



Register | Log In

Search

**WD** 85th ANNUAL WRITER'S DIGEST WRITING COMPETITION

**Early-Bird Deadline: May 6, 2016**

**Enter Today**



### 101 Best Websites for Writers

Subscribe to our FREE email newsletter and get the NEW 101 Best Websites for Writers download.

enter your email address here

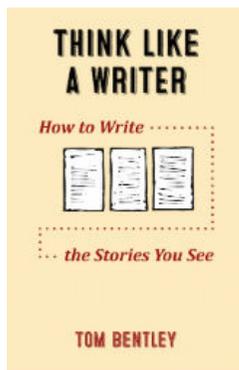


## Don't Muzzle (or Muffle) Your Writing Voice

By: Guest Column | June 8, 2015



I think about the issue of voice in writing quite often. You know, your writing voice, that whiff of brimstone or reverberant cello note or cracked teeth and swollen tongue that stamps your writing as having been issued from you alone. Many writers, particularly younger ones, struggle to find their voice: the word choice, the cadence, the tone, the very punctuation—the stuff that slyly suggests or that screams that *you* wrote it.



*This guest post is by Tom Bentley. Bentley is a fiction writer, an essayist, and a business writer and editor. (He does not play banjo.) He's published hundreds of freelance pieces—ranging from first-person essays to travel pieces to more journalistic subjects—in newspapers, magazines, and online. He is the author of a coming-of-age novel and a short story collection. You can see examples of his services, his published writing, and his lurid*

*website confessions at [tombentley.com](http://tombentley.com).*

You'd never mistake Donald Barthelme for Ernest Hemingway; the word blossoms gathered in Virginia Woolf's garden would have flowers not found in the window-box plantings of Joan Didion. So your writing and be yours alone.

One of the things that  
Ricki Lee Jones in c



person). She was cuckoo and mesmerizing in the best of ways on stage: banging on the roof of the piano, exhorting the other players, talking to them in asides during some songs. She played a lunatic version of *Don't Fear the Reaper(!)*, beating out a slapclap on the top of her piano. The performance was so Rikki Lee Jones: singular, eccentric, passionate, moody. You wanted to be around her just to see what she might do or say (or sing) next. Her voice was hers and hers alone.

## Your Writing Voice Is There for the Singing

When you're developing your writing voice, you might be so painstakingly wrapped up in expressing yourself JUST SO that you drain the blood out of your writing, or pull the plug on the electricity of your ideas. You might have read an essay by Pico Iyer or a story by Alice Munro or a novel by Cormac McCarthy and you might be trying so hard to source and employ the rhythms, humors and tics of those gifted writers that you spill onto the page a fridge full of half-opened condiments that cancel each other's flavors.

Be yourself behind the pen, be the channel between what cooks in your brain and what courses through the keyboard. Even if that self is one day the grinning jester and another the sentimental fool, be fully that person, unmasked, on the page. Maybe you grew up in a slum in Mumbai or have a pied-à-terre in every European capital, maybe your adolescence was a thing of constant pain, maybe you never made a wrong move, maybe you never moved at all—it should be in your writing, whether in its proclamations or its subtext. Your voice is all the Crayons in your box.

*[Here are 12 Lessons Learned From a Debut Author That Will Help You Get Published]*

For instance, if you're inclined to the confessional (like all us old Catholics), turn to your sins: I was a very enterprising shoplifter in high school, running a cottage resale business on the side. While I don't recommend they teach my techniques in business school, I later forged my history of happy hands into an award-winning short story, and then turned the [account of having won that short story contest](#) into a published article in a *Writer's Market* volume. Ahh, the just desserts of an empire of crime.

## A Voice, and Its Chorus

Of course it's no monotone: Sometimes I might write about Sisyphus and sometimes I might write about drool (and sometimes I might speculate whether Sisyphus drooled while pushing the rock up that endless hill). By that I mean your short stories might have a female narrators, male narrators, be set in a tiny town one time and in a howling metropolis the next. But you still must find the voice—*your* voice—for that story.

I like to write essays that often take a humorous slant, but at the same time, that isn't the limit or restriction I put on my own expression. I published a piece on not actually knowing my father despite my years with him, and [another that discusses](#) never finding out what happened to my high school girlfriend after she vanished in Colombia. Both had a tone of pathos. That pensive tone is also one of my voices, and its sobriety doesn't cancel the chiming of my comic voice. So your voice might be part of a choir.

*[Want to land an agent? Here are 4 things to consider when researching literary agents.]*

## Getting Gritty About Grammar

A friend of mine who was putting together a "private university" once asked me if I would teach a 16-session class on grammar, because of what she perceived as the lamentable state of comprehension of language structures and their underpinnings among the young. Now I could probably do a decent job of that, though I'd definitely have to brush up on some grammar formalities and its seemingly obscurantist vocabulary. But after thinking about it, I decided that it just wasn't right for me. It wouldn't be an expression of my voice, like teaching a class on writing an essay or developing a character would be.

The tools are important indeed, but the authentic voice is transcendent.

Here's a [good, helpful essay](#) on finding and developing your writer's voice, courtesy of Writer's Digest (and here's [another fine one](#), on the same topic from Jane Friedman). An important point in both essays is that the expression of self in writing, be it in diction, passion, slant or tone, can be a variant thing—the hummingbird's flight is always expressive of the bird, but its dartings and hoverings aren't always approached from the same direction or desire.

So, let your writer's voice take wing.



***Want more?** Don't make simple mistakes that can sink your chances of getting published. In our tutorial [8 Things First-Time Novelists Need to Avoid](#), you'll learn the common mistakes first-time novelists make—which is critical in helping you avoid being perceived as a “beginner” by industry professionals. [Enjoy the sneak peek above then order here.](#)*

Thanks for visiting *The Writer's Dig* blog. [For more great writing advice, click here.](#)

**Brian A. Klems is the editor of this blog, online editor of *Writer's Digest* and author of the popular gift book *Oh Boy, You're Having a Girl: A Dad's Survival Guide to Raising Daughters*.**

Follow Brian on Twitter: [@BrianKlems](#)  
Sign up for Brian's free *Writer's Digest* eNewsletter: [WD Newsletter](#)



#### You might also like:

- [Early Bird Deadline April 1: Writer's Digest Conference in NYC](#)
- [Coping With Writer's Jealousy](#)
- [How to Write the Perfect Query Letter](#)
- [Want to Write a Column? Here are 7 Key Tips You Need to Know](#)
- [8 Practical Tips to Avoid Too Much Plot in Your Novel](#)



---

#### CATEGORIES

Brian Klems' The Writer's Dig

---

#### TAGS

Brian Klems

---

#### RELATED POSTS

[Early Bird Deadline April 1: Writer's Digest Conference in NYC](#) [<http://www.writersdigest.com/online-editor/early-bird-deadline-april-1-writers-digest-conference-in-nyc>]

[Coping With Writer's Jealousy](#) [<http://www.writersdigest.com/online-editor/coping-with-writers-jealousy>]

[How to Write the Perfect Query Letter](#) [<http://www.writersdigest.com/online-editor/how-to-write-the->

perfect-query-letter]

Want to Write a Column? Here are 7 Key Tips You Need to Know [http://www.writersdigest.com/online-editor/want-to-write-a-column-here-are-7-key-tips-you-need-to-know]

8 Practical Tips to Avoid Too Much Plot in Your Novel [http://www.writersdigest.com/online-editor/too-much-of-a-good-thing-dont-sink-a-story-with-too-much-plot]

DID YOU LOVE THIS ARTICLE? SUBSCRIBE TODAY & SAVE 58%



Name  City

Email Address  State/Province

Address 1  Zip

Address 2

You might also like:  
No Related Posts

4 thoughts on "Don't Muzzle (or Muffle) Your Writing Voice"



**bowenk39**  
June 11, 2015 at 6:47 pm

i buy almost everything except food and clothing from online auctions most people aren't aware of the almost I unbelievable deals that they can get from online auction sites the site that has the best deals is Best Deal Here >>> <http://www.Profit-Review.Com>



**PhoenixRising360**  
June 10, 2015 at 8:20 am

Liked the analogy of singing to writing. I think too often writers are trying so hard to impress they forget to channel emotions through their writing which is what will make the real impression.



**jotokai**  
June 9, 2015 at 4:16 pm

I think the key is to find many ways to say it. When you've find several that follow all the rules that you want to follow, then the one you like is yours.

**luigikorrey**  
June 9, 2015 at 2:36 am

Some indie authors have achieved a lot of success by running temporary sales on their ebooks—even setting the price at “free” for a few days. This tactic can generate a lot of visibility and build your fan base quickly. Applied to one book in an ongoing series, low or free pricing also can attract many readers who'll then go and buy all the others.

But obviously, it's not a great tactic to give away your work permanently, not if your long-term goal is to make writing books a paying proposition.

## Stock Photos

20 Million Royalty-Free Images. Try Bigstock Free for 7 Days.



### MARCH/APRIL ISSUE



### Writer's Digest Magazine

- [Preview the Issue](#)
- [Buy It Here](#)
- [Give a Gift Subscription](#)

**Save 58%!**

[SUBSCRIBE](#)

### FREE WRITING DOWNLOADS

- [How Do I Write & Sell Short Fiction?](#)
- [Freelance Pricing Guide](#)
- [Promoting Your Work and Yourself](#)
- [Why Am I Getting Rejected?](#)
- [Protecting Your Writing](#)
- [Selling Your Work Online](#)
- [Fiction Genre Descriptions](#)

### More Free Writing Downloads

### WRITER'S DIGEST SHOP



### Secrets to Getting Published Kit - Nonfiction

Ideal for nonfiction writers looking to get noticed, this unique collection of helpful materials has ...

~~\$286.97~~

**\$75.99**

[BUY NOW!](#)

### WRITING WORKSHOPS STARTING MARCH 31ST

- [Breaking into Copywriting](#)
- [Blogging 101](#)
- [Social Media 101](#)
- [Character Development: Creating Memorable Characters](#)
- [Advanced Poetry](#)
- [Fitting Writing into Your Life](#)

- [Writing the Romance Novel](#)

[View All Online Writing Workshops](#)



**WRITER'S DIGEST ANNUAL CONFERENCE**  
August 12-14 • NYC

Featuring David Baldacci and Kwame Alexander

**Register by April 1 for your best price!**

**UPCOMING BOOT CAMP**



**How to Write and Pitch Novels & Picture Books for Kids Boot Camp**

[BUY NOW!](#)

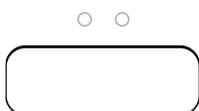
Get instruction and a personalized critique of your first 1,000 words or 5 pages from a literary agent during this online event April 18-21, 2016. Sign up now!

[Learn More.](#)

**GOOGLE LINKS**

**Shutterstock Stock Photos**

Over 50,000 Images Added Daily. What Will You Create?



**SPONSORED LINKS**

**Writing A Book?**

Get 8 Free Guides To Writing, Blogging & Publishing From BookBaby



**FEATURED LINKS**

**Advance your career in just 90 minutes**

Check out a live or OnDemand webinar from WD!

**The Best Writing Instruction on the Web**

New workshops start weekly. View the course schedule now

**Get paid for Your Writing**

Find over 7000 agents, publishers, and more

**Enhance Your Writing Career**

Save on Writers Digest Subscriptions