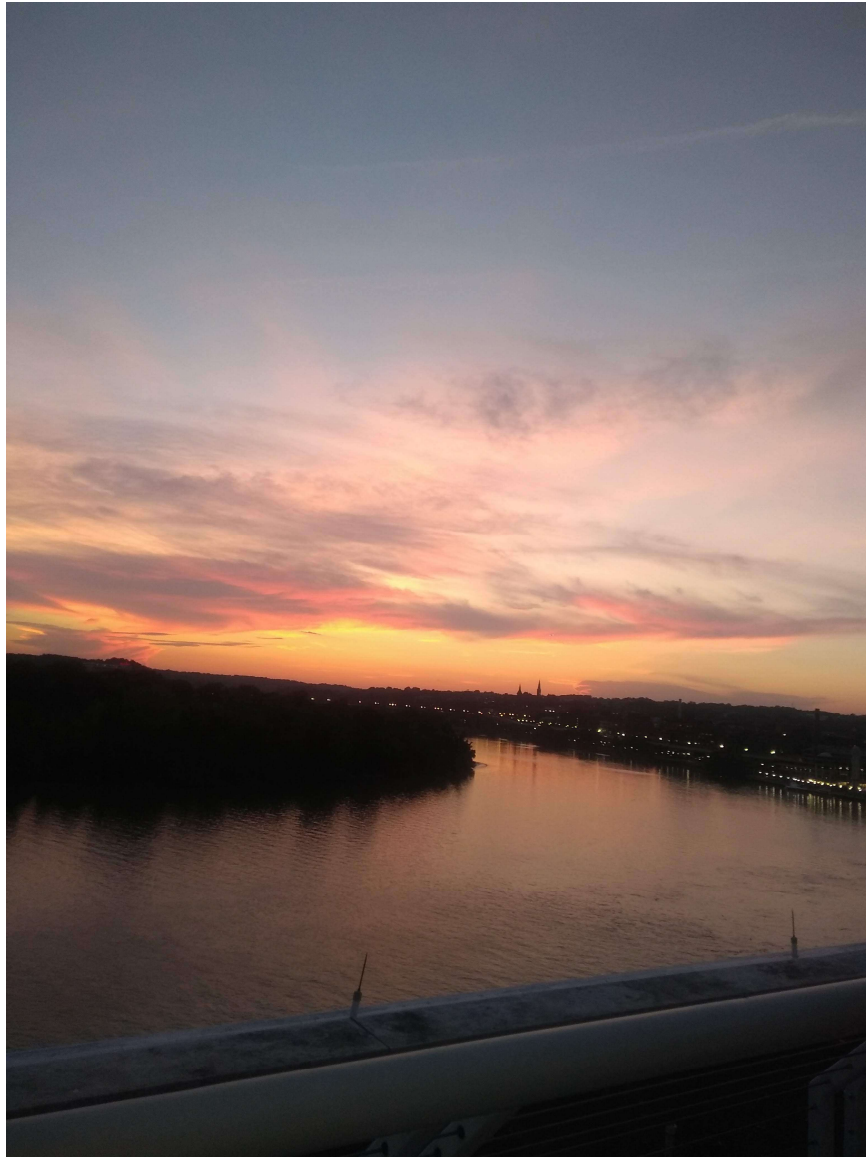


- **Read.** Read books within the genre you wish to publish. Read books on the writing life. Read just for the sheer pleasure of it. Some of my favorites:
 - *If You Want to Write*, by Brenda Ueland
 - *Walking on Alligators*, by Susan Shaugnessy
 - *Writing Down the Bones*, by Natalie Goldber
 - *Stein on Writing* by Sol Stein



•**Understand the market.** Write about the things that capture your interest and stir your passion but be sure to ask the hard question - "Who will *pay money* to read this?" - in order to identify a market for your work. Some writing is just for you. Some writing is for the public. Once, a friend who likes writing poetry asked me where could he get a collection of poems published. "Where do *you* buy poetry?" I asked him. The answer was, he didn't buy poetry. He wrote poems but never read the poetry of others. His words - as is much poetry - were mostly for his own soul. There's not a large market for poems. So, if he wants to get published, he needs to study the market to see what people really want and actually buy. You need to do the same thing.

- **Don't be envious.** Sometimes there's a bit of professional jealousy among writers when someone is successful. I'm guilty of feeling, "Why him, and not me?" Use that energy to prod yourself forward. Tell yourself "If she can do it, so can I." There's enough for everybody. Your progress won't be diminished by someone else's success.



- And finally, pay attention to that still, small voice. That's the best guide for figuring out what the next step is.

Joy Jones is a performance and author of including *Private of Meditations for Tambourine* book is *Fearless Speaking*. If you creative process out interviews every variety on feed on Fridays at Visit her on the



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