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Sidestep Your Fears, Start Writing And Live Your Dream

> Muhammed Abdullahi Tosin

# Your Right To Write:

Sidestep Your Fears, Start Writing And Live Your Dream

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# Here's my story...

Once upon a time,

I loved the craft of writing. I envied the ranks of writers. Their wits, their elegance ... and influence. Their almost immortal existence, living many years after they're long dead. I wanted to be one. But I just could not. Starting was a nightmare. I could only wish I was a writer.

Why was this so?

• Writing is a lonely task; it bores.

- It consumes time; I was busy.
- It requires talents; I had none.
- It takes a special training; I lacked this.
- It calls for perfect language mastery; my grammar sucked.

That was my thinking. My secondary school teachers would cheer me on. They sometimes even coerced me to write for contests.

'You write well' was their sincere lie. They all failed. I wouldn't argue with them. But I was just not made to be a writer. I couldn't be one. And for so long, I wasn't one.

How did the story change? All my fears were actually real, so how could my status have changed? What turned my bleeding edge into my leading edge?

### Mindset!

You heard me right – my mindset. It was my attitude to writing.

Before – I saw the challenges ... and concluded they were stumbling blocks.

Today – I see them ... and I'm thrilled at the opportunity to break new grounds.

### **Perception is everything**

Maybe you don't know – perception is everything.

Now, read that again ... and let it sink into your skull: perception is everything.

Let's have an aside: There's a story of two salesmen sent to conduct research on the market potential of shoes in Africa.

The first salesman was quick to observe: "There is no potential here – nobody wears shoes." His counterpart had an entirely different view: "There is massive potential here – everybody needs shoes."

I give you the permission – take 2 minutes off reading this piece ... just to ponder on the story.

You're back? Great! That's the decisiveness of the mindset. I was a victim too for so long a time. I opined the cup was half empty. I was very correct in my observation.

But my judgement was completely wrong.

### The gamechanger

Sometime in 2009, a friend and mentor, Akinde AbdulHafiz was the editor of a campus organization I was a member of. An essay contest was organized and he wanted me to enter. "I wish I were a good writer," I lamely excused.

Any editor could have let go of it. He could have seen a young boy who *couldn't* be a writer because he didn't write well. He did not.

He saw a young talented boy ... slumbering and snoring. But he believed the boy was a great writer in embryo. So he woke him.

With an overdose of constant motivation – even persuasion – he made me enter the contest, as if he was paid to make sure I entered.

I went ahead to claim the second prize. And that has made all the difference.

Ask me now and I'll tell you – the cup is always half filled. Never half empty!

# Is this book for you?

Friend, if you're an always-motivated writer, you've never procrastinated writing your ideas, and you never shelve your passion because you're busy, this

book isn't for you. So please stop reading now and go write what's on your mind.

If you're an aspiring writer, or better still a wishful writer ... if your story is or was once like mine, then you're in the right place. You're reading what will wake you from your dream, for that's the only way to make it come true.

This book won't teach you *how* to write. For only when you're motivated to write against all odds, do you need the *how*. The first step is *your mindset* – and that's what this book will help you with.

# How's writing to you?

Do you love writing at all? Is it your dream to become a proficient essayist?

Foolish questions, right?

Yes! They're ridiculously idiotic questions. But they prove a point: that *you* love writing. Everyone does. Some people will not own up, but they envy writers too.

I have not lived long on earth – just a few years more than two decades.

But I can tell you I've met and interacted with many people; people with varied orientations, backgrounds, inclinations and interests.

I haven't found for once – or heard of – anyone who would aver with impunity that he hates writing!

One who would proclaim: "I do not wish to know how to assemble words in print into literary jewels to express my thoughts."

I bet you've not too.

What you'll find everywhere are wishful writers all too reluctant to give the craft a starting shot. They wish to write, but wishes aren't horses.

You're facing this challenge too, aren't you?

Don't be shy to own up...I've confessed mine too. And I assure you you've got many co-wishful writers.

In anyway, all hope is not lost. You still can claim your right to write. But only if you're ready.

Are you set?

# Here are some killing mindsets

You sure want to be a writer, but you feel some prerequisites are missing:

• You haven't discovered the secrets of writing

- You've got no mentor;
- You haven't read copious grammar books;
- You haven't attended ample writing workshops;
- You haven't taken a course at Writers Bureau;
- You study Chemistry, not English Literature;
- And many other crazy excuses ... you know them best.

If your case is one of these, the bad news is you're living in the dreamland.

Attaining all these before you start writing is utopian.

The above are advantages to position you for a fulfilling writing adventure. They're must-have, skill-enhancing gizmos I don't take with levity and that I recommend.

But they're to be progressively acquired. They aren't prerequisites. Only a thing do you need from the start: *your willing mind*.

Other tools will help you, but you can excel without *first* getting them. They are helpful enhancers, never preconditions. They make you better *along the way*, but you can get going *initially* even without them.

Let's examine these advantages?

### 1: Writing secrets

You want some writing secrets, don't you? I mean some real magical wands you can apply to become a writer that's proficient, celebrated and every reader's darling overnight ... you want them don't you?

I know you do. But I'll disappoint you.

This scrambling for writing secrets has slaughtered many promising writing lives. It has stunted the growth of many book ideas, ever before they left the skulls where they're produced.

Many people ask me: "What is the secret to writing great essays?" A simple query, but no friendly answer!

My response in all cases is the same. The secret to writing better essays is that there're no secrets.

Illogical, right?

Maybe, but that's the truth.

Different people have deployed different tactics which worked for them in improving their writing prowess. But no general hard-and-fast pattern exists.

So I tell you any secret you're told about improving writing skills is a myth.

This mindset is crucial to the realization of your writing dreams. No writer has some super secrets.

Get it right – there're tactics of composition, rules of grammar, techniques of audience engagement and whatnot. But these aren't secrets. Not at all!

They're just guides you can find everywhere public. And you wouldn't need them until you've started the journey ... your dream to live a writer's life.

### 2: Writing mentors or teachers

I get asked often: "Can I make it in essay writing if I have no mentor?"

Before I give an answer, I like to tell such questioners who a writing mentor is.

A mentor is that more exposed, more dexterous writer who guides you, inspires you, gives your upfront ideas, critiques your pieces and helps you improve it.

This is something awesome, something you need. Having one is cool, isn't it?

But many great writers I know have no mentors! Will anyone tell me who mentored Shakespeare?

Some writers too only got mentors along the way, after having started. Some even after having bagged cool prizes.

I'm one of these people. My writing life is a product of self education. I started writing, and winning contests, ever before I *learnt* from my writing mentors – Dr. Mahfouz Adedimeji, Jeff Goins, Ali Luke, Akinde AbdulHafiz et al.

They've since helped me improve a lot. But I did not need their tutoring to start.

You too don't. Believe me.

### 3: Writing conferences and workshops

Birds of a feather flock together. Gatherings of writers are abodes of inspiration and skill honing.

If you've attended any meaningful one before, you'll hate to miss it.

But I never attended any such gatherings before I won contests. I know some better writers too who made their mark in the craft before they ever graced any literary festival.

You need to mingle with, draw inspiration and learn from other writers, but that needn't come before you start.

So think twice before you give the excuse of never having attended writing workshops.

### 4: Essay writing textbooks

Wishful writers have another notorious explanation: "I haven't read many books of grammar, treatises on research making, audience engagement and composition."

Common excuse, no substance! So beware!

I'm not saying such tools aren't great writing companions. They give you a robust command of the language of the craft and confidence stemming from certainty.

Who would say these aren't things you need? Only a nincompoop!

Isaac Newton – that wizard scientist and Mathematician – was once to recount the secret of his enviable strides in a 1676 letter to his rival, Robert Hooke.

What did he say? "If I have seen a little further it is by standing on the shoulders of Giants."

It's agreeable that the dwarf sees farther than the giant, when he has the giant's shoulder to mount on. Yet, many are those who first excelled in writing without an idea of the rigid, classroom rules some writing texts preach.

This is not saying studying how to write *before* you start writing doesn't help. It does ... a lot.

But you can start writing for – and winning – essay contests *even without* them.

Or would a child learn how to walk ever before he starts walking?

Your duty isn't to learn everything about writing before you start. Your duty is to show up. Just start ... even before you've read how some folks become proficient.

### 5: Prior mastery of subject matter

I like to try my hands at essay competitions. Maybe you do too.

But your excuse is that your field is Chemistry, not Economics, not Accounting, nor Business Administration – so you should not enter a writing contest on *employment generation* or *poverty alleviation*.

But you see, you're wrong!

Agreed, being familiar with the subject-matter of the essay contest means you have an appreciable residual knowledge on it.

This is an edge ... that you're a step ahead.

But lack of familiarity or expertise with the essay theme is no bar to your chances of success. All you need do is make your research, study the topic, comprehend it, relate it to practical everyday happenings and you're good to go.

Did you know the English alphabets when you were born? If your lecturer gives you an assignment on a topic you've never heard, would you cry off the task and instead fail the course?

What you'll do instead is called research. It can save you here too.

### 6: What further excuses have you?

Friend, I'm sorry as I've murdered your lame excuses.

All I've said above applies to all the other explanations you give for not writing yet. If you want to prove me wrong, follow or mention me on Twitter and take me up: <a href="mailto:@Oxygenmat">@Oxygenmat</a>.

Let me quote Peter Elbow, someone that has expressed this point in his book, Writing Without Teachers, better than I can do:

People without education say, "If only I had education I could write." People with education say, "If only I had talent, I could write." People with education and talent say, "If only I had self-discipline I could write." People with education, talent and self-discipline — and there are plenty of them who can't write — say, "If only ..." and don't know what to say next.

Believe me ... you're ready to start writing. For too long, you've neglected to exercise your right to write. Now is when to claim it.

# I'm not saying writing is beans

I've said writing needn't burden you. I mean it. And I reiterate it.

But writing isn't a bed of roses. Even if it were, roses harbor prickly thorns. Writing isn't the easiest of arts. If it were, everyone would be a writer. And writers wouldn't be so important and enviable.

This realization ... that writing is for men, not males, will give you the right attitude. I acknowledge there are some gory challenges, some *real fears*. Let's see some of them:

### 1: Writing is a daunting task

Yeah! That's very true. This scares the pants off the buttocks of many people. I was scared to start too.

Making research, thinking deep, reasoning well and ingeniously generating practical recommendations to problems aren't part of the pop culture or the club lifestyle the mind is naturally tempted to.

### 2: Writing is a lonely venture

Ever felt like a forlorn taxi driver on his Monday morning sojourn on a snowy terrain?

Try your hands at writing ... you'll understand. A writer opened up to me sometime ago: "I get bored when writing long essays and most times, I have to abandon it."

When you're speaking, it's to others. When you're chatting, you're in a company. When you're partying, watching football, staging a rally or holding a meeting, boredom isn't your concern.

But in the case of writing, it's enough a detraction that only your pen and paper or your PC screen keeps your company. At your writing desk, you feel the kids disturb, your spouse nags and your friends suck! Why's this so?

You want to be alone. You fleece distractions ... or better still, everyone else – from your attention. You either rid them off your mind or your writing flow is grounded.

The only people you wanna stay with while you write are you, you and you.

### 3: No returns is certain on writing

If you sell water, everyone is your customer. Or doesn't everyone drink?

If you write a novel, poems or essays, not everyone will read you. And some will read only if they won't pay a dime.

If you're like me, an essay contest junkie, you can enter many writing contests. But participation in 20 of them guarantees no cash. Not even in one.

You see now: everyone drinks water; not everyone reads and not every contest rewards. So if your writing goal is to amass laurels or smile to your banker, you may end up naked in the snow.

### 4: Writing gulps a whole lot of time

Many people daily lament of having more than they can accomplish. The mantra is: so much work; so little time.

Admit it: time management is one of your headaches. I'm no seer, but the sheer number of people battling this problem just makes this fact too glaring to be refuted.

I've heard many students and pals cry out before – "the greatest problem I'm facing is that of time..." This becomes harder when you've got tons of other tasks to combine with your writing life.

#### 5: Resources may be out of your reach

When I embraced writing, I was a very broke chap. Anyone who had a PC was affluent. I had only my skull and my mind. I had a real challenge ... a menacing one.

I had to type essays after essays on my phone, transfer them with a Bluetooth device to a borrowed PC and process them to enter contests.

Other times, I had saved them in my email draft on phone, retrieved them from a PC and all the rest.

It's true a PC is now easy on the pocket, but the truth is many still find it costs a fortune.

I did not give in, even though I had a cruel challenge. I had a real reason to throw in the towel, but I assured myself quitters never are winners. I carried on, for the love of writing and writing fetched me all the tools a writer could covet.

If you're a writer these days without a PC, you're in bad luck. Never worry though: it's a challenge you can surmount. But if your mind isn't well prepared, you'll crash out soon.

Pick up the gauntlet. Don't let in. Just go on.

#### You're not alone

Now with all these real fears, should you still embrace writing? Is the game still worth the candle?

You think it's not worth it to still try a shot at writing? You make those logjams reasons why you should put your writing interests in abeyance ... till some time in the future when you'll be less busy, better poised and more skillful?

Wrong!

Your fears only explain your writing sloth. They fail to justify it. They can't! Believe me.

The truth is you'll never conquer those fears if you don't dare them. Most people you daily read face these hiccups too ... or faced them at some time. And many, their cases were worse off than yours.

But they keep writing, because in their mind is a burning passion and in their veins is steaming courage. If they are dogged, you too can. Believe me you've got to.

So just keep on.

# Invest in writing – and never lose out

Beyond all the charade of keeping on when the going is tough, and stories of men who made it through rough terrains, here's the most important point you'll find in this book. The very best case I've made for writing.

Writing is a win-win thing. *Make ai sei 'am in broken English – you no fit lose for writing*. For the learners, that's Nigerian Pidgin.

Here's how: if you enter an essay competition, or indulge in any writing at that, you shall win everything ... you've already won.

Pen down your ideas and you may win laurels. If you don't win, you'd gather valuable experience. But if you don't write, you'd gain nothing.

This is because writing is a great way to:

- amass awards, laurels, honour, garlands, medals and what else you'll call it;
- boost your esteem, confidence, finesse and fulfillment;
- stockpile skills, experience, exposure, intellectual build up and sagacity;
- become an informed opinion leader ... a media darling; and
- earn cool cash.

And what do you lose for writing? Think deeply: anything?

Three things...

- Nothing
- Nothing
- Nothing

Yes, there is pain and rejection if you're not a 'winner'. But the greatest failure is to never risk at all.

When you fail, you don't really fail. You *learn*. You draw a lesson from it. You find new ways to move forward, to write better, ways to work around future problems.

To adapt Thomas Edison's explanation, you learn 999 ways to *not* get immediate gains from writing. And that would mean the next try is your breakthrough.

I've found that practising writing makes you expressive. Many students who don't do well in their examinations are not brainless ... not unserious.

They're simply not expressive.

I'm not the most brilliant chap among my course mates. Neither am I a book fanatic. I know some 80% of them who read avidly while I run extra-curricular.

But constant writing has made me stand tall above the crowd. My lecturers often say I write delicious prose for class assignments. Maybe they get enchanted when marking my exam scripts too.

That's one more way writing is a win-win thing.

## Make writing your darling

You've got to love writing to not dump it. Writing brings many goodies, but real writers don't just pen their thoughts to get applauded, celebrated or compensated.

As Jeff Goins rightly puts it in his *Writers' Manifesto*, they write because they cannot *not* write.

If they don't write, they wouldn't sleep. They would simply not know what to do. They only want to be with one person – their darling.

As I type this, I should be on my bed because I had little sleep yester night.

But the ideas I'm putting down won't stop banging my head if I don't purge them out. My heart won't stop beating fast if I'm not with my lover now.

That's the spirit. If you cherish the art, then treat it just like that.

#### Cultivate a diehard determination

Friend, the best way to stay focused rearing your writing interests is to keep writing. But that's difficult. And you'd need an overdose of courage and strong will to keep going.

At every point, let your passion and determination to claim your right, start writing and keep writing, purely to express – and never to impress – be burning.

The simple way to go about it is to write regularly: daily, weekly, monthly ... just regularly. Develop an unrepentant determination not to settle for even a little less than consistency.

Remember Jean Baptiste Lamarck's theory of use and disuse?

Infrequent scribbling isn't a sure way to attain writing mastery ... it's in fact a great way to remain mediocre.

One way I keep myself consistent is to <u>enter regular essay contests</u>. Being deadline-driven, they get me writing always.

And the good news is that at any time, so many of them are open, accessible on my website. The options are many, the opportunities limitless.

It can even be overwhelming as you can search for contests by deadline, educational qualification, gender, geographical location and subject matter.

Staying close to news and writing opinion pieces on burning local and national issues can also help you remain regular.

You're busy, you have no PC, you haven't a Masters in creative writing, you aren't a published author ... and so what?

These don't justify all your ifs, buts and self-doubts. Writing is your right to claim, and the only steps you're left to follow are:

- writing now...
- writing on...
- and writing more...

# Make writing important to you

One way to solve the time puzzle is to not relegate your writing life to your curricular, entrepreneurial or leisure pursuits. Attaching much importance to it is the only way to not dump writing.

If you offer 5 courses in school and consider writing a separate task, you may not have enough time and motivation to combine.

Why? Because your courses are 5 and writing isn't one of them.

Now if your courses were to be 7, wouldn't you allot meaningful time and motivation to them all?

Sure you'd.

So just make your writing passion one, two or more courses as you wish to offer, and share your time between them all.

And I should remind you that writing is a great way to live again, centuries after you're long dead. This is how Benjamin Franklin articulates it:

If you would not be forgotten,

As soon as you are dead and rotten,

Either write things worth reading,

Or do things worth the writing.

## Here's your clarion call

A lot of people are so scared to assert their right to write. I was scared too. Very much frightened.

How could I call myself a writer?

I had no Degree or certificate to show for it. I feared I could be challenged. That I was only pretending. That I was a serial impostor.

Maybe you are, too. But in actual fact, you need no certification to write. It's a right you've always had ... your birthright.

Like I was too frightened to write, you probably are, too. If that's you, consider this your clarion call.

I charge you to heed the call: to write ideas that impact, to change lives with language and create words that change the world.

And this task is pretty easy. Anyone can do it. All it requires are two scary things:

- Claim your right to write
- And start writing right

You're very ready to start crafting awesome essays. And sliding laurels into your bag. And hanging garlands around your neck.

The best place you can possibly start is where you are.

It's not entirely easy but it can become effortless. The same way a child starts to walk or an adult masters a new language and speaks it without thinking.

Starting to write is many times easier than you think. You only need sit before a computer or a pen and a piece of paper and start creating letters ... stringing them into words, and into sentences.

I wish it were more difficult than that, but it simply is not.

Writing can be learnt and mastered, like anything well practised. Believe me, starting is easy. So you've got just one choice: *start*!

You needn't be proficient to start, but you must start to be proficient. The best – and only – way to learn how to write is by writing.

It seems a crazy advice, but that's the truth.

Now listen – how do you learn to walk? By walking, right? How do you learn to eat if not by eating?

So do not wait; no ifs or buts. No soon or wishes. Eschew procrastination. Just start ... start ... now!

At this instant, stop reading this book. Pick up your pen and start writing ... right now.

I'll wait for you to complete the article. After that, you can come back to continue reading this.

## Before I say bye

Remember this always...

If you write, you'll be right. Go a step further and author...that's how to become an authority. Whatever you conceive, and solemnly believe, you can achieve.

The life of one of the most prolific writers of the 20th century, David Hubert Lawrence aptly shows the decisiveness of self-assurance.

As a young man, he nursed the ambition of being an accomplished writer, but he was a poor boy who never went to school. Because of this, kind friends assured him his ambition was impossible.

Against all odds, Lawrence saved some money and got himself the most complete dictionary of his time so as to master all the words in it.

But then, he turned to the word "impossible". With fine scissors, he cut it out and threw it away.

Thereafter, he built his whole career on the premise that nothing is impossible.

I give a usual advice: If you're ready to learn the craft of writing, nobody can stop you. If you aren't interested in writing, nobody can help you.

So it's all entirely up to you.

Heed Seth Godin's counsel: "The biggest challenge is that there are no barriers. If you want to do it, go do it. Ideas worth spreading, spread."

Let me tell you again ... it's your official wakeup call...

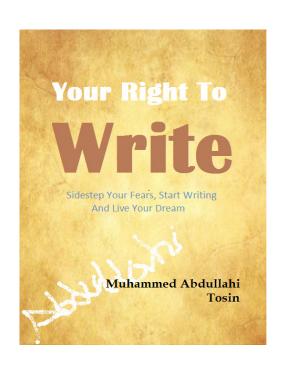
This is when to take a stand. To enter the driver's seat. Claim your writing right.

And start writing right.

## What you can do

If you like this book, you're welcome to share it with anyone and everyone. But please do not sell it or alter it in any way. Here are some cool ways to share:

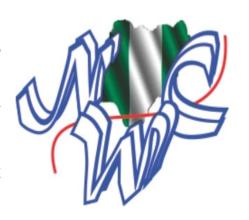
- Tweet it: <a href="http://bit.ly/13TJt26">http://bit.ly/13TJt26</a>
- Share it on Facebook: <a href="http://on.fb.me/12bQEyx">http://on.fb.me/12bQEyx</a>
- Share it on Google+: <a href="http://bit.ly/143KcfQ">http://bit.ly/143KcfQ</a>
- Share it on LinkedIn: <a href="http://linkd.in/12bQRld">http://linkd.in/12bQRld</a>
- Email it to or print it for a friend.



For more exciting ways of sharing this book, check out: <a href="http://bit.ly/12HdDrl">http://bit.ly/12HdDrl</a>

#### Join us for more

If you want to learn essay writing or you love to keep track of current Nigerian and international essay competitions all for FREE, you only need to check *Naija Writers' Coach*.



Here are some ways to stay in touch:

- The Blog: <a href="http://NaijaWritersCoach.com">http://NaijaWritersCoach.com</a>
- On Twitter: <a href="http://bit.ly/14fSscZ">http://bit.ly/14fSscZ</a>
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- On LinkedIn: <a href="http://linkd.in/14fTeq1">http://linkd.in/14fTeq1</a>

#### Meet the author

Muhammed Abdullahi Tosin is a Nigerian essayist, entrepreneur and CEO of *Naija Writers' Coach*.

He's into freelance writing, coaching other writers, speaking at events, setting up and customizing websites and blogging.



He lives in Ilorin, Nigeria, with his books, and learns just enough legal jargons to be dangerous ;-)

Learn more about him at: <a href="http://NaijaWritersCoach.com/profile/">http://NaijaWritersCoach.com/profile/</a>