

Writing for publication may be both the easiest and the hardest thing you'll ever do. Learning the rules—if they can be called rules—is the easy part. Following them, turning them into regular habits, is an ongoing struggle. Here are the rules:

1. Read. Read about the art, the craft, and the business of writing. Read the kind of work you'd like to write. Read good literature and bad, fiction and fact. Read every day and learn from what you read. If you commute to work or if you spend part of your day doing relatively mindless work, listen to book tapes. If your library doesn't have a good supply of complete books on audio tape, companies like Recorded Books, Books on Tape, Brilliance Corporation, and the Literate Ear will rent or sell you a wide selection of such books for your pleasure and continuing education. These provide a painless way to ponder use of language, the sounds of words, conflict, characterization, plotting, and the multitudes of ideas you can find in history, biography, medicine, the sciences, etc.

2. Take classes and go to writers' workshops. Writing is communication. You need other people to let you know whether you're communicating what you think you are and whether you're doing it in ways that are not only accessible and entertaining, but as compelling as you can make them. In



other words, you need to know that you're telling a good story. You want to be the writer who keeps readers up late at night, not the one who drives them off to watch television. Workshops and classes are rented readers—rented audiences—for your work. Learn from the comments, questions, and suggestions of both the teacher and the class. These relative strangers are more likely to tell you the truth about your work than are your friends and family who may not want to hurt or offend you. One tiresome truth they might tell you, for instance, is that you need to take a grammar class. If they say this, listen. Take the class. Vocabulary and grammar are your primary tools. They're most effectively used, even most effectively abused, by people who understand them. No computer program, no friend or employee can take the place of a sound knowledge of your tools.

3. Write. Write every day. Write whether you feel like writing or not. Choose a time of day. Perhaps you can get up an hour earlier, stay up an hour later, give up an hour of recreation, or even give up your lunch hour. If you can't think of anything in your chosen genre, keep a journal. You should be keeping one anyway. Journal writing helps you to be more observant of your world, and a journal is a good place to store story ideas for later projects.

4. Revise your writing until it's as good as you can make it. All the reading, the writing, and the classes should help you do this. Check your writing, your research (never neglect your research), and the physical appearance of your manuscript. Let nothing substandard slip through. If you notice something that needs fixing, fix it, no excuses. There will be plenty that's wrong that you won't catch. Don't make the mistake of ignor-



ing flaws that are obvious to you. The moment you find yourself saying, "This doesn't matter. It's good enough." Stop. Go back. Fix the flaw. Make a habit of doing your best.

5. Submit your work for publication. First research the markets that interest you. Seek out and study the books or magazines of publishers to whom you want to sell. Then submit your work. If the idea of doing this scares you, fine. Go ahead and be afraid. But send your work out anyway. If it's rejected, send it out again, and again. Rejections are painful, but inevitable. They're every writer's rite of passage. Don't give up on a piece of work that you can't sell. You may be able to sell it later to new publications or to new editors of old publications. At worst, you should be able to learn from your rejected work. You may even be able to use all or part of it in a new work. One way or another, writers can use, or at least learn from, everything.

6. Here are some potential impediments for you to forget about:

First forget *inspiration*. Habit is more dependable. Habit will sustain you whether you're inspired or not. Habit will help you finish and polish your stories. Inspiration won't. Habit is persistence in practice.

Forget *talent*. If you have it, fine. Use it. If you don't have it, it doesn't matter. As habit is more dependable than inspiration, continued learning is more dependable than talent. Never let pride or laziness prevent you from learning, improving your work, changing its direction when necessary. Persistence is essential to any writer—the persistence to finish your work, to keep writing in spite of rejection, to keep reading, studying, submitting work for sale. But stubbornness, the

refusal to change unproductive behavior or to revise unsalable work can be lethal to your writing hopes.

Finally, don't worry about imagination. You have all the imagination you need, and all the reading, journal writing, and learning you will be doing will stimulate it. Play with your ideas. Have fun with them. Don't worry about being silly or outrageous or wrong. So much of writing is fun. It's first letting your interests and your imagination take you anywhere at all. Once you're able to do that, you'll have more ideas than you can use. Then the real work of fashioning them into a story begins. Stay with it.

Persist.



## Afterword

I wrote this brief essay for the *Writers of the Future* anthology series (*L. Ron Hubbard Presents Writers of the Future IX*). This series showcases the work of new writers, and my essay is a compact version of a talk that I've given to groups of new writers.

The last word of the essay is its most important word. Writing is difficult. You do it all alone without encouragement and without any certainty that you'll ever be published or paid or even that you'll be able to finish the particular work you've begun. It isn't easy to persist amid all that. That's why I've called this mild little essay "Furor Scribendi"—"A Rage for Writing." "Rage," "Positive Obsession," "burning need to write" . . . Call it anything you like; it's a useful emotion.

Sometimes when I'm interviewed, the interviewer either compliments me on my "talent," my "gift," or asks me how I discovered it. (I don't know, maybe it was supposed to be lying in my closet or on the street somewhere, waiting to be discovered.) I used to struggle to answer this politely, to explain that I didn't believe much in writing talent. People who want to write either do it or they don't. At last I began to say that my most important talent—or habit—was *persistence*. Without it, I would have given up writing long before I finished my first novel. It's amazing what we can do if we simply refuse to give up.

I suspect that this is the most important thing I've said in all my interviews and talks as well as in this book. It's a truth

that applies to more than writing. It applies to anything that is important, but difficult, important, but frightening. We're all capable of climbing so much higher than we usually permit ourselves to suppose.

The word, again, is "persist"!