



## Writers on Writing: Collected Essays from The New York Times

By The New York Times



**Writers on Writing: Collected Essays from The New York Times** By The New York Times

**Now in paperback, today's most celebrated writers explore literature and the literary life in an inspirational collection of original essays.**

By turns poignant, hilarious, and practical, *Writers on Writing* brings together more than forty of contemporary literature's finest voices.

Pieces range from reflections on the daily craft of writing to the intersection of art's and life's consequential moments. Authors discuss what impels them to write: creating a sense of control in a turbulent universe; bearing witness to events that would otherwise be lost in history or within the writer's soul; recapturing a fragment of time. Others praise mentors and lessons, whether from the classroom, daily circumstances, or the pages of a favorite writer. For anyone interested in the art and rewards of writing, *Writers on Writing* offers an uncommon and revealing view of a writer's world.

Contributors include Russell Banks, Saul Bellow, E. L. Doctorow, Richard Ford, Kent Haruf, Carl Hiaasen, Alice Hoffman, Jamaica Kincaid, Barbara Kingsolver, Sue Miller, Walter Mosley, Joyce Carol Oates, Annie Proulx, Carol Shields, Jane Smiley, Susan Sontag, John Updike, Kurt Vonnegut Jr., Alice Walker, and Elie Wiesel.

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

After 30 years as a journalist, John Darnton decided to try his hand at writing a novel. If he wrote 1,000 words a day, he discovered, he'd have a book in a matter of months. But wouldn't it be nice to learn a few tricks of the trade from other writers as well? Thus was born *The New York Times's* Monday-morning *Writers on Writing* series. In embarking on the series, says Darnton, he learned that the writers he most wanted to hear from were not necessarily the same ones who most wanted to hear from him. But there couldn't have been too many who turned him down. The 46 columns collected in *Writers on Writing* are by the likes of Saul Bellow, Mary Gordon, David Mamet, Annie Proulx, Carol Shields, and Paul West. Though many of them have not much more than the occupation "writer" in common, Darnton says that in one way he found them all to be alike: "They wanted to hear, right away, what you thought of their work."

Here, Richard Ford explains why he finds not writing to be a terrific thing. Alice Hoffman describes the effect illness (her own and that of others) has had on her work. Barbara Kingsolver grapples with writing an "unchaste" novel. Louise Erdrich explores the effect a second language, Ojibwe in her case, can have on one's involvement with the first. And Russell Banks learns the hard way that "when you meet a witness to your distant past, your memory tends to improve." The most hilarious piece is Carolyn Chute's "How Can You Create Fiction When Reality Comes to Call?" In it, she describes one day, in which "X-rated stuff happens," the cuckoo clock goes off incessantly, dirty dishes beckon, political cohorts come calling, a dog has a couple of seizures, laundry needs doing, and guests constantly arrive. Once Chute finally does get down to writing, the "n" breaks off the daisy wheel. But at least the phone doesn't ring. "Its bell is broken. It never rings. Thank heavens." --*Jane Steinberg*

#### From Publishers Weekly

Unlike many assemblages of previously published works, this collection of 41 essays from the New York Times's "Writers on Writing" column is more than the sum of its parts. Just as Times culture editor Darnton hoped when he devised the series for writers to "talk about their craft," the result is a thoughtful examination of writers' concerns about the creative process and the place of literature in America. Appropriately for works commissioned for a major newspaper, the essays are immediately engaging and compelling all the way through. Some writers accomplish these ends through a good story, as does Russell Banks writing on the limits of memory and his lost chance at a career in crime. Or they are darkly entertaining, as is Carolyn Chute as she talks about obstacles in trying to switch from "life mode to writer mode." Sara Paretsky compels with her Dickensian belief in the value of writing for people "who feel powerless and voiceless in the larger world." There's also the sheer comfort of recognizing known voices: the seriousness of Mary Gordon, the combativeness of Kurt Vonnegut Jr., the sting of Joyce Carol Oates. As steeped in writing as this book is, it is not a manual: advice includes only general rules to observe well and write regularly and axioms from writers like William Saroyan, who counsels, "There is no how to it, no how do you write, no how do you live, how do you die." Overall, the writers' pensiveness and amity make for a thought-provoking yet reassuring read a good bedside book. Fans of writers-on-writing anthologies and close readers of the New York Times who may have bypassed these essays for the immediate payoff of a front-page headline should pause to enjoy this rich collection.

From School Library Journal

Adults/High School-Teens interested in writing fiction will find inspiration, advice, and humor in these 43 essays from the column of the same name, published in the Book Review section of the Times. Carl Hiaasen, whose many hilarious novels include *Sick Puppy*, describes the trouble he had killing off a bad guy who was threatening to take center stage in one of his novels. Barbara Kingsolver, author of the electrifying *The Poisonwood Bible*, admits to extreme discomfort in writing explicit sexual scenes, but does it anyway. Gail Godwin writes of crossing over into nonfiction, at the request of her publisher, and finding it challenging but not as difficult as she first thought. Mystery writer Walter Mosley advises, "If you want to be a writer, you have to write every day-" even if that means only reading over what you've written and thinking about it. And Kent Haruf, author of *Plainsong*, lovingly describes the room he writes in, and then goes on to describe writing his first draft blind, typing with a stocking cap pulled over his eyes. Teens will be familiar with some if not all of the writers in this collection, but all of these fine authors have something enlightening to say.

*Molly Connally, Kings Park Library, Fairfax County, VA*

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## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Gene Kirkland:**

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#### **Karl Wolfe:**

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