

## 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)

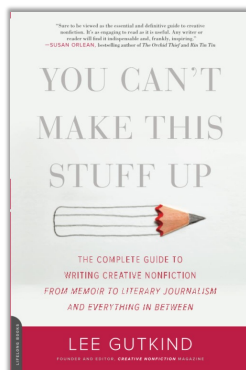
Lee Gutkind. “The Best of Thirty Years of Creative Non-Fiction.” *Creative Non-Fiction: The Final Issue*, edited by Lee Gutkind and Lee Rubinkowski, Belt, 2024, pp. 11-17.

## 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

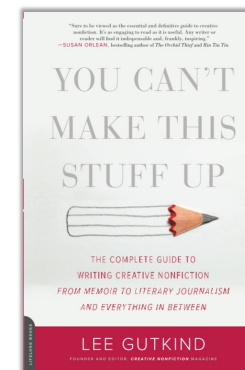
**Unit 3c:** Information

**Unit 4a:** Recreation and Reconstruction

**Unit 4b:** Hook, Frame, and Focus

**Unit 4c:** Revising Creative Non-Fiction

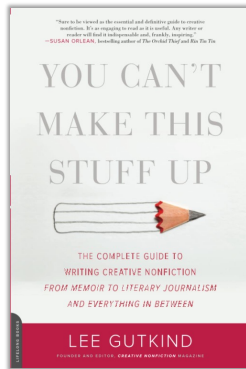
## Ten Writing Recommendations



**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.

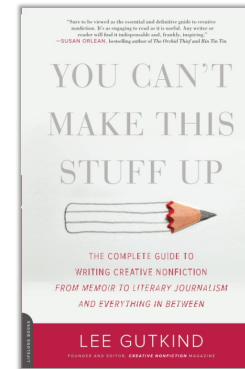
## 🔗 Ten Writing Recommendations



### 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](http://www.mollypeacock.org)

### Edith Iglauer, from *Fishing with John*

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| <p><b>The Writing Life</b></p> <p>5. <b>Write voluntarily, not by coercion:</b> Writing under duress results in poor writing.</p> <p><b>Philosophical Considerations</b></p> <p>8. <b>Recognize and accept that writing is difficult and time consuming:</b> Writing is labour, and labour can be difficult.</p> <p>9. <b>Harness your passion:</b> Think about what most matters to you, and write about it.</p> | <p>“On my first trip ... I had scarcely noticed my immediate surroundings.... Now I was alive to everything....” (181)</p> <p>““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)</p> <p>“It’s a way of life for me.... [It becomes] part of you and you part of it. It’s indivisible.” (176)</p> |
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### Molly Peacock, “On Dormancy”

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| <p><b>The Practicalities of Writing</b></p> <p>1. <b>Find a suitable time and place to write:</b> Keep to a regular writing schedule.</p> <p><b>The Writing Life</b></p> <p>6. <b>Understand that writing is a process:</b> It should be conceived as a series of tasks, not as one task.</p> <p>7. <b>Achieve a balance between work and life:</b> Prioritize, organize, and budget time effectively.</p> | <p>“... [P]aperwhite narcissus bulbs” require “a fishbowl” placed in a “cool, dark place” in order to grow effectively. (236-37)</p> <p>“Don’t hide them too far away, or you won’t be able to lurk about watching the process of dormancy.... <i>Give yourself a rest.</i>” (237)</p> <p>“Fallowness is not the same as barrenness.... Everything worth producing ... is worth doing <i>absolutely nothing</i> for.” (235)</p> |
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