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Quotes about Writers and Writing

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The writer has a grudge against society, which he documents with accounts of unsatisfying sex, unrealized ambition, unmitigated loneliness, and a sense of local and global distress. The square, overpopulation, the bourgeois, the bomb and the cocktail party are variously identified as sources of the grudge. There follows a little obscenity here, a dash of philosophy there, considerable whining overall, and a modern satirical novel is born.

- Adler, Renata

Writers must fortify themselves with pride and egotism as best they can. The process is analogous to using sandbags and loose timbers to protect a house against flood. Writers are vulnerable creatures like anyone else. For what do they have in reality? Not sandbags, not timbers. Just a flimsy reputation and a name.

- Aldiss, Brian

The hard necessity of bringing the judge on the bench down into the dock has been the peculiar responsibility of the writer in all ages of man.

- Algren, Nelson

Every writer hopes or boldly assumes that his life is in some sense exemplary, that the particular will turn out to be universal.

- Amis, Martin

It is rarely that you see an American writer who is not hopelessly sane.

- Anderson, Margaret

To write well, express yourself like common people, but think like a wise man. Or, think as wise men do, but speak as the common people do.

- Aristotle

If the doctor told me I had six minutes to live, I'd type a little faster.

- Asimov, Isaac

Some writers confuse authenticity, which they ought always to aim at, with originality, which they should never bother about.

- Auden, W. H.

No poet or novelist wishes he were the only one who ever lived, but most of them wish they were the only one alive, and quite a number fondly believe their wish has been granted.

- Auden, W. H.

A professional writer is an amateur who didn't quit.

- Bach, Richard

A word is a bud attempting to become a twig. How can one not dream while writing? It is the pen which dreams. The blank page gives the right to dream.

- Bachelard, Gaston

Writers like teeth are divided into incisors and grinders.

- Bagehot, Walter

Who wants to become a writer? And why? Because it's the answer to everything. To Why am I here? To uselessness. It's the streaming reason for living. To note, to pin down, to build up, to create, to be astonished at nothing, to cherish the oddities, to let nothing go down the drain, to make something, to make a great flower out of life, even if it's a cactus.

- Bagnold, Enid

The responsibility of a writer is to excavate the experience of the people who produced him.

- Baldwin, James

Any writer, I suppose, feels that the world into which he was born is nothing less than a conspiracy against the cultivation of his talent.

- Baldwin, James

To endow the writer publicly with a good fleshly body, to reveal that he likes dry white wine and underdone steak, is to make even more miraculous for me, and of a more divine essence, the products of his art. Far from the details of his daily life bringing nearer to me

the nature of his inspiration and making it clearer, it is the whole mystical singularity of his condition which the writer emphasizes by such confidences. For I cannot but ascribe to some superhumanly the existence of beings vast enough to wear blue pajamas at the very moment when they manifest themselves as universal conscience.

- Barthes, Roland

On the day when a young writer corrects his first proof-sheet he is as proud as a schoolboy who has just got his first dose of pox.

- Baudelaire, Charles

All a writer has to do to get a woman is to say he's a writer. It's an aphrodisiac.

- Bellow, Saul

The free-lance writer is a man who is paid per piece or per word or perhaps.

- Benchley, Robert

It took me fifteen years to discover I had no talent for writing, but I couldn't give it up, because by that time I was too famous.

- Benchley, Robert

The biggest obstacle to professional writing is the necessity for changing a typewriter ribbon.

- Benchley, Robert

Work on good prose has three steps: a musical stage when it is composed, an architectonic one when it is built, and a textile one when it is woven.

- Benjamin, Walter

I was an only child. I lost both my parents. By the time I was twenty I was bald. I'm homosexual. In the way of circumstances and background to transcend I had everything an artist could possibly want. It was practically a blueprint. I was programmed to be a novelist or a playwright. But I'm not.

- Bennett, Alan

Essential characteristic of the really great novelist: a Christ-like, all-embracing compassion.

- Bennett, Arnold

Why do writers write? Because it isn't there.

- Berger, Thomas

A writer never reads his work. For him, it is the unreadable, a secret, and he cannot remain face to face with it. A secret, because he is separated from it.

- Blanchot, Maurice

To write is to make oneself the echo of what cannot cease speaking -- and since it cannot,

in order to become its echo I have, in a way, to silence it. I bring to this incessant speech the decisiveness, the authority of my own silence.

- Blanchot, Maurice

No one who cannot limit himself has ever been able to write.

- Boileau, Nicholas

He who cannot limit himself will never know how to write.

- Boileau, Nicholas

Like all writers, he measured the achievements of others by what they had accomplished, asking of them that they measure him by what he envisaged or planned.

- Borges, Jorge Luis

Every writer creates his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future.

- Borges, Jorge Luis

A book should be luminous not voluminous.

- Bovee, Christian Nevell

Writers seldom choose as friends those self-contained characters who are never in trouble, never unhappy or ill, never make mistakes, and always count their change when it

is handed to them.

- Bowen, Catherine Drinker

For your born writer, nothing is so healing as the realization that he has come upon the right word.

- Bowen, Catherine Drinker

Every writing career starts as a personal quest for sainthood, for self-betterment. Sooner or later, and as a rule quite soon, a man discovers that his pen accomplishes a lot more than his soul.

- Brodsky, Joseph

But this I know; the writer who possesses the creative gift owns something of which he is not always master -- something that at times strangely wills and works for itself. If the result be attractive, the World will praise you, who little deserve praise; if it be repulsive, the same World will blame you, who almost as little deserve blame.

- Bronte, Charlotte

Great writers are the saints for the godless.

- Brookner, Anita

Every human being has hundreds of separate people living under his skin. The talent of a writer is his ability to give them their separate names, identities, personalities and have them relate to other characters living with him.

- Brooks, Mel

The aim, if reached or not, makes great the life: try to be Shakespeare, leave the rest to fate!

- Browning, Robert

Making a book is a craft, like making a clock; it needs more than native wit to be an author.

- Bruyere, Jean De La

Writers are the main landmarks of the past.

- Bulwer-Lytton, Edward G.

The pen is mightier than the sword.

- Bulwer-Lytton, Edward G.

Writing is more than anything a compulsion, like some people wash their hands thirty times a day for fear of awful consequences if they do not. It pays a whole lot better than this type of compulsion, but it is no more heroic.

- Burchill, Julie

The trouble began with Forster. After him it was considered ungentlemanly to write more than five or six novels.

- Burgess, Anthony

The only living works are those which have drained much of the author's own life into them.

- Butler, Samuel

Nothing so fretful, so despicable as a Scribbler, see what I am, and what a parcel of Scoundrels I have brought about my ears, and what language I have been obliged to treat them with to deal with them in their own way; -- all this comes of Authorship.

- Byron, Lord

To withdraw myself from myself has ever been my sole, my entire, my sincere motive in scribbling at all.

- Byron, Lord

In general I do not draw well with literary men -- not that I dislike them but I never know what to say to them after I have praised their last publication.

- Byron, Lord

If I don't write to empty my mind, I go mad. As to that regular, uninterrupted love of writing. I do not understand it. I feel it as a torture, which I must get rid of, but never as a pleasure. On the contrary, I think composition a great pain.

- Byron, Lord

The process of writing has something infinite about it. Even though it is interrupted each night, it is one single notation.

- Canetti, Elias

I believe more in the scissors than I do in the pencil.

- Capote, Truman

Writing is a dreadful labor, yet not so dreadful as Idleness.

- Carlyle, Thomas

To note an artist's limitations is but to define his talent. A reporter can write equally well about everything that is presented to his view, but a creative writer can do his best only with what lies within the range and character of his deepest sympathies.

- Cather, Willa

Writing ought either to be the manufacture of stories for which there is a market demand -- a business as safe and commendable as making soap or breakfast foods -- or it should be an art, which is always a search for something for which there is no market demand, something new and untried, where the values are intrinsic and have nothing to do with standardized values.

- Cather, Willa

An author is often obscure to the reader because they proceed from the thought to expression than like the reader from the expression to the thought.

- Chamfort, Sebastien-Roch Nicolas De

There is something about the literary life that repels me, all this desperate building of castles on cobwebs, the long-drawn acrimonious struggle to make something important which we all know will be gone forever in a few years, the miasma of failure which is to me almost as offensive as the cheap gaudiness of popular success.

- Chandler, Raymond

Any man who can write a page of living prose adds something to our life, and the man who can, as I can, is surely the last to resent someone who can do it even better. An artist cannot deny art, nor would he want to. A lover cannot deny love.

- Chandler, Raymond

The task of an American writer is not to describe the misgivings of a woman taken in adultery as she looks out of a window at the rain but to describe four hundred people under the lights reaching for a foul ball. This is ceremony.

- Cheever, John

Who often, but without success, have prayed for apt Alliteration's artful aid.

- Churchill, Charles

Writing is an adventure. To begin with, it is a toy and an amusement. Then it becomes a

mistress, then it becomes a master, then it becomes a tyrant. The last phase is that just as you are about to be reconciled to your servitude, you kill the monster and fling him to the public.

- Churchill, Winston

Nothing contributes to the entertainment of the reader more, than the change of times and the vicissitudes of fortune.

- Cicero, Marcus T.

The writer who loses his self-doubt, who gives way as he grows old to a sudden euphoria, to prolixity, should stop writing immediately: the time has come for him to lay aside his pen.

- Colette, Sidonie Gabrielle

If you want to be a writer-stop talking about it and sit down and write!

- Collins, Jackie

To write what is worth publishing, to find honest people to publish it, and get sensible people to read it, are the three great difficulties in being an author.

- Colton, Charles Caleb

The society of dead authors has this advantage over that of the living: they never flatter us to our faces, nor slander us behind our backs, nor intrude upon our privacy, nor quit their shelves until we take them down.

- Colton, Charles Caleb

Justice to my readers compels me to admit that I write because I have nothing to do; justice to myself induces me to add that I will cease to write the moment I have nothing to say.

- Colton, Charles Caleb

A great writer creates a world of his own and his readers are proud to live in it. A lesser writer may entice them in for a moment, but soon he will watch them filing out.

- Connolly, Cyril

The more books we read, the clearer it becomes that the true function of a writer is to produce a masterpiece and that no other task is of any consequence.

- Connolly, Cyril

When writers meet they are truculent, indifferent, or over-polite. Then comes the inevitable moment. A shows B that he has read something of B's. Will B show A? If not, then A hates B, if yes, then all is well. The only other way for writers to meet is to share a quick pee over a common lamp-post.

- Connolly, Cyril

In most cases a favorite writer is more with us in his book than he ever could have been in the flesh; since, being a writer, he is one who has studied and perfected this particular mode of personal incarnation, very likely to the detriment of any other. I should like as a

matter of curiosity to see and hear for a moment the men whose works I admire; but I should hardly expect to find further intercourse particularly profitable.

- Cooley, Charles Horton

Let authors write for glory and reward. The truth is well paid when she is sung and heard.

- Corbett, James J.

If you describe things as better than they are, you are considered to be a romantic; if you describe things as worse than they are, you will be called a realist; and if you describe things exactly as they are, you will be thought of as a satirist.

- Crisp, Quentin

There are hardly half a dozen writers in England today who have not sold out to the enemy. Even when their good work has been a success, Mammon grips them and whispers: More money for more work.

- Crowley, Aleister

Herman Melville was as separated from a civilized literature as the lost Atlantis was said to have been from the great peoples of the earth.

- Dahlberg, Edward

To write is a humiliation.

- Dahlberg, Edward

What has a writer to be bombastic about? Whatever good a man may write is the consequence of accident, luck, or surprise, and nobody is more surprised than an honest writer when he makes a good phrase or says something truthful.

- Dahlberg, Edward

Writing is conscience, scruple, and the farming of our ancestors.

- Dahlberg, Edward

I think of an author as somebody who goes into the marketplace and puts down his rug and says, I will tell you a story, and then he passes the hat.

- Davies, Robertson

The secret of good writing is to say an old thing in a new way or to say a new thing in an old way.

- Davis, Richard Harding

Writing isn't hard. It isn't any harder than ditch-digging.

- Dennis, Patrick

Writers are always selling somebody out.

- Didion, Joan

An author who speaks about his own books is almost as bad as a mother who talks about her own children.

- Disraeli, Benjamin

The writer isn't made in a vacuum. Writers are witnesses. The reason we need writers is because we need witnesses to this terrifying century.

- Doctorow, E. L.

Writing is a socially acceptable form of schizophrenia.

- Doctorow, E. L.

Writing is turning one's worst moments into money.

- Donleavy, J. P.

Yes, it's hard to write, but it's harder not to.

- Doren, Carl Van

The first essential in writing about anything is that the writer should have no experience of the matter.

- Duncan, Isadora

How people treat you is their karma; how you react is yours.

- Dyer, Wayne

Of the creative spirits that flourished in Concord, Massachusetts, during the middle of the nineteenth century, it might be said that Hawthorne loved men but felt estranged from them, Emerson loved ideas even more than men, and Thoreau loved himself.

- Edel, Leon

I have the conviction that excessive literary production is a social offence.

- Eliot, George

Some editors are failed writers, but so are most writers.

- Eliot, T. S.

Writing a novel without being asked seems a bit like having a baby when you have nowhere to live.

- Ellman, Lucy

There is no luck in literary reputation. They who make up the final verdict upon every book are not the partial and noisy readers of the hour when it appears; but a court as of angels, a public not to be bribed, not to be entreated, and not to be overawed, decides upon every man's title to fame.

- Emerson, Ralph Waldo

A pathological business, writing, don't you think? Just look what a writer actually does: all

that unnatural tense squatting and hunching, all those rituals: pathological!

- Enzensberger, Hans Magnus

If you wish to be a writer; write!

- Epictetus

Mr. Faulkner, of course, is interested in making your mind rather than your flesh creep.

- Fadiman, Clifton

There are two kinds of writers; the great ones who can give you truths, and the lesser ones, who can only give you themselves.

- Fadiman, Clifton

The first thing an unpublished author should remember is that no one asked him to write in the first place. With this firmly in mind, he has no right to become discouraged just because other people are being published.

- Farrar, John

If I had not existed, someone else would have written me, Hemingway, Dostoevski, all of us.

- Faulkner, William

I never know what I think about something until I read what I've written on it.

- Faulkner, William

If a writer has to rob his mother, he will not hesitate; the Ode on a Grecian Urn is worth any number of old ladies.

- Faulkner, William

The writer's only responsibility is to his art. He will be completely ruthless if he is a good one. He has a dream. Everything goes by the board: honor, pride, decency, security, happiness, all, to get the book written. If a writer has to rob his mother, he will not hesitate; the Ode on a Grecian Urn is worth any number of old ladies.

- Faulkner, William

My own experience has been that the tools I need for my trade are paper, tobacco, food, and a little whisky.

- Faulkner, William

Life cannot defeat a writer who is in love with writing; for life itself is a writer's love until death.

- Ferber, Edna

Only amateurs say that they write for their own amusement. Writing is not an amusing occupation. It is a combination of ditch-digging, mountain-climbing, treadmill and childbirth. Writing may be interesting, absorbing, exhilarating, racking, relieving. But amusing? Never!

- Ferber, Edna

Writers should be read but not seen. Rarely are they a winsome sight.

- Ferber, Edna

Creative writers are always greater than the causes that they represent.

- Forster, Edward M.

The best way to become a successful writer is to read good writing, remember it, and then forget where you remember it from.

- Fowler, Gene

Writing is easy. All you do is stare at a blank sheet of paper until drops of blood form on your forehead.

- Fowler, Gene

Either write something worth reading or do something worth writing.

- Franklin, Benjamin

Our work is to present things that are as they are.

- Frederick The Great, (Frederick II)

Analogies, it is true, decide nothing, but they can make one feel more at home.

- Freud, Sigmund

The walls are the publishers of the poor.

- Galeano, Eduardo

The style of an author should be the image of his mind, but the choice and command of language is the fruit of exercise.

- Gibbon, Edward

It has always been my practice to cast a long paragraph in a single mould, to try it by my ear, to deposit it in my memory, but to suspend the action of the pen till I had given the last polish to my work.

- Gibbon, Edward

If any man wishes to write a clear style, let him first be clear in his thoughts.

- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang Von

Every author in some degree portrays himself in his works, even if it be against his will.

- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang Von

He who does not expect a million readers should not write a line.

- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang Von

The writer probably knows what he meant when he wrote a book, but he should immediately forget what he meant when he's written it.

- Golding, William

You can fire your secretary, divorce your spouse, abandon your children. But they remain your co-authors forever.

- Goodman, Ellen

A writer should be a joyous optimist. Anything that implies rejection of life is wrong for a writer.

- Gribbon, George

I don't regard Brecht as a man of iron-gray purpose and intellect, I think he is a theatrical whore of the first quality.

- Hall, Sir Peter

Whatever an author puts between the two covers of his book is public property; whatever of himself he does not put there is his private property, as much as if he had never written a word.

- Hamilton, Gail

If a nation loses its storytellers, it loses its childhood.

- Handke, Peter

The role of the writer is not simply to arrange Being according to his own lights; he must also serve as a medium to Being and remain open to its often unfathomable dictates. This is the only way the work can transcend its creator and radiate its meaning further than the author himself can see or perceive.

- Havel, Vaclav

The characteristic of Chaucer is intensity: of Spenser, remoteness: of Milton elevation and of Shakespeare everything.

- Hazlitt, William

They're fancy talkers about themselves, writers. If I had to give young writers advice, I would say don't listen to writers talking about writing or themselves.

- Hellman, Lillian

If I had to give young writers advice, I would say don't listen to writers talking about writing or themselves.

- Hellman, Lillian

Writing, at its best, is a lonely life. Organizations for writers palliate the writer's loneliness, but I doubt if they improve his writing. He grows in public stature as he sheds his loneliness and often his work deteriorates. For he does his work alone and if he is a good enough writer he must face eternity, or the lack of it, each day.

- Hemingway, Ernest

I have tried simply to write the best I can. Sometimes I have good luck and write better than I can.

- Hemingway, Ernest

They can't yank a novelist like they can a pitcher. A novelist has to go the full nine, even if it kills him.

- Hemingway, Ernest

A serious writer is not to be confounded with a solemn writer. A serious writer may be a hawk or a buzzard or even a popinjay, but a solemn writer is always a bloody owl.

- Hemingway, Ernest

We are all apprentices in a craft where no one ever becomes a master.

- Hemingway, Ernest

Prose is architecture, not interior decoration, and the Baroque is over.

- Hemingway, Ernest

The most essential gift for a good writer is a built-in, shock-proof, shit detector. This is the writer's radar and all great writers have had it.

- Hemingway, Ernest

The writer must write what he has to say, not speak it.

- Hemingway, Ernest

There is nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and bleed.

- Hemingway, Ernest

Manuscript: something submitted in haste and returned at leisure.

- Herford, Oliver

The older author is constantly rediscovering himself in the more or less fossilized productions of his earlier years.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

You who write, choose a subject suited to your abilities and think long and hard on what your powers are equal to and what they are unable to perform.

- Horace

You must often make erasures if you mean to write what is worthy of being read a second time; and don't labor for the admiration of the crowd, but be content with a few choice readers.

- Horace

The secret of all good writing is sound judgment.

- Horace

One gains universal applause who mingles the useful with the agreeable, at once delighting and instructing the reader.

- Horace

Good sense is both the first principal and the parent source of good writing.

- Horace

Let your literary compositions be kept from the public eye for nine years.

- Horace

The strokes of the pen need deliberation as much as the sword needs swiftness.

- Howe, Julia Ward

A writer and nothing else; a man alone in a room with the English language, trying to get human feelings right.

- Hutchens, John K.

I am always at a loss at how much to believe of my own stories.

- Irving, Washington

He is outside of everything, and alien everywhere. He is an aesthetic solitary. His

beautiful, light imagination is the wing that on the autumn evening just brushes the dusky window.

- James, Henry

I hold any writer sufficiently justified who is himself in love with his theme.

- James, Henry

Footnotes -- little dogs yapping at the heels of the text

- James, William

Composition is, for the most part, an effort of slow diligence and steady perseverance, to which the mind is dragged by necessity or resolution, and from which the attention is every moment starting to more delightful amusements.

- Johnson, Samuel

I know not, Madam, that you have a right, upon moral principles, to make your readers suffer so much.

- Johnson, Samuel

In all pointed sentences, some degree of accuracy must be sacrificed to conciseness.

- Johnson, Samuel

The greatest part of a writer's time is spent in reading, in order to write; a man will turn

over half a library to make one book.

- Johnson, Samuel

Never write anything that does not give you great pleasure. Emotion is easily transferred from the writer to the reader.

- Joubert, Joseph

No pen, no ink, no table, no room, no time, no quiet, no inclination.

- Joyce, James

Writing is the incurable itch that possesses many.

- Juvenal, (Decimus Junius Juvenalis)

I'd rather be a lightning rod than a seismograph.

- Kesey, Ken

The moving finger writes, and having written moves on. Nor all thy piety nor all thy wit, can cancel half a line of it.

- Khayyam, Omar

People want to know why I do this, why I write such gross stuff. I like to tell them that I have the heart of a small boy -- and I keep it in a jar on my desk.

- King, Stephen

I believe that it is my job not only to write books but to have them published. A book is like a child. You have to defend the life of a child.

- Konrad, George

This is something that I cannot get over -- that a whole line could be written by half a man, that a work could be built on the quicksand of a character.

- Kraus, Karl

A writer is someone who can make a riddle out of an answer.

- Kraus, Karl

It requires more than mere genius to be an author.

- La Bruyere, Jean De

The writing of the wise are the only riches our posterity cannot squander.

- Landor, Walter Savage

I hate the actor and audience business. An author should be in among the crowd, kicking their shins or cheering them on to some mischief or merriment.

- Lawrence, D. H.

I like to write when I feel spiteful. It is like having a good sneeze.

- Lawrence, D. H.

It's hard enough to write a good drama, it's much harder to write a good comedy, and it's hardest of all to write a drama with comedy. Which is what life is.

- Lemmon, Jack

The cure for writers cramp is writer's block.

- Leon, Inigo de

The only phenomenon with which writing has always been concomitant is the creation of cities and empires, that is the integration of large numbers of individuals into a political system, and their grading into castes or classes. It seems to have favored the exploitation of human beings rather than their enlightenment.

- Levi-Strauss, Claude

We do not write in order to be understood; we write in order to understand.

- Lewis, Cecil Day

As I take up my pen I feel myself so full, so equal to my subject, and see my book so clearly before me in embryo, I would almost like to try to say it all in a single word.

- Lichtenberg, Georg C.

Nowadays three witty turns of phrase and a lie make a writer.

- Lichtenberg, Georg C.

I can write better than anybody who can write faster, and I can write faster than anybody who can write better.

- Liebling, A. J.

I think it's bad to talk about one's present work, for it spoils something at the root of the creative act. It discharges the tension.

- Mailer, Norman

Writing books is the closest men ever come to childbearing.

- Mailer, Norman

The writer's language is to some degree the product of his own action; he is both the historian and the agent of his own language.

- Man, Paul De

The ambivalence of writing is such that it can be considered both an act and an interpretive process that follows after an act with which it cannot coincide. As such, it both affirms and denies its own nature.

- Man, Paul De

Ultimately, literature is nothing but carpentry. With both you are working with reality, a

material just as hard as wood.

- Marquez, Gabriel Garcia

I never think when I write. Nobody can do two things at the same time and do them well.

- Marquis, Don

If written directions alone would suffice, libraries wouldn't need to have the rest of the universities attached.

- Martin, Judith

Practically everybody in New York has half a mind to write a book, and does.

- Marx, Groucho

The writer may very well serve a movement of history as its mouthpiece, but he cannot of course create it.

- Marx, Karl

It's very hard to be a gentleman and a writer.

- Maugham, W. Somerset

The trouble with young writers is that they are all in their sixties.

- Maugham, W. Somerset

The writer is more concerned to know than to judge.

- Maugham, W. Somerset

There are three rules for writing the novel. Unfortunately no one knows what they are.

- Maugham, W. Somerset

Habits in writing as in life are only useful if they are broken as soon as they cease to be advantageous.

- Maugham, W. Somerset

The need to express oneself in writing springs from a mal-adjustment to life, or from an inner conflict which the adolescent (or the grown man) cannot resolve in action. Those to whom action comes as easily as breathing rarely feel the need to break loose from the real, to rise above, and describe it... I do not mean that it is enough to be maladjusted to become a great writer, but writing is, for some, a method of resolving a conflict, provided they have the necessary talent.

- Maurois, Andre

You enter a state of controlled passivity, you relax your grip and accept that even if your declared intention is to justify the ways of God to man, you might end up interesting your readers rather more in Satan.

- McEwan, Ian

You expect far too much of a first sentence. Think of it as analogous to a good country

breakfast: what we want is something simple, but nourishing to the imagination. Hold the philosophy, hold the adjectives, just give us a plain subject and verb and perhaps a wholesome, nonfattening adverb or two.

- Mcmurtry, Larry

Give me a condor's quill! Give me Vesuvius crater for an inkstand!

- Melville, Herman

I write in order to attain that feeling of tension relieved and function achieved which a cow enjoys on giving milk.

- Mencken, H. L.

Writing crystallizes thought and thought produces action.

- Meyer, Paul J.

I was brought up in the great tradition of the late nineteenth century: that a writer never complains, never explains and never disdains.

- Michener, James A.

I am always interested in why young people become writers, and from talking with many I have concluded that most do not want to be writers working eight and ten hours a day and accomplishing little; they want to have been writers, garnering the rewards of having completed a best-seller. They aspire to the rewards of writing but not to the travail.

- Michener, James A.

Although most of us know Vincent van Gogh in Arles and Paul Gauguin in Tahiti as if they were neighbors -- somewhat disreputable but endlessly fascinating -- none of us can name two French generals or department store owners of that period. I take enormous pride in considering myself an artist, one of the necessities.

- Michener, James A.

After all, most writing is done away from the typewriter, away from the desk. I'd say it occurs in the quiet, silent moments, while you're walking or shaving or playing a game, or whatever, or even talking to someone you're not vitally interested in.

- Miller, Henry

A man writes to throw off the poison which he has accumulated because of his false way of life. He is trying to recapture his innocence, yet all he succeeds in doing (by writing) is to inoculate the world with a virus of his disillusionment. No man would set a word down on paper if he had the courage to live out what he believed in.

- Miller, Henry

Writing is the hardest way of earning a living, with the possible exception of wrestling alligators.

- Miller, Olin

Let those who would write heroic poems make their life an heroic poem.

- Milton, John

I always write a good first line, but I have trouble in writing the others.

- Moliere

All the world knows me in my book, and my book in me.

- Montaigne, Michel Eyquem De

Like stones, words are laborious and unforgiving, and the fitting of them together, like the fitting of stones, demands great patience and strength of purpose and particular skill.

- Morrison, Edmund

Of course I'm a black writer. I'm not just a black writer, but categories like black writer, woman writer and Latin American writer aren't marginal anymore. We have to acknowledge that the thing we call literature is more pluralistic now, just as society ought to be. The melting pot never worked. We ought to be able to accept on equal terms everybody from the Hasidim to Walter Lippmann, from the Rastafarians to Ralph Bunche.

- Morrison, Toni

The shelf life of the modern hardback writer is somewhere between the milk and the yogurt.

- Mortimer, John

Writing is like getting married. One should never commit oneself until one is amazed at

one's luck.

- Murdoch, Iris

Style and Structure are the essence of a book; great ideas are hogwash.

- Nabokov, Vladimir

I'm the kind of writer that people think other people are reading.

- Naipaul, V. S.

The only way out is the way through, just as you cannot escape from death except by dying. Being unable to write, you must examine in writing this being unable, which becomes for the present -- henceforth? -- the subject to which you are condemned.

- Nemerov, Howard

To be a good diarist, one must have a snouty, sneaky mind.

- Nicolson, Harold

Of all that is written, I love only what a person has written with his own blood.

- Nietzsche, Friedrich

A writer is a person who has solutions for which there are no riddles.

- Nunn, Gregory

Everywhere I go I'm asked if I think the university stifles writers. My opinion is that they don't stifle enough of them.

- O'Connor, Flannery

Good novels are not written by orthodoxy-sniffers, nor by people who are conscience-stricken about their own orthodoxy. Good novels are written by people who are not frightened.

- Orwell, George

All writers are vain, selfish and lazy, and at the very bottom of their motives lies a mystery. Writing a book is a long, exhausting struggle, like a long bout of some painful illness. One would never undertake such a thing if one were not driven by some demon whom one can neither resist nor understand.

- Orwell, George

For a creative writer possession of the truth is less important than emotional sincerity.

- Orwell, George

He is a man of thirty-five, but looks fifty. He is bald, has varicose veins and wears spectacles, or would wear them if his only pair were not chronically lost. If things are normal with him, he will be suffering from malnutrition, but if he has recently had a lucky streak, he will be suffering from a hangover. At present it is half past eleven in the morning, and according to his schedule he should have started work two hours ago; but even if he had made any serious effort to start he would have been frustrated by the

almost continuous ringing of the telephone bell, the yells of the baby, the rattle of an electric drill out in the street, and the heavy boots of his creditors clumping up the stairs. The most recent interruption was the arrival of the second post, which brought him two circulars and an income tax demand printed in red. Needless to say this person is a writer.

- Orwell, George

One reason writers write is out of revenge. Life hurts; certain ideas and experiences hurt; one wants to clarify, to set out illuminations, to replay the old bad scenes and get the Treppenworte said -- the words one didn't have the strength or ripeness to say when those words were necessary for one's dignity or survival.

- Ozick, Cynthia

If you're going to write, don't pretend to write down. It's going to be the best you can do, and it's the fact that it's the best you can do that kills you.

- Parker, Dorothy

If I had more time I would write a shorter letter.

- Pascal, Blaise

The last thing we decide in writing a book is what to put first.

- Pascal, Blaise

Writers, you know, are the beggars of Western society.

- Paz, Octavio

Good writing excites me, and makes life worth living.

- Pinter, Harold

I would love to spend all my time writing to you; I'd love to share with you all that goes through my mind, all that weighs on my heart, all that gives air to my soul; phantoms of art, dreams that would be so beautiful if they could come true.

- Pirandello, Luigi

Most authors steal their works, or buy.

- Pope, Alexander

Ten censure wrong, for one that writes amiss.

- Pope, Alexander

Why did I write? What sin to me unknown dipped me in ink, my parents , or my own?

- Pope, Alexander

True ease in writing comes from art, not chance, as those move easiest who have learned to dance. 'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence. The sound must seem an echo to the sense.

- Pope, Alexander

Good authors, too, who once knew better words now only use four-letter words writing prose... anything goes.

- Porter, Cole

Good writers are those who keep the language efficient. That is to say, keep it accurate, keep it clear.

- Pound, Ezra

Nothing written for pay is worth printing. Only what has been written against the market.

- Pound, Ezra

I perceived that to express those impressions, to write that essential book, which is the only true one, a great writer does not, in the current meaning of the word, invent it, but, since it exists already in each one of us, interprets it. The duty and the task of a writer are those of an interpreter.

- Proust, Marcel

Great writers arrive among us like new diseases -- threatening, powerful, impatient for patients to pick up their virus, irresistible.

- Raine, Craig

What no wife of a writer can ever understand is that a writer is working when he's staring out of the window.

- Rascoe, Burton

Really, in the end, the only thing that can make you a writer is the person that you are, the intensity of your feeling, the honesty of your vision, the unsentimental acknowledgment of the endless interest of the life around and within you. Virtually nobody can help you deliberately-many people will help you unintentionally.

- Rau, Santha Rama

Make em laugh; make em cry; make em wait.

- Reade, Charles

To write something, you have to risk making a fool of yourself.

- Rice, Anne

Fundamentally, all writing is about the same thing; it's about dying, about the brief flicker of time we have here, and the frustration that it creates.

- Richler, Mordecai

Never write on a subject until you have read yourself full of it.

- Richter, Jean Paul

A writer writes not because he is educated but because he is driven by the need to communicate. Behind the need to communicate is the need to share. Behind the need to share is the need to be understood. The writer wants to be understood much more than

he wants to be respected or praised or even loved. And that perhaps, is what makes him different from others.

- Rosten, Leo

Every writer is a narcissist. This does not mean that he is vain; it only means that he is hopelessly self-absorbed.

- Rosten, Leo

The only reason for being a professional writer is that you can't help it.

- Rosten, Leo

Whores and writers, Mahound. We are the people you can't forgive.

- Rushdie, Salman

Writers and politicians are natural rivals. Both groups try to make the world in their own images; they fight for the same territory.

- Rushdie, Salman

I make no complaint. I am a writer. I do not accept my condition; I will strive to change it; but I inhabit it, I am trying to learn from it.

- Rushdie, Salman

Books choose their authors; the act of creation is not entirely a rational and conscious

one.

- Rushdie, Salman

It is excellent discipline for an author to feel that he must say all that he has to say in the fewest possible words, or his readers is sure to skip them.

- Ruskin, John

I am paid by the word, so I always write the shortest words possible.

- Russell, Bertrand

It is necessary to write, if the days are not to slip emptily by. How else, indeed, to clap the net over the butterfly of the moment? for the moment passes, it is forgotten; the mood is gone; life itself is gone. That is where the writer scores over his fellows: he catches the changes of his mind on the hop. Growth is exciting; growth is dynamic and alarming. Growth of the soul, growth of the mind.

- Sackville-West, Vita

Writing is a question of finding a certain rhythm. I compare it to the rhythms of jazz. Much of the time life is a sort of rhythmic progression of three characters. If one tells oneself that life is like that, one feels it less arbitrary.

- Sagan, Françoise

The trade of authorship is a violent, and indestructible obsession.

- Sand, George

Writing is to descend like a miner to the depths of the mine with a lamp on your forehead, a light whose dubious brightness falsifies everything, whose wick is in permanent danger of explosion, whose blinking illumination in the coal dust exhausts and corrodes your eyes.

- Sauser, Blaise Cendrars

When an author is too meticulous about his style, you may presume that his mind is frivolous and his content flimsy.

- Seneca

The man who writes about himself and his own time is the only man who writes about all people and about all time.

- Shaw, George Bernard

You must not suppose, because I am a man of letters, that I never tried to earn an honest living.

- Shaw, George Bernard

I cringe when critics say I'm a master of the popular novel. What's an unpopular novel?

- Shaw, Irwin

Easy writings curse is hard reading.

- Sheridan, Richard Brinsley

Thus, with child to speak, and helpless in my throes, biting my truant pen, beating myself for spite: Fool! said my muse to me, look in thy heart, and write.

- Sidney, Sir Philip

Writing is not a profession, but a vocation of unhappiness.

- Simenon, Georges

A good writer is basically a story teller, not a scholar or a redeemer of mankind.

- Singer, Isaac Bashevis

Paper and ink are all but trash, if I cannot find the thought which the writer did think.

- Smith, Dr. Walter

What I like in a good author isn't what he says, but what he whispers.

- Smith, Logan Pearsall

Whiskey has killed more men than bullets, but most men would rather be full of whiskey than bullets. What I like in a good author is not what he says, but what he whispers.

- Smith, Logan Pearsall

Agatha Christie has given more pleasure in bed than any other woman.

- Smith, Nancy Banks

The writer does the most good who gives his reader the most knowledge and takes from him the least time.

- Smith, Sydney

Employ your time in improving yourself by other men's writings so that you shall come easily by what others have labored hard for.

- Socrates

Writing is the continuation of politics by other means.

- Sollers, Philippe

For a country to have a great writer is like having another government. That's why no regime has ever loved great writers, only minor ones.

- Solzhenitsyn, Alexander

The writer is either a practicing recluse or a delinquent, guilt-ridden one; or both. Usually both.

- Sontag, Susan

The best emotions to write out of are anger and fear or dread. The least energizing emotion to write out of is admiration. It is very difficult to write out of because the basic

feeling that goes with admiration is a passive contemplative mood.

- Sontag, Susan

Writers are a little below the clowns and a little above the trained seals.

- Steinbeck, John

The profession of book writing makes horse racing seem like a solid, stable business.

- Steinbeck, John

The discipline of the written word punishes both stupidity and dishonesty.

- Steinbeck, John

Writing is the only thing that, when I do it, I don't feel I should be doing something else.

- Steinem, Gloria

What you're trying to do when you write is to crowd the reader out of his own space and occupy it with yours, in a good cause. You're trying to take over his sensibility and deliver an experience that moves from mere information.

- Stone, Robert

What an occupation! To sit and flay your fellow men and then offer their skins for sale and expect them to buy them.

- Strindberg, J. August

Let's face it, writing is hell.

- Styron, William

O Grub Street! how do I bemoan thee, whose graceless children scorn to own thee! . Yet thou hast greater cause to be ashamed of them, than they of thee.

- Swift, Jonathan

Style may defined as the proper words in the proper places.

- Swift, Jonathan

As a man has no right to kill one of his children if it is diseased or insane, so a man who has made the gradual and conscious expression of his personality in literature the aim of his life, has no right to suppress himself any carefully considered work which seemed good enough when it was written. Suppression, if it is deserved, will come rapidly enough from the same causes that suppress the unworthy members of a man's family.

- Synge, J. M.

The two most engaging powers of a good author are to make new things familiar and familiar things new.

- Thackeray, William M.

A perfectly healthy sentence, it is true, is extremely rare. For the most part we miss the

hue and fragrance of the thought; as if we could be satisfied with the dews of the morning or evening without their colors, or the heavens without their azure.

- Thoreau, Henry David

How vain it is to sit down to write when you have not stood up to live.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Some American writers who have known each other for years have never met in the daytime or when both were sober.

- Thurber, James

When all things are equal, translucence in writing is more effective than transparency, just as glow is more revealing than glare.

- Thurber, James

A writer is dear and necessary for us only in the measure of which he reveals to us the inner workings of his very soul.

- Tolstoy, Count Leo

No doubt I shall go on writing, stumbling across tundras of unmeaning, planting words like bloody flags in my wake. Loose ends, things unrelated, shifts, nightmare journeys, cities arrived at and left, meetings, desertions, betrayals, all manner of unions, adulteries, triumphs, defeats... these are the facts.

- Trocchi, Alexander

Most writers regard the truth as their most valuable possession, and therefore are economical in its use.

- Twain, Mark

Write without pay until somebody offers to pay you. If nobody offers within three years, sawing wood is what you were intended for.

- Twain, Mark

As to the adjective, when in doubt strike it out.

- Twain, Mark

Often I think writing is a sheer paring away of oneself leaving always something thinner, barer, more meager.

- Unknown, Source

My idea is always to reach my generation. The wise writer writes for the youth of his own generation, the critics of the next, and the schoolmasters of ever afterward.

- Unknown, Source

An author ought to write for the youth of his own generation, the critics of the next, and the schoolmasters of ever afterwards.

- Unknown, Source

All good writing is swimming under water and holding your breath.

- Unknown, Source

Mostly, we authors must repeat ourselves -- that's the truth. We have two or three great moving experiences in our lives -- experiences so great and moving that it doesn't seem at the time that anyone else has been so caught up and pounded and dazzled and astonished and beaten and broken and rescued and illuminated and rewarded and humbled in just that way ever before.

- Unknown, Source

You don't write because you want to say something; you write because you've got something to say.

- Unknown, Source

Writing is simple. First you have to make sure you have plenty of paper... sharp pencils... typewriter ribbon. Then put your belly up to your desk... roll a sheet of paper into the typewriter... and stare at it until beads of blood appear on your forehead.

- Unknown, Source

Writers aren't people exactly. Or, if they're any good, they're a whole lot of people trying so hard to be one person. It's like actors, who try so pathetically not to look in mirrors. Who lean back ward trying -- only to see their faces in the reflecting chandeliers.

- Unknown, Source

Many writers who choose to be active in the world lose not virtue but time, and that stillness without which literature cannot be made.

- Vidal, Gore

Each writer is born with a repertory company in his head. Shakespeare has perhaps 20 players, and Tennessee Williams has about 5, and Samuel Beckett one -- and maybe a clone of that one. I have 10 or so, and that's a lot. As you get older, you become more skillful at casting them.

- Vidal, Gore

Most bad books get that way because their authors are engaged in trying to justify themselves. If a vain author is an alcoholic, then the most sympathetically portrayed character in his book will be an alcoholic. This sort of thing is very boring for outsiders.

- Vizinczey, Stephen

You can never correct your work well until you have forgotten it.

- Voltaire

The art of writing is the art of applying the seat of the pants to the seat of the chair.

- Vorse, Mary Heaton

I love being a writer, what I can't stand is the paperwork.

- Vries, Peter De

Writing saved me from the sin and inconvenience of violence.

- Walker, Alice

Every drop of ink in my pen ran cold.

- Walpole, Horace

Once in seven years I burn all my sermons; for it is a shame if I cannot write better sermons now than I did seven years ago.

- Wesley, John

Good writing is clear thinking made visible.

- Wheeler, Bill

Writing is an act of faith, not a trick of grammar.

- White, Elwyn Brooks

In a sense the world dies every time a writer dies, because, if he is any good, he has been a wet nurse to humanity during his entire existence and has held earth close around him, like the little obstetrical toad that goes about with a cluster of eggs attached to his legs.

- White, Elwyn Brooks

Writing is not like painting where you add. It is not what you put on the canvas that the reader sees. Writing is more like a sculpture where you remove, you eliminate in order to make the work visible. Even those pages you remove somehow remain.

- Wiesel, Elie

This morning I took out a comma and this afternoon I put it back in again.

- Wilde, Oscar

From the point of view of literature Mr. Kipling is a genius who drops his aspirates. From the point of view of life, he is a reporter who knows vulgarity better than any one has ever known it.

- Wilde, Oscar

His style is chaos illumined by flashes of lightning. As a writer he has mastered everything except language.

- Wilde, Oscar

The future author is one who discovers that language, the exploration and manipulation of the resources of language, will serve him in winning through to his way.

- Wilder, Thornton

A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.

- Woolf, Virginia

Every secret of a writer's soul, every experience of his life, every quality of his mind is written large in his works.

- Woolf, Virginia

I was in a queer mood, thinking myself very old: but now I am a woman again -- as I always am when I write.

- Woolf, Virginia

We are nauseated by the sight of trivial personalities decomposing in the eternity of print.

- Woolf, Virginia

The creations of a great writer are little more than the moods and passions of his own heart, given surnames and Christian names, and sent to walk the earth.

- Yeats, William Butler

Clutter is the disease of American writing. We are a society strangling in unnecessary words, circular constructions, pompous frills and meaningless jargon.

- Zinsser, William

Four basic premises of writing: clarity, brevity, simplicity, and humanity.

- Zinsser, William

Hard writing makes easy reading. Easy writing makes hard reading.

- Zinsser, William

Writing is thinking on paper.

- Zinsser, William

Writing is a craft not an art.

- Zinsser, William



QuotationsBook