

# “Lightning Writing Workshop”

## Questions we'll consider:

How important are writing skills to a software professional ? What techniques did we learn in software that we can transpose to writing ? And vice-versa ?

## Writing – some tips and lessons learned

1. **Learn from others.** Most writers find it hard to be a critic of their own writing, and of their own writing processes. Trade feedback, advice and ideas with others who write.
2. **Censor your censor.** Learn to ignore that tiny inner voice that criticizes your writing before it has even reached the page. Good writing is what you want to end up with – for a starting point, *any* writing will do.
3. **Write to /dev/null.** I find it hard to throw away code, and I find it hard to throw away words. There are words that you need to write, although they shouldn't be shared. Learning to discard is hard, but it's a necessity.
4. **Make it personal.** Writing is like getting naked. Don't cover it up in an artificial or impersonal voice, and don't waste time writing about things that don't matter. Even when writing about objective matters, such as technology, your writing will only be effective if you're behind it fully. Mean every word you write.
5. **Write every day.** Regular practice is key. Every little bit of thoughtful, intentional practice will improve your skill by some small fraction. Over time, these will add up to significant progress.
6. **Revise mercilessly.** Perhaps most of what makes for good writing happens after the writing proper. Move paragraphs around to make the ideas flow better. Delete anything that doesn't contribute to the main thrust. You can't make it too short or too direct.
7. **Find an outlet.** The best feedback I get is from readers of “official” writing – pieces that I publish for readers who invest time and attention, looking for some substantial value in return. Blogs and the like have made publishing a very low barrier – start with a personal blog, then move on to more “serious” publications – trade magazines, etc.

## Recommended books:

♥ Peter Elbow, *Writing With Power, Techniques for Mastering the Writing Process*

A practical book on making the most of two basic writing techniques, freewriting and revising.

“Writing calls on two skills that are so different that they usually conflict with each other: creating and criticizing.”

♥ Richard Gabriel, *Writer's Workshops and the Art of Making Things*

Gabriel – a poet and software professional – discusses how writers can best learn from each other.

“The work teaches us. It's like practice: The number of times we do something is the best indicator of how good we will be. Craft will improve, and our ability to focus just on those things that make the work great will improve because some things become routine or we recognize them as unimportant. The best lesson for the work we are doing right now is the work we just finished.”

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