

NCTE

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So You Want To Be a Better Writer? Try These Tips and Tools from the National Council of Teachers of English



1. **Write often!** Give yourself a boost with regular writing practices like journal-writing, taking notes on your reading, and freewriting (which teacher and writer Peter Elbow calls, “the most effective way I know to improve your writing.”)

2. Experiment to expand your range and abilities. Try writing for many different purposes and audiences—try stories, memoirs, letters to the editor, and more. **Be brave!**

3. Have fun with writing. Play with words, use your imagination, and tune your ear for language that tickles you. One student coined the term “sizzling pickles” for pleasing words and phrases that jump out when you read them. Look for your own “sizzling pickles” and use them in your writing. And keep your eyes and ears peeled—ideas and inspiration for writing are lurking everywhere.

Keep a notebook with intriguing words and phrases you hear, or a file on your phone.

4. Don't be shy about passing your writing around—it's good experience to **get feedback from friends, family, and writers you respect.**

5. Read! **“Read like a wolf eats!”** as writer Gary Paulsen says. **Read like a writer!** Try to imagine why and how the author did something in a certain way and think about the techniques you use in your own writing. Use your favorite writers as models for writing practice.

6. Use writing to find out what you know, not just in English class, but also in other subjects and in ordinary life. **The funny thing about writing is that it actually helps you think!** Whether it's a math problem or a magazine article, writing about it can help you think it through and make connections.



7. If you have trouble getting started, try brainstorming, clustering, looking for ideas in your journal or writer's notebook, or imitating the first lines of your favorite novels.

8. **Write what you know.** There's no need to make each piece your life's history, but do find your topics, descriptions, dialogue, and ideas in your own life's experiences.

So important!

9. Work first on developing and drafting your ideas. **Revise, revise, revise!** Then edit for correct grammar and spelling. Try this technique used by professional editors: Don't search for every type of error at once—use separate readings of your document to find and correct different types of errors. Your close attention to revising and editing will make your writing clearer to your audience.

10. **Save your writings in a writing folder or notebook and occasionally take time to review and reflect.** Ask yourself what you like about a piece, what you don't like, and what you would like to change. Your writing notebook will help you choose areas that you still want to work on, and will be a rich source for new ideas.