

Basic Writing Notes  
For Beginners  
To Become Published Authors  
Strategies and Guidelines  
Practical Help  
Advice to Avoid Mistakes

By Quin Sherrer

Award Winning Author of 31 Christian themed books—

Primarily on prayer and personal renewal

**Quin's Quotes and Notes** or Hints for Writers compiled by Quin Sherrer, who has authored or co-written 31 books with over a million copies in circulation in addition to titles in at least 8 foreign languages.

### **How To Create Your Blueprint**

**\*Write a ONE sentence description of your book. It should include:**

**what you are writing, to whom, and why you are writing it!**

**This sentence is one of your hardest assignments. The purpose is to force you to focus. If you can't do this it makes no sense to go further in the process.**

**Brainstorm or storyboard:** Write down every idea, thought, phrase, point, or topic you can concerning your subject—each on a separate line. Don't worry about spelling or grammar. This is just for you to refer to. When you run out of ideas, interview specialists, glean books on the subject, conduct an online survey, or use a team of people for ideas! \* (gleaned from Eddie Smith's writer's workshop. End of his contribution.)

### **Quin's Notes on Getting Started**

**Take away value:** a spiritual and/or practical lesson that the reader can TAKE AWAY and apply to his or her own life. Ask: Why am I writing this article? What do I want to say? What has God taught me I can share? What are the Biblical principles? What can the reader take away to help?

**The Lead.** It sets the stage, catches the reader's attention and draws him into the article.

Grab the reader with first paragraph or you have lost him. The lead can be an anecdote, a quote, a fact, a statistic, a question or a comparison/contrast lead. A lead has four functions: to attract attention; to establish the subject; set the tone; and guide the reader into the story smoothly and directly. It doesn't have to be written first, but will probably be rewritten many times.

A first person story is strongest. Theme is the glue that holds story together. Write out your theme and keep it before you as you write. Don't insult the reader.

Each of us can testify to something God has done in our life which will encourage or help someone else. But how do we choose what to share? Ask yourself these questions.

1. Which experience will be the most helpful to someone?
2. Which is the most interesting?
3. Which glorifies God the most?

The answer should be the same to all three questions: the experience in which you changed the most. Ask God what you are to share. Is it consistent with Scripture?

### **Get a Critic and Be Willing To Re-write**

Get someone to be an honest critic in reading your work. It will help find the weak spots. Be able to take criticism. Good writing is rewriting. For those who say rewriting isn't necessary because God tells her what to write, Pat King says: **"Certainly God does inspire each of us, but by the**

**time it goes through the muddled process of our brains and gets itself to paper the result is most likely to need repair.”**

Remember, it is not how colorfully you write or even how long, but do you move the hearts of people by what you say? It is better to describe than persuade. Include feelings, freshness, grammar, good ending.

“As a writer you have the power to make people laugh, cry, hate, love and think.”-Anonymous .

Find out area of specialization for you. A good writer shows rather than tells. Example: “He threw the book at the wall” instead of “he was angry.”

Read great authors and books and magazines. Study style. A writer must be a reader.

Read *Guideposts*, *Readers Digest*, Christian magazines; some books by Catherine Marshall, John Gresham, Max Lucado, Jan Karon, and other writers who use description freely.

### **A Writing Formula Known as: Hey, You, See, So, Ha**

Hi or Hey is the opening.

You is reader identification --you get involved.

See is the bulk of the story with concrete words.

So is the take-away --conclusion or payoff.

Ha. The neat closing line that leaves a lump in the throat or a laugh in your heart.

Definition of Guideposts: a first-person narrative written in simple, dramatic, anecdotal style with a spiritual point that the reader can “take away” and apply to his or her own life. It may be your own or someone else’s first-person story.

### **Things I Wished I had Known When I Started Writing (by Ben Bova)**

1. Write something everyday. Don’t find a reason not to. Preferably, at the same time every day. Even if you only get one page done, you have accomplished something.
2. Read widely—Once you’ve read a book,, go back and read it again to see how the author tackled the problems of telling his or her story. Analyze what you’ve read.
3. Write about WHO you know. You will find that, inevitably, your chief model will be yourself. The main characters will have a good dose of your own personality in them. Study all the wonderful diverse people around you—their problems, their loves and hates, joys and sorrows, hopes and fears are the raw material for your stories.
4. Start in the middle. Hook the reader with first line or first paragraph. The best way to do this is by starting your story in the midst of brisk, exciting action.
5. Use all five senses. vision, hearing, touch, taste and smell.

6. Point of view. Every story is about someone. Every story has to be told from someone's point of view.
7. Make your manuscript readable. Typed, double-spaced, identified with your name in the upper left corner of the front page. Each subsequent page should be numbered and "slugged" with the story title and your last name at the top of each page, together with the page number. Generous margins on the left and right, top and bottom. Usually 250 words per page. Don't use fancy typeset. (If typing **book manuscript don't put name on each page/or slug**).

## Memory Bank

“Dig deep in your memory and locate three poignant emotional experiences. Describe them in detail. Mull over these experiences. Which one do you believe could be used in a story, if with suitable changes it becomes a problem, a resolution, whatever?” Margaret J. Anderson, *The Christian Writer’s Handbook*. (Some ideas below were adapted from her book).

Real-life experiences begin in your mind. You go way back and jot these recollections in your idea notebook. Start a memory bank—any number of associations may be combined with your original experience. Here are some that might bring back memories of incidents in your own life you can use as anecdotes:

### Smells:

forest fire	flowers
paper mill	hospital
fresh bread	new mown hay
heavy perfume	fish

### Sounds:

musical instrument	sobbing
foghorn	baby crying
church bells	siren
dog barking	car racing

### Personal Experiences:

dreams	special birthdays
Christmas	a broken promise
a family secret	a family gathering
a Valentine	a relative’s visit

### Encounters with people:

friends	doctor
employers	business associate
a teacher	fellow traveler
a famous person	a foreigner

### Conversations:

opinions	jargon
dialects	arguments
idioms	expressions of devotion
forgiveness	honesty

### Emotions:

loneliness	love
disgust	depression
joy	disappointment
hope	fear

**Settings:**

a lake	a schoolroom
a mine	a home
a forest	a church
a cave	a mountain

**Major Events:**

a flood	a forest fire
a death	a court trial
a birth	a funeral
a wedding	an accident

**Art and Music**

a seascape	a favorite hymn
a folk song	an old quilt
a lullaby	a piece of sculpture

**The Anecdote:**” Perhaps the most difficult short item to write. A miniature dramatic story, it has a beginning which introduces the characters involved, a middle which shows the action and conflict of the piece, and a satisfying ending, usually a punch line which clinches what has been said.” (Margaret Anderson)

**“Writing is what I do. I have to do it.”- James A Michener**

The anointing of the Holy Spirit is what makes the story lasting. Pray before you begin, during writing and afterwards that your story will reach those God wants it to touch. **“Lord, release Your flow of creativity through me.”** Be a writer of excellence. Go over your work before sending it to an editor. Make it the best you can make it.

**News Release:** for newspapers or places where you will be speaking.

Have all five “W” elements plus sometimes HOW

Who (person—with credentials)

What (will speak, autograph books or whatever)

When (date, time)

Where (place)

Why (monthly speaker, to promote book and meet readers, to introduce people to Israel)

**Biographical information.** Keep on hand an up-to-date bio sheet on yourself. Have printed cards to pass out to people with only the information on the cards that you want the general public to know. Some people do not want to include phone numbers or home addresses on their business card.

### **TURN YOUR MESSAGE INTO ARTICLE OR BOOKLET**

**Turn your message into an article or booklet.** Most magazines have a “theme” for each issue and usually work 6 months to a year ahead. Set yourself a realistic goal to reach. Be familiar with the magazine you want to write for. Study several issues. Write for editorial guidelines. Use the internet.

Get : *The Christian Writers’ Market Guide* (newest edition). Available electronically.

**Avoid using “language of Zion”** such as “I ministered to the man” or “God moved in a mighty way.” Show the reader.

**Teaching articles** are usually made up of anecdotes put together with good transition sentences.

**Learn to be a storyteller.** Chances are your reader will remember the little illustration you told longer than some big theological teaching. Make one point the reader will remember. Don’t present the whole dose of a Christian message in one story.

**Topics.** Get file folders and label them. Put articles to illustrate that topic in the folder so that when you are ready to write you will have illustrations. If I own a book, I write on the opening page the page numbers of interest to me in that book. I may even make a photocopy of certain pages and drop them into appropriate file folders. When I’m writing a book I am always looking for experts to quote which gives even more credibility to my point. Be sure to document your source like this: Dutch Sheets, *The Beginner’s Guide to Intercession* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 2001), 171. (This last number is the page number).

### **When writing a book ask yourself:**

What is the book’s “take away” for the reader? Who is your audience? (Men, women, children, leaders?) Is it a teaching manual? How many pages (or chapters)? Could each chapter stand alone as an article? What material should you discard? Cut anything that doesn’t stick with the theme or take away. Save it for your next book.

Goal to complete it: Or when is “Due Date” to publisher? (Never be late)

Due date for release to public? (Sometimes there is a 9 months to 12 months turnaround before book is published and released)

What Bible translation will you use? Ask publisher what their publishing house prefers and stick with it. In the beginning of the book tell what translation you are using for the majority of verses. If you use another translation during the manuscript always note it after the Scripture. Example: (Matthew 18:18 NIV)

Get Permissions if you use real names; if not put a disclaimer on title page to say: “All of these stories are true but some names and places have been changed throughout the book to protect privacy of individuals.” To get permission have person sign a form that says something like: “I have reviewed the written version of the story about me which will appear in the book ----- (name of book) **and I grant nonexclusive permission for worldwide distribution of this story by the authors and publisher (name both) This permission includes all editions, other language translations, and derivations of the work.**”

Can each chapter stand alone as an article? Cut anything that doesn't stick with the theme or take away; save it for next book. Publicity? How will publisher market your book? Ask and be prepared for radio and TV shows and have a bio and photo for publicity ready.

Will You Have A Ministry Newsletter? A blog? (For those in ministry or mission field.)

Decide if you will have a monthly or quarterly newsletter and if it will have pictures, graphic arts, etc. Will you pay to have it done, or do it yourself? What is the purpose of your newsletter? To raise funds? To inform? To gain prayer support?

### **This is a Key Prayer for a Writer in my opinion**

From Glen Clark, published in I Will Lift Up My Eyes, 1937. Adapted by Quin

**In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray for the right ideas to come to me**

**in perfect sequence and in perfect order, and in the right time and in the right way. I pray for my actual needs to be met by the right supply in the right way and at the right time. I pray for my will to be completely and utterly Your will. I pray**

**that You, O Father, will open the door to the right work that will enable me (and my family) to make our finest contribution to mankind. Amen.**

Scriptures: Mark 11:24; John 5:15, 11:22; 14:13; 15:16; 16:23.

## **Manuscript requirements**

On a 8.5x 11 inch sheet of paper, 12 point Times Roman type, double spaced gives you approximately 320 words to a page which is generally the printed page. Usually one inch margins all the way around.

Devotions are 250-300 words generally; magazine articles 1,200 to 1,500 words.

Use short words, sentences, short paragraphs.

Evaluate every statement and ask, “Why will my readers care about this?”

Write in active voice rather than passive. Use active verbs.

Write only to one person (so the reader thinks you are talking to him/her)

If want to “handwrite” before you compose on a computer, use legal paper and write double space so you can edit it before typing it in later. Many writers do this when scribbling down ideas. Keep notebook beside your bed, in car, in purse to record a scene or thought.

Reread the ending of your article to be sure it ties in with your beginning.

Keep theme throughout article,,chapters,etc.

## **How To Keep A Spiritual Journal**

*“This is what the LORD, the God of Israel says: ‘Write in a book all the words I have spoken to you.’”*(Jeremiah 30:2 NIV)

“A journal is a book in which to keep a personal record of events in your life. It is a tool for self discovery, an aid to concentration, a mirror for the soul, a place to generate and capture ideas, a way to gauge our spiritual growth. Spiritual growth concerns all of life—our goals, our time, our relationships, our work, our politics, our inner lives.” (Ronald Klug, How To Keep A Spiritual Journal). The Bible is rich in “remember” encouragements. (Isaiah 46:9; I Chron. 16:12; John 15:20).

At the end of the day you can write down some things that were significant:

In what ways was this day unique? Did I have any significant conversations?

What were my chief joys? Is God trying to tell me something about any emotional high or low points in the day? If I failed at something, what lesson did I learn?

In what area did I learn to trust God more?

Ben Franklin asked himself two questions daily. “**What good am I going to do today?**” And before he went to bed, he would ask, “**What good have I done today?**”

“**“God has given each of you some special abilities; be sure and use them to help each other, passing on to others God’s many kinds of blessings”** (I Peter 4:19 TLB).

### **Writing Tips For Christian Writers ( from Quin Sherrer)**

- A prayer partner (several praying friends preferable).
- An accountability person (holds you accountable to write, will critique what you write).
- A goal to write and finish (set a deadline to finish goal).
- Have a Bible study concordance for your computer. Example: **BibleSoft PC Study Bible** has concordance for five or more translations and commentary. **GatewayBible program** also.
- Become a reader of other books (even biographies, fiction, non-fiction).
- Become a good researcher (learn how to use Internet and libraries).
- Have integrity-do not stretch truth in stories, do not hurt by betrayal, do not steal writing.
- Develop Discipline (find best/right times for you to write).
- Strategy for getting published—study magazines or book publishers.
- Keep an Idea book - Reignite memories and record them.
- Keep a Quote book. Write quote, author’s name, name of book or article, page number, copyright date, even city of publisher. Use this as footnote when quote in article or book.
- Invest in buying *The Christian Writer’s Market Guide* at least every two years.
- In your book are you going to have An Introduction? An Appendix? A Biographical Page? Will you put footnotes as Endnotes in back of book? (Many publishers do today).
- Are you going to have people endorse your manuscript? Who? How will you send them the manuscript? One publisher asks authors: “**Please, do not mail out this manuscript or any edited copies of edited chapters or post on your website... . Hijacked chapters can go viral on the web and we are already tracking down copyright violators on other books. We ask that you let our department mail out galley proofs to prospective endorsers.**”
- How will you promote your book? Hire a publicity firm? Do it yourself? Do you have a list of questions a radio host could ask you about your book? Ask yourself:
- How do you make your life one of spiritual multiplication?” Writing is one way.

I reread often: “*100 Christian Women Who Changed the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*” by Helen Kooiman Hosier, Fleming Revell; *All the Women of the Bible* by Edith Deen, Harper Collins Publishers; and *Women of the Bible* by Ann Spangler and Jean Syswerda, Zondervan.