

1,100 Quotations

Words to Inspire

Writers

E-book Sampler

Edited by

Gregory Victor Babic

Over 300 Authors

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Words to Inspire Writers

*A perpetual Calendar of classic Writing-related
Quotations—on Writers, Writing, Words,
Books, Literature, and Publishing—specifically
selected to illustrate the Writing Process and to
motivate Authors every day*

Edited by

Gregory Victor Babic

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Introduction

Be Inspired to Write

This book was compiled as a gift of motivation for you, for every day of the year. Keep it on your desk between your Dictionary and your Thesaurus so that you can refer to it often.

The collected quotations, sayings, aphorisms, maxims, and epigrams contained within these pages have been specifically selected from the Public Domain (all authors having died before 1924) — predominantly for their motivational value — and then arranged to best illuminate the Writing Process.

Each date has as its focus three particular aspects of the *Writing Process* — namely, the *Pre-Writing or Preparation Stage* (of Thinking and Planning); the *Writing or Creation Stage* (of Drafting and Editing); and, the *Post-Writing or Celebration Stage* (of Publishing and Marketing) — and the quotations are arranged in that order in every entry. Whatever the stage of the Writing Process you are at, you will find a relevant inspirational quotation by reading either the first, second, or third entry; or, you could just read all three entries each and every day, and thus find yourself even more encouraged to continue with your own work.

It is to be hoped that you will take heart from this priceless heritage — a classic compendium of wise words whispered from the graves of the literary dead — and be inspired in your own writing always.

January

January 1

How many people eat, drink, and get married; buy, sell, and build; make contracts and attend to their fortune; have friends and enemies, pleasures and pains, are born, grow up, live and die—but asleep!

Joseph Joubert (1754–1824)

Whatever one wishes to say, there is one noun only by which to express it, one verb only to give it life, one adjective only which will describe it. One must search until one has discovered them, this noun, this verb, this adjective, and never rest content with approximations, never resort to trickery, however happy, or to vulgarism, in order to dodge the difficulty.

Guy de Maupassant (1850–1893)

Books... are the curse of the human race.

Benjamin Disraeli (1804–1881)

January 2

I do not love a man who is zealous for nothing.

Oliver Goldsmith (1728–1774)

Fill your paper with the breathings of your heart.

William Wordsworth (1770–1850)

Words to Inspire Writers

Ships that pass in the night, and speak each other in passing;
Only a signal shown and a distant voice in the darkness;
So on the ocean of life we pass and speak one another,
Only a look and a voice; then darkness again and a silence.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–1882)

January 3

Live all you can; it's a mistake not to. It doesn't so much matter what you do in particular, so long as you have your life. If you haven't had that what have you had?

Henry James (1843–1916)

It requires more than genius to be an author.

Jean de La Bruyere (1645–1696)

The past but lives in written words: a thousand ages were blank if books had not evoked their ghosts, and kept the pale unbodied shades to warn us from fleshless lips.

François Fénelon (1651–1715)

January 4

Oh it is only a novel! ... In short, only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humor, are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language.

Jane Austen (1775–1817)

Words in prose ought to express the intended meaning; if they attract attention to themselves, it is a fault; in the very best styles you read page after page without noticing the medium.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834)

February

February 1

The deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer... No good novel will ever proceed from a superficial mind.

Henry James (1843–1916)

He that writes to himself writes to an eternal public.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more; it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

William Shakespeare (1564–1616)

February 2

Happy the Man, and happy he alone,
He who can call today his own:
He who, secure within, can say,
Tomorrow do thy worst, for I have liv'd today.

John Dryden (1631–1700)

Words to Inspire Writers

Epithets, like pepper,
Give zest to what you write;
And if you strew them sparely,
They whet the appetite:
But if you lay them on too thick,
You spoil the matter quite!

Lewis Carroll (1832–1898)

I dislike modern memoirs. They are generally written by people who have either entirely lost their memories, or have never done anything worth remembering.

Oscar Wilde (1854–1900)

February 3

I expect to pass through this world but once; any good thing therefore that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any fellow-creature, let me do it now; let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.

Stephen Grelliet (1773–1855)

The proper force of words lie not in the words themselves, but in their application.

William Hazlitt (1778–1830)

Turn pimp, flatterer, quack, lawyer, parson, be chaplain to an atheist, or stallion to an old woman, anything but a poet; for a poet is worse, more servile, timorous and fawning than any I have named.

William Congreve (1670–1729)

March

March 1

We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.)

Viewed freely, the English language is the accretion and growth of every dialect, race, and range of time, and is the culling and composition of all. From this point of view, it stands for Language in the largest sense, and is really the greatest of studies.

Walt Whitman (1819–1892)

Thank you for the manuscript; I shall lose no time in reading it.

Benjamin Disraeli (1804–1881)

March 2

One should examine oneself for a very long time before thinking of condemning others.

Molière [Jean Baptiste Poquelin] (1622–1673)

Rhythm and rhyme and the harmonies of musical language, the play of fancy, the fire of imagination, the flashes of passion, so hide the nakedness of a heart laid open, that hardly any confession, transfigured in the luminous halo of poetry, is reproached as self-exposure.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr (1809–1894)

Words to Inspire Writers

I've been reading reviews of my stories for twenty-five years, and can't remember a single useful point in any of them, or the slightest good advice. The only reviewer who ever made an impression on me was Skabichevsky, who prophesied that I would die drunk in the bottom of a ditch.

Anton Chekhov (1860–1904)

March 3

A little learning is a dangerous thing;
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring:
There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,
And drinking largely sobers us again.

Alexander Pope (1688–1744)

It has always been my practice to cast a long paragraph in a single mould, to try it by my ear, to deposit it in my memory, but to suspend the action of the pen till I had given the last polish to my work.

Edward Gibbon (1737–1794)

Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree.

Alfred Joyce Kilmer (1886–1918)

March 4

Writing well is at one and the same time good thinking, good feeling, and good expression; it is having wit, soul, and taste, all together.

George-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (1707–1788)

If one wait for the right time to come before writing, the right time never comes.

James Russell Lowell (1819–1891)

April

April 1

The best way to become acquainted with a subject is to write a book about it.

Benjamin Disraeli (1804–1881)

However much we may admire the orator's occasional bursts of eloquence, the noblest written words are commonly as far behind or above the fleeting spoken language as the firmament with its stars is behind the clouds.

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862)

Good things, when short, are twice as good.

Baltasar Gracián (1601–1658)

April 2

There are some books that refuse to be written. They stand their ground year after year and will not be persuaded. It isn't because the book is not there and worth being written—it is only because the right form of the story does not present itself. There is only one right form for a story and if you fail to find that form the story will not tell itself.

Mark Twain (1835–1910)

Say all you have to say in the fewest possible words, or your reader will be sure to skip them; and in the plainest possible words or he

Words to Inspire Writers

will certainly misunderstand them.

John Ruskin (1819–1900)

There is no luck in literary reputation. They who make up the final verdict upon every book are not the partial and noisy readers of the hour when it appears; but a court as of angels, a public not to be bribed, not to be entreated, and not to be overawed, decides upon every man's title to fame.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)

April 3

We often discover what will do, by finding out what will not do; and probably he who never made a mistake never made a discovery.

Samuel Smiles (1812–1904)

When an honest writer discovers an imposition it is his simple duty to strip it bare and hurl it down from its place of honor, no matter who suffers by it; any other course would render him unworthy of the public confidence.

Mark Twain (1835–1910)

If all mankind minus one were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind.

John Stuart Mill (1806–1873)

April 4

It is not sufficient to have a grasp of what one should say, but one must also say these things in the way that one should, and this makes a great contribution to the character that the speech

May

May 1

Would you not like to try all sorts of lives—one is so very small—but that is the satisfaction of writing—one can impersonate so many people.

Katherine Mansfield (1888–1923)

My God, my God, thou art a direct God, may I not say a literal God... [but also] a figurative, a metaphorical God too; a God in whose words there is such a height of figures, such voyages, such peregrinations to fetch remote and precious metaphors, such extensions, such spreadings, such curtains of allegories, such third heavens of hyperboles, so harmonious elocutions, so retired and so reserved expressions, so commanding persuasions, so persuading commandments, such sinews even in thy milk, and such things in thy words, as all profane authors seem of the seed of the serpent that creeps; thou art the dove that flies.

John Donne (1573–1631)

Every burned book enlightens the world.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)

May 2

Books and friends should be few but good.

Proverb

Words to Inspire Writers

In all pointed sentences, some degree of accuracy must be sacrificed to conciseness.

Samuel Johnson (1709–1784)

Learning hath gained most by those books by which the printers have lost.

Thomas Fuller (1608–1661)

May 3

Give me books, fruit, French wine and fine weather and a little music out of doors, played by somebody I do not know.

John Keats (1795–1821)

The man who makes no mistakes does not usually make anything.

Edward John Phelps (1822–1900)

The words that love inspires
Outlive their utterance.

Horace (65–8 B.C.)

May 4

Neither man nor nation can exist without a sublime idea.

Fedor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky (1821–1881)

Sleep on your writing; take a walk over it; scrutinize it of a morning; review it of an afternoon; digest it after a meal; let it sleep in your drawer a twelvemonth; never venture a whisper about it to your friend, if he be an author especially.

Amos Bronson Alcott (1799–1888)

Another damned, thick, square book! Always scribble, scribble, scribble! Eh! Mr. Gibbon?

William, Duke of Gloucester (1743–1805)

June

June 1

By thought I embrace the universal.

Blaise Pascal (1623–1662)

As to metaphorical expression, that is a great excellence in style, when it is used with propriety, for it gives you two ideas for one; conveys the meaning more luminously, and generally with a perception of delight.

Samuel Johnson (1709–1784)

What is originality? Undetected plagiarism.

Henry Wheeler Shaw (1818–1885)

June 2

You who write, choose a subject suited to your abilities and think long and hard on what your powers are equal to and what they are unable to perform.

Horace (65–8 B.C.)

The eloquent man is he who is no beautiful speaker, but who is inwardly and desperately drunk with a certain belief.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)

An ambassador is a man of virtue sent to lie abroad for his country; a news-writer is a man without virtue who lies at home for himself.

Sir Henry Wotton (1568–1639)

Words to Inspire Writers

June 3

I have never known any distress that an hour's reading did not relieve.

Baron de Montesquieu (1689–1755)

As the character is, such is the speech.

Aelius Aristides (117–181)

He that complies against his will,
Is of his own opinion still.

Samuel Butler (1612–1680)

June 4

I am too much of a skeptic to deny the possibility of anything.

T(homas) H(enry) Huxley (1825–1895)

Use what language you will, you can never say anything but what you are.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)

True genius walks along a line, and, perhaps, our greatest pleasure is in seeing it so often near falling, without being ever actually down.

Oliver Goldsmith (1728–1774)

June 5

Start at once a bedside library and spend the last half hour of the day in communion with the saints of humanity.

Sir William Osler, 1st Baronet (1849–1919)

Under all speech that is good for anything there lies a silence that is better. Silence is deep as Eternity; speech is shallow as Time.

Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881)

July

July 1

Life isn't all beer and skittles.

Thomas Hughes (1822–1896)

What is poetry? The suggestion, by the imagination, of noble grounds for the noble emotions.

John Ruskin (1819–1900)

I suffer from the disease of writing books and being ashamed of them when they are finished.

Baron de Montesquieu (1689–1755)

July 2

Why did I write? What sins to me unknown dipped me in ink, my parents, or my own?

Alexander Pope (1688–1744)

The finest language is mostly made up of simple unimposing words.

George Eliot (1819–1880)

To withdraw myself from myself has ever been my sole, my entire, my sincere motive in scribbling at all.

Lord [George Gordon] Byron (1788–1824)

Words to Inspire Writers

July 3

If a little knowledge is dangerous, where is the man who has so much as to be out of danger?

T(homas) H(enry) Huxley (1825–1895)

Writing is a dreadful labor, yet not so dreadful as Idleness.

Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881)

A bitter jest, a slander, a calumny, pierceth deeper than any loss, danger, bodily pain, or injury whatsoever.

Robert Burton (1577–1640)

July 4

Pleasure is very seldom found where it is sought; our brightest blazes of gladness are commonly kindled by unexpected sparks.

Samuel Johnson (1709–1784)

Yet even Letters are as it were the Banke of words, and restore themselves to an Author, as the pawnes of Language.

Ben Jonson (1572–1637)

Nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendor in the grass, of glory in the flower.

William Wordsworth (1770–1850)

July 5

All words are pegs to hang ideas on.

Henry Ward Beecher (1813–1887)

To be a well-favored man is the gift of fortune; but to write and read comes by nature.

William Shakespeare (1564–1616)

August

August 1

Thought is no more identical with language than feeling is identical with the nervous system.

Samuel Butler (1835–1902)

Good writing is a kind of skating which carries off the performer where he would not go.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)

Books, we are told, propose to instruct or to amuse. Indeed! The true antithesis to knowledge, in this case, is not pleasure, but power. All that is literature seeks to communicate power; all that is not literature, to communicate knowledge.

Thomas de Quincey (1785–1859)

August 2

Error flies from mouth to mouth, from pen to pen, and to destroy it takes ages.

Voltaire (1694–1778)

When roused by passion, I can sometimes find the right words to say, but in ordinary conversation I can find none, none at all. I find conversation unbearable owing to the very fact that I am obliged to speak.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778)

Words to Inspire Writers

Your manuscript is both good and original, but the part that is good is not original and the part that is original is not good. [Attributed]

Samuel Johnson (1709–1784)

August 3

It is the chiefest point of happiness that a man is willing to be what he is.

Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536)

An original writer is not one who imitates nobody, but one whom nobody can imitate.

François-René (Vicomte de) Chateaubriand (1768–1848)

Vanity is so secure in the heart of man that everyone wants to be admired: even I who write this, and you who read this.

Blaise Pascal (1623–1662)

August 4

A man must keep a little back shop where he can be himself without reserve. In solitude alone can he know true freedom.

Michel Eyquem de Montaigne (1533–1592)

Our plans miscarry because they have no aim. When a man does not know what harbor he is making for, no wind is the right wind.

Marcus Annaeus Seneca (4 B.C. – A.D. 65)

A sure sign of a good book is that you like it more the older you get.

Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742–1799)

September

September 1

Natural ability without education has more often raised a man to glory and virtue than education without natural ability.

Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 B.C.)

Writing is a dog's life, but the only life worth living.

Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880)

A book is a garden, an orchard, a storehouse, a party, a company by the way, a counselor, a multitude of counselors.

Henry Ward Beecher (1813–1887)

September 2

There are only three events in a man's life; birth, life, and death; he is not conscious of being born, he dies in pain, and he forgets to live.

Jean de La Bruyere (1645–1696)

To business that we love we rise betime,
And go to't with delight.

William Shakespeare (1564–1616)

Why shouldn't truth be stranger than fiction? Fiction, after all, has to make sense.

Mark Twain (1835–1910)

Words to Inspire Writers

September 3

The great law of culture: let each become all that he was created capable of being.

Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881)

Learn to write well, or not to write at all.

John Sheffield (1648–1721)

I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it. [Attributed]

Voltaire (1694–1778)

September 4

Mix a little foolishness with your serious plans: it's lovely to be silly at the right moment.

Horace (65–8 B.C.)

We cannot write well or truly but what we write with gusto.

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862)

Whoever thinks a faultless piece to see,
Thinks what ne'er was, nor is, nor e'er shall be.

Alexander Pope (1688–1744)

September 5

Language is the light of the mind.

John Stuart Mill (1806–1873)

Good writing comes from good talent.

Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519)

October

October 1

To know how to say what others only know how to think is what makes men poets or sages; and to dare to say what others only dare to think makes men martyrs or reformers—or both.

Elizabeth (Rundle) Charles (1828–1896)

Forty is the old age of youth; fifty the youth of old age.

Victor Hugo (1802–1885)

Well, my book is written—let it go. But if it were only to write over again there wouldn't be so many things left out. They burn in me; and they keep multiplying; but now they can't ever be said. And besides, they would require a library—and a pen warmed up in hell.

Mark Twain (1835–1910)

October 2

When I was sitting writing 'The Shadow of the Glen' I got more aid than any learning would have given me from a chink in the floor of the old Wicklow house where I was staying, that let me hear what was being said by the servant girls in the kitchen.

J(ohn) M(illington) Synge (1871–1909)

The most original authors are not so because they advance what is new, but because they put what they have to say as if it had never

Words to Inspire Writers

been said before.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832)

A book is good company. It is full of conversation without loquacity. It comes to your longing with full instruction, but pursues you never.

Henry Ward Beecher (1813–1887)

October 3

Whoever interrupts the conversation of others to make a display of his fund of knowledge, makes notorious his own stock of ignorance.

Saadi (1184–1291)

How many a dispute could have been deflated into a single paragraph if the disputants had dared to define their terms.

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.)

The world's great men have not commonly been great scholars, nor great scholars great men.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr (1809–1894)

October 4

Carpe diem. Seize the day.

Horace(65–8 B.C.)

When a man is in doubt about this or that in his writing, it will often guide him if he asks himself how it will tell a hundred years hence.

Samuel Butler (1835–1902)

I don't give a damn for a man who can spell a word only one way.

Mark Twain (1835–1910)

November

November 1

Books are good enough in their own way, but they are a mightily bloodless substitute for life.

Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894)

All one's inventions are true, you can be sure of that. Poetry is as exact a science as geometry.

Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880)

The faults of great authors are generally excellences carried to an excess.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834)

November 2

Wise men learn more from fools than fools from wise men.

Cato the Elder (234–149 B.C.)

The business of art is this—to make that understood and felt which, in the form of an argument, might be incomprehensible and inaccessible.

Count Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910)

I wish thee as much pleasure in the reading, as I had in the writing.

Francis Quarles (1592–1644)

Words to Inspire Writers

November 3

Judge a man by his questions rather than by his answers.

Voltaire (1694–1778)

Wit in conversation is only a readiness of thought and a facility of expression, or (in midwives' phrase) a quick conception, and an easy delivery.

Alexander Pope (1688–1744)

I am a citizen, not of Athens or Greece, but of the world.

Socrates (470–399 B.C.)

November 4

There are some who speak one moment before they think.

Jean de La Bruyere (1645–1696)

Drama, instead of telling us the whole of a man's life, must place him in such a situation, tie such a knot, that when it is untied, the whole man is visible.

Count Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910)

Write how you want, the critic shall show the world you could have written better.

Oliver Goldsmith (1728–1774)

November 5

Get your facts first, and then you can distort them as much as you please.

Mark Twain (1835–1910)

Many a time the thing left silent makes for happiness.

Pindar (522–443 B.C)

December

December 1

The true perfection of man lies not in what man has, but in what man is.

Oscar Wilde (1854–1900)

Journalism is literature in a hurry.

Matthew Arnold (1822–1888)

Every book must be chewed to get out its juice.

Proverb

December 2

How vain it is to sit down to write when you have not stood up to live.

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862)

The job of the artist is to always deepen the mystery.

Francis Bacon (1561–1626)

Oh for a book and a shady nook. . .

Christopher North (1785–1854)

Words to Inspire Writers

December 3

Teach me to live, that I may dread
The grave as little as my bed.

Thomas Ken (1637–1711)

I wish I could write as mysterious as a cat.

Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849)

The generations of living things pass in a short time, and like runners hand on the torch of life.

Lucretius [Titus Lucretius Carus] (99–55 B.C.)

December 4

Adam was the only man who, when he said a thing, knew that nobody had said it before him.

Mark Twain (1835–1910)

The pen is the tongue of the hand—a silent utterer of words for the eye.

Henry Ward Beecher (1813–1887)

Any publicity is good publicity.

Proverb

December 5

Sir, I have found you an argument; but I am not obliged to find you an understanding.

Samuel Johnson (1709–1784)

Justice to my readers compels me to admit that I write because I have nothing to do; justice to myself induces me to add that I will cease to write the moment I have nothing to say.

Charles Caleb Colton (1780–1832)

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