

Creative Non-Fiction: The Final Issue (2024)

[But] despite the resistance and criticism, the idea of writing non-fiction that was personal, intimate, and cinematic, with writers opening up and exploring all possibilities, employing the tools of storytelling—first gradually and then rapidly—caught on.... It took a while, but the academy [has now] embraced creative non-fiction and its virtues.... Nearly every week, creative non-fiction books appear on the bestseller lists of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*.... Many newspapers today ... regularly solicit and publish personal essays [in their] opinion and feature pages.... Today, creative non-fiction is ... a legitimate and accepted genre worldwide. (13-16)

[Creative non-fiction was] rarely permitted in newspapers, magazines, and literary journals [when *Creative Non-Fiction* launched in 1994].... Creative writing programs in English departments paid little attention to non-fiction at the time, whether or not it was deemed “creative.”.... Throughout the next decade ... many people in the academy and the journalistic community made light of [it].... Some of the pushback was quite mean-spirited. Michael Anderson, an editor for the *New York Times Book Review*, characterized the idea of creative non-fiction as “bullshit.... If it is creative, then it’s not non-fiction, and if it’s non-fiction, it is not creative.” (11-12)

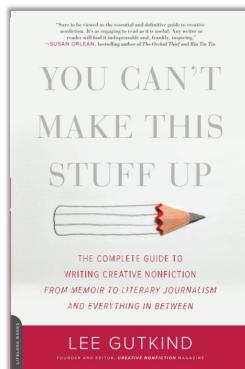
Lee Gutkind. “The Best of Thirty Years of Creative Non-Fiction.” *Creative Non-Fiction: The Final Issue*, edited by Lee Gutkind and Lee Rubinkowski, Belt, 2024, pp. 11-17.

Attendance Question

What is the most important consideration for a writer who wishes to create believable manufactured dialogue in a work of CNF?

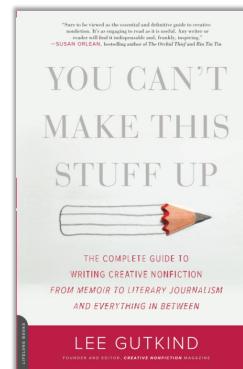
- **Verisimilitude (6):** it should sound like an authentic, plausible, relatable, and believable conversation between two (or more) real people
- **Characterization (4):** it should clearly differentiate between the various characters to showcase their unique personalities, roles, and voices
- **Narrative Advancement (2):** it should say something, have a clear purpose, and move the narrative in a specific direction
- **Concision (1):** it should remain tightly focused on the theme of the larger work and avoid going off on unnecessary tangents or digressions
- **Clarity (1):** it should avoid vagueness, excessive abstraction, and jargon, and ground itself in something concrete
- **Show, Don’t Tell (1):** it should reveal character and/or theme more through what the characters do than through what they say

Writing Creative Non-Fiction



- Unit 1a:** What Is Creative Non-Fiction?
- Unit 1b:** The Truthfulness of CNF
- Unit 1c: Ten Writing Recommendations**
- Unit 2a:** Types of Creative Non-Fiction
- Unit 2b:** Research and Immersion
- Unit 2c:** Narrative and Narrators
- Unit 3a:** Reading and Readers
- Unit 3b:** Scenes
- Unit 3c:** Information
- Unit 4a:** Recreation and Reconstruction
- Unit 4b:** Hook, Frame, and Focus
- Unit 4c:** Revising Creative Non-Fiction

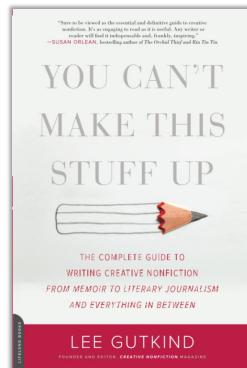
Ten Writing Recommendations



The Practicalities of Writing

- 1. Find a suitable time and place to write:** Keep to a regular writing schedule.
- 2. Read widely and voraciously:** Reading and writing go hand in hand.
- 3. Set concrete and attainable goals:** Break down work into manageable chunks.
- 4. Use an outline as a guide, not a straitjacket:** They are a rough overview, not a strict roadmap.

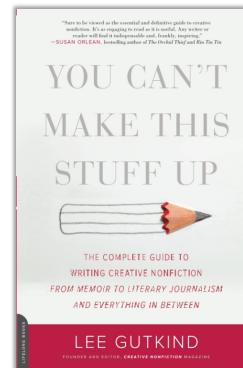
~~ Ten Writing Recommendations



The Writing Life

5. **Write voluntarily, not by coercion:** Writing under duress results in poor writing.
6. **Understand that writing is a process:** It should be conceived as a series of tasks, not as one task.
7. **Achieve a balance between work and life:** Prioritize, organize, and budget time effectively.

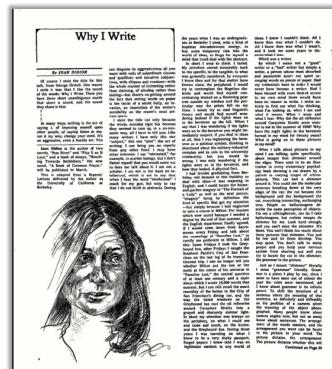
~~ Ten Writing Recommendations



Philosophical Considerations

8. **Recognize and accept that writing is difficult and time consuming:** Writing is labour, and labour can be difficult.
9. **Harness your passion:** Think about what most matters to you, and write about it.
10. **Know that writing is partially instinctual:** Some of it is an inborn skill and pattern of behaviour.

Joan Didion, "Why I Write" (1976)



[I am] a writer, a person whose most absorbed and passionate hours are spent arranging words on pieces of paper. Had my credentials been in order I would never have become a writer. Had I been blessed with even limited access to my own mind there would have been no reason to write. I write entirely to find out what I'm thinking, what I'm looking at, what I see and what it means. What I want and what I fear.

Joan Didion. "Why I Write." *The New York Times Book Review*, 5 Dec. 1976, pp. 2, 98-99.

~~ Author Biographies

Edith Iglauer

- British Columbia-based author and journalist
- was a staff writer and frequent contributor to the *New Yorker*
- wrote for the *Vancouver Sun* and the literary journal *Geist* until her death in 2019 at age 101
- *Fishing with John* was first published in 1988 and was a runaway bestseller (392-93)

Molly Peacock

- Toronto-based author of biography, memoir, poetry, and essays
- author of the bestselling biography *Mrs Delaney Begins Her Life Work at 72*
- is series editor for *The Best Canadian Poetry in English*, an influential annual publication
- "On Dormancy" first appeared in *House and Garden Magazine*

www.mollypeacock.org

 **Edith Iglauer, from *Fishing with John***
The Writing Life

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“On my first trip ... I had scarcely noticed my immediate surroundings.... Now I was alive to everything....” (181)

“Nothing that has to be done on this boat comes naturally to me,’ I said unhappily. ‘I don’t think I can do any of the things you really need.’” (173)

“It’s a way of life for me.... [It becomes] part of you and you part of it. It’s indivisible.” (176)

 **Molly Peacock, “On Dormancy”**
The Practicalities of Writing

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The Writing Life

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“... [P]aperwhite narcissus bulbs” require “a fishbowl” placed in a “cool, dark place” in order to grow effectively. (236-37)

“Don’t hide them too far away, or you won’t be able to lurk about watching the process of dormancy.... *Give yourself a rest.*” (237)

“Fallowness is not the same as barrenness.... Everything worth producing ... is worth doing *absolutely nothing* for.” (235)

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