My Own Rules for Writing

A few suggestions of mine based on bitter experience.

Start with a bang! Catch the reader’s attention immediately. Then just write like a demon. Sort out the spelling, grammar and typos at the end.

Begin your story right in the action. Often it is a good idea to swap Chapter 1 with Chapter 2. Setting the scene and describing the characters can wait until the reader is hooked.

Make at least one character really likeable, the reader has to care what happens to them. They become the hero and the main focus of the plot.

Make at least one character really mean and horrible and as hateful as possible and beastly to the hero. We all need someone to hate.

Base your characters on real people or movie stars.

Let bad things happen to good people. It shows the strength of their character when they handle the situation. Also, let bad things happen to bad people, especially at the end. Quicksand is good. ☺

Don’t describe your sympathetic characters too much so the reader can identify with them. They often want to be like the hero.

Pretend you are a movie camera and describe everything you see in detail, but then you can cut it out later if it gets in the way of the plot.

Use all your senses, then put what you see, smell, hear, feel, taste, etc., down on paper. This will give your story texture, a sense of reality and authenticity.

Surprise yourself. Do this, and you will then certainly surprise your reader.

Use lots of cliffhangers, especially at the end of chapters.

For Writer’s Block just type any old junk. Lyrics of a song or a shopping list, and soon the blood will start to flow. Then use the delete button.

Use short, punchy sentences when describing action or exciting events. Longer ones when setting scenes or writing descriptions.
Let your main character grow, develop and learn stuff as time passes.

Use dialogue as much as possible. Show what is happening with conversation. It is more interesting and involving listening to people talk.

Write with only one person in mind. Remember who you are writing it for and keep that one person in your mind all the time.

Don’t condescend to younger readers. Treat them like small adults.

She said, he said is fine. Said is mostly an invisible word. (Unlike what teachers often tell you. 😊)

Try and remain invisible as a writer. It is about the hero and the characters’ lives, not you. Don’t show off with how clever you are. Use only words the average Jo or Joe will understand.

Always carry a notebook for when ideas strike. You can never get them back.

Do a word search for the words WAS, WERE, THAT and WHICH and decide if they can be cut. What else can be cut? She was standing on the corner becomes she stood on the corner. They were singing becomes they sang. The dress that she wore becomes the dress she wore.

Practice a lot. Writing is the same as sport or music, the more you do, the better you get at it. Try writing only one page a day, no more. Rework it all day. 365 days = 365 pages and that is usually enough for a book.

Revise, edit, revise again and again and again. Make it as good as you can before you show it to anyone else. Leave it a while and revise it yet again.

Read out aloud what you have written and listen to the flow and rhythm.

Actually finish it, seriously, and send it to a publisher, your teacher or your boss. Don’t waste too much time getting non-professionals to read your work. Only one opinion really counts – a potential publisher.

Never give in, ever. One rejected manuscript does not mean you are no good, nor does 20. It has been rejected by only one person, and often has not even been read. Treat it as practice - honing your skills. Red ink is not personal criticism. Remember, 1% inspiration, 99% perspiration. (TE Edison) Both JK Rowling and JRR Tolkien were rejected 16 times. I bet there are a few editors who regret that decision. 😊