

Erica's Top Ten Writing Strategies

The Idea-Gathering Phase

1. There's no such thing as a "perfect" idea. Ideas are everywhere and ideas can be anything. Grab one, grab many, grab often - the world is a gorgeous buffet table of ideas, so fill your plate. Don't let an idea get away or tell yourself you can grab it later.
2. Resist the temptation to shift into analytical ("Hmm, what would I do with that idea?") or self-critical ("That's not a good idea.") mode. You have ONE job: putting your idea on paper. This is not the moment for neatness, correct spelling – or even words if your idea is more of a visual concept. Just commit the idea to paper so you can reflect on it later.
3. Say, "Wooooo!" In other words, praise yourself for being a creative person who puts ideas on paper. That is a HUGE step that many people don't take, so give yourself credit. And by making it a positive experience, you will be motivated to do it regularly!

The Editing Phase

4. Look over your collection of ideas and select an idea that is particularly interesting to you. Writing is not always easy, so give yourself an advantage by choosing to write about the things you like best or find most compelling! Spend some time exploring and playing with your ideas nonjudgmentally and seeing what they might want to turn into. What you create during this part of the process is called a draft, not a finished product.
5. Hit pause. Let your draft sit for a little while. An hour, a day, a week – it depends on the piece. The point is: focus your brain on something else (or nothing at all) for a bit.
6. Come back! Your own fresh eyes help a lot when you are doing the critical work, like seeing if your draft flows well, is missing anything, needs to be trimmed or restructured. Other people's fresh eyes can help you edit your work, too. Sometimes it is hard to see what your draft still needs if you love it. And sometimes it is hard to see what is actually great about your draft if you are not happy with some aspect of it. This is why the right reader - a friend, classmate, family member or teacher, for example – can provide helpful input. (Bonus: if you read your draft out loud to this person, you may even hear things you want to change that you would not notice by reading it to yourself silently.)
7. Repeat, repeat, repeat! In other words, edit and receive feedback on your draft, revise it, and then do it again. Your writing can only get better as a result.

Being a Writer

8. Writing is an exercise – like drawing, swimming, and dancing – and keeping your writing muscles in shape takes regular practice. So, like the Nike ad says, just do it.
9. Don't waste time telling yourself you are not good enough or have nothing important to say. That is just fear talking. Tell fear to be quiet and get out of the way so you can write.
10. And finally: read, read, READ! It is the #1 thing that makes you a better writer.