

Be Your Own Best Critic

We've all said, at one time or another, "I should write a book." Alternatively, someone has said to us, "Man, you ought to write a book." We've chuckled, thought about it for a moment or two and then moved on. But, you know what? Whether we've said it to ourselves or had someone say it to us, it's excellent advice. We all have a book in us. Each of us is different. Our individual perspectives and experiences are unique. It's the voice of the author that makes a book readable, enjoyable or compelling. All of us have a voice that is ours alone. The difference between an author and everyone else is that the author has done the work to get their particular voice heard. It's simply a matter of doing the work.

In some sense, once that work is started, the real work begins. It's true that books are simply a collection of words. It's also somewhat simplistic. The words in any book have, or should have been, specifically chosen for effect. Words have rhythm and pattern and, when well chosen, bounce around our heads like music. The only way to achieve this music is by choosing the right words to begin with, the ones that carry the melody, and pruning back the words that cause discord and disharmony. The process of doing this is called editing and ruthless editing is a writer's best friend.

Ernest Hemingway believed that every story was like an iceberg. It's what you couldn't see that made the story real and powerful. Because of this, he held back the majority of the descriptives in his writing and left out details that another writer would have naturally included. The point of this isn't to teach you how to write like Hemingway, but to demonstrate the power of judicious editing. Leave whatever you write for a day or more. Write something else or take a day off. Then, after some time has passed go back and reread what you've written. Is it as good as you initially thought it was? Does it flow like you thought it did? Is it music yet? If it's not you need to rewrite the parts that are causing the trouble, editing out the words that don't fit and the ideas that are misplaced.

Careful and critical editing will help you get to the core of what you want to write. It will allow you to distill your ideas down to their essence, so that you can give your readers something intoxicating.