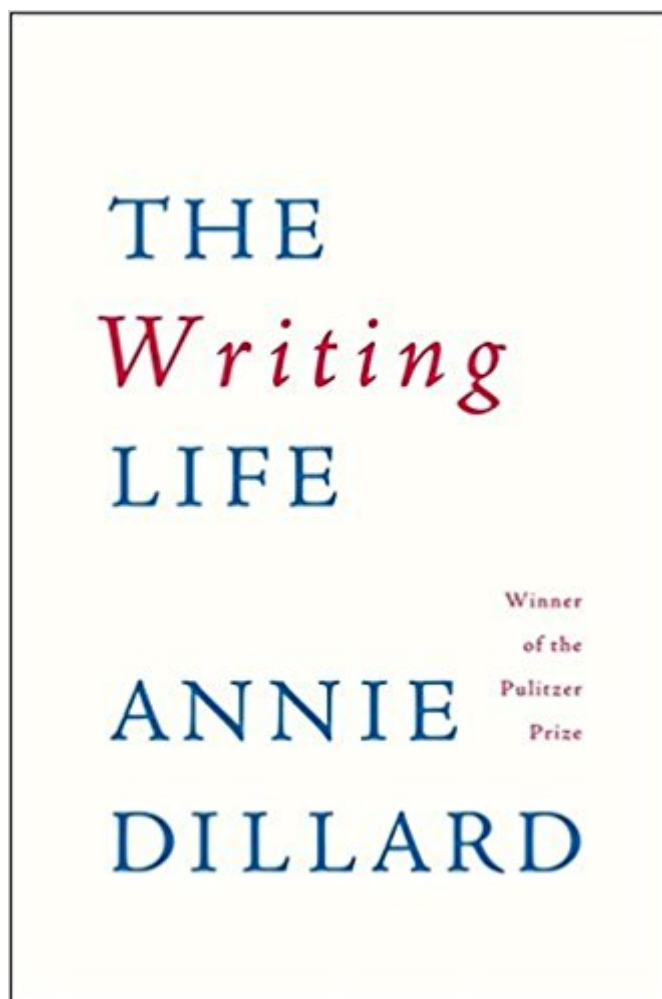


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The Writing Life



Synopsis

• In this collection of short essays, Annie Dillard—the author of *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* and *An American Childhood*—illuminates the dedication, absurdity, and daring that characterize the existence of a writer. A moving account of Dillard's own experience, *The Writing Life* offers deep insight into one of the most mysterious professions.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Annie Dillard has spent a lot of time in remote, bare-bones shelters doing something she claims to hate: writing. Slender though it is, *The Writing Life* richly conveys the torturous, tortuous, and in rare moments, transcendent existence of the writer. Even for Dillard, whose prose is so mellifluous as to seem effortless, the act of writing can seem a Sisyphean task: "When you write," she says, "you lay out a line of words.... Soon you find yourself deep in new territory. Is it a dead end, or have you located the real subject? You will know tomorrow or this time next year." Amid moving accounts of her own writing (and life) experiences, Dillard also manages to impart wisdom to other writers, wisdom having to do with passion and commitment and taking the work seriously. "One of the few things I know about writing is this: spend it all, shoot it, play it, lose it, all, right away, every time. Do not hoard what seems good for a later place.... Something more will arise for later, something better." And, if that is not enough, "Assume you write for an audience consisting solely of terminal patients," she says. "That is, after all, the case.... What could you say to a dying person that would not enrage by its triviality?" This all makes *The Writing Life* seem a dense, tough read, but that is not

the case at all. Dillard is, after all, human, just like the rest of us. During one particularly frantic moment, four cups of coffee and not much writing down, Dillard comes to a realization: "Many fine people were out there living, people whose consciences permitted them to sleep at night despite their not having written a decent sentence that day, or ever." --Jane Steinberg

"In this collection of short essays, the author of *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* and *An American Childhood* probes the sorcery that levitates her own writing, discussing with clear eye and wry wit how, where and why she writes," said PW . Copyright 1990 Reed Business Information, Inc.

An excellent read. I had read this book many years ago and when I saw it on recently felt I had to read it again and add it to my own library. It's a classic.

I love this book as I use it for meditations on writing. it is not an instruction booklet on writing, but it is a compilation of Ms. Dillard's thought and her reality concerning writing. I love that I can pick it up on a daily basis and be inspired and confirmed in my writing process without it being a book that tries to tell me how to write. Inspiration and a look at the true writing life is what she delivers and just what I needed.

What I noticed when reading *The Writing Life* was how much Annie Dillard stretches for her literary artistry. Searching for the most expressive concept for every word in every sentence is grueling work. I try my best as a writer, but looming deadlines and my annoying hobby of not quitting my day job tend to downplay my searches to words that will just get the job done. Edits and rewrites help to bring up the quality, but not to the level of an Annie Dillard..I admire the author's strength of conviction in her professionalism as a writer; going to great lengths in creating writing spaces and scrutinizing vistas and objects to glean crisp and sparkling descriptions. Her philosophical considerations might border on the extreme to non-writers. To me, it's "old home week." When someone is aiming for perfection, whether it be in writing about writing or in competing for the gold in an Olympic event, the reader (or bystander) can't help but share some of the angst. Sharing the angst while reading this book, I was imagining what it would be like to be crafting this work for an audience of writers - verbal athletes themselves who would be judging the work for its gold medal potential. Glad that it was Annie Dillard who took on this challenge of portraying the depths of her writer-self, I give her five stars as my Gold Medal tribute.

Lyrical, as you would expect of Annie Dillard.

Too often, an aspiring writer becomes discouraged when he or she finds it difficult to produce admirable prose. Annie Dillard's "The Writing Life" is encouraging in that she reminds us that even for our finest living writers--of whom she is one--writing is a difficult, often torturous task. In a telling passage, Dillard writes, "If you ask a 21-year-old poet whose poetry he likes, he might say, unblushing, 'Nobody's.' He has not yet understood that poets like poetry, and novelists like novels; he himself likes only the role, the thought of himself in a hat." Some of us are at first drawn to writing by the romantic allure of being known as "a writer." We fancy ourselves looking fine in that hat. Then, when we hit the wall of hard, grueling work, we are tempted to bow out. Dillard's book gives me a second wind. Platitudinous as it sounds, she states with conviction, "No one ever said it would be easy." Furthermore, this book takes the reader on a tour of the interior struggles that an honest writer must endure; and Dillard masterfully describes these struggles. I'm guessing that the reviewers who did not like this book are those who want no more than to wear the hat. They want the instructions as to how to put the hat on and keep it there. However, for those who are serious about enduring the pains and frustrations necessary for digging into their own souls to find a real story, this book is a gem, a testimony from a fellow struggler who candy-coats nothing, who tells it like it is, and who still gives witness to the beauty one finds when one is willing to work....hard.

Dillard delivers with wit and wisdom. I found this slim volume helpful to my writing life!

This is not a how-to-write book. It doesn't reveal much about craft or process. If it has a "point", it is to discourage any sane person from sacrificing their life to writing. It is less beautiful than *Holy the Firm*, less brilliant than *Living by Fiction*, less refined than *Tinker Creek*, and less deep than *For the Time Being*. But *The Writing Life* is wonderfully honest and insightful. I cherish every opportunity to spend time inside Annie's head, and I thoroughly enjoyed this short book.

Love it.

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