

Write YOUR NEXT Chapter

A G U I D E

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When you look at a blank page, do you draw a blank?

Have you felt the itch or urge occasionally, or even more often, to write things down, but then decided against it, thinking it wasn't worth the risk or the trouble?

You might think it's because you're not a writer, not "good" at writing, and simply not wired to do it.

Except, that's not true. You were given bad information.

If you're like most people, you formed your relationship to the page in school. You took tests, wrote papers, and found yourself on the business end of a red pen many times. Your work was judged, criticized, and assigned a letter grade that announced what the work, and thus you, were worth.

It's no wonder so many of us went out of our way to avoid writing, or, when we couldn't avoid it, endeavored to do it with great pains, and the faint expectation of punishment.

The *page*, however, is different from a paper or a test. A page is one of many. It has more than one side. A page can be turned.

This Is Not a Test

Something else happened back in school that divided us even further: We were told what we could and couldn't do, that some people were writers and some weren't.

A cultural emphasis on majors and titles and specializations and what's perceived as "talent" is one of the most dangerous flaws of our education system and our culture as a whole—it takes certain aspects of what makes us human and assigns them to specific people, or denies them of it. It industrializes and separates.

When we decide we cannot or shouldn't bother putting our thoughts on a page, we may think we're avoiding judgment. But what that does is bar access to a critical part of ourselves, the part that yearns to understand our own minds, to explore our own memories; to tell a story and own the telling of it. And it's precisely why we need the page—because we need access to something that's ours alone.

Are some people born with natural abilities? Sure. But to write off whole swaths of things and to snuff out the tiniest flames because we didn't major in this or that is woefully shortsighted and spiritually destructive.



WHAT IF THERE WAS NO
SUCH THING AS A WRITER?
WHAT IF EVERYONE
SIMPLY WROTE?

—
Julia Cameron, *The Right to Write*

You're Wired to Write

The ability, and desire, to express yourself, to make something—call it art, call it whatever you want—is innately human. And the page is a place for processing, discovering, exploring, and understanding what it is we think, and who we are.

“We should write because it is human nature to write,” says Julia Cameron in *The Right to Write*. “Writing claims our world. It makes it directly and specifically our own.”

Writing is like welding, like fishing, like cooking; it is a skill that can be cultivated, and it's worth doing it not because you need to be an expert or win a contest, but because of what it yields for you. Does this mean we all can or should become professional writers or make it your main source of income? God no. Namely because that is not necessarily the life you even want! But it doesn't mean you can't or shouldn't lay claim to the page, make it your own.

To write, to say and express, is to know your own mind. It's not about the final “product” as much as it is the process and what it can reveal to you about who you are and just what you're capable of.

Why on earth would you deny yourself this powerful tool? You shouldn't. Not for a moment more.



IT'S INSULTING TO CALL
A PROFESSIONAL TALENTED...
SKILL IS RARER THAN TALENT.

Seth Godin, *The Practice*

How to Ease Your Path to the Page

For the better part of a decade I've studied and practiced the Gateless Method, an approach and technique for teaching the art and craft of writing that draws on the research and work of Suzanne Kingsbury, a Fulbright scholar, novelist, and one of the most sought-after developmental editors in the country.

And man did I need this. While I'd always identified as a writer, I labored under enormous self criticism and insecurity. I'd worked as a copywriter, a magazine editor and writer, contributed to publications, even won writing contests, but it didn't matter. I was racked with doubt, and the one thing I knew I did want to do—write a book—felt entirely out of reach.

The Gateless experience was transformative for me. I attended several retreats a year, and marveled at how this approach opened up the page for me, and created a sense of ease and expansion. I went on to certify as a Gateless instructor, and have used this method not just in my own writing and in the workshops and programs I lead, but as a stealth tool in my creative work as a consultant for clients across industry. I use it because it works.

How It Works

The heart of the method is simple, but complex: Rather than find flaws and attempt to fix things, we train our attention onto what's working. Rather than criticize or question, we seek out genius, point to what's working. In strengthening this muscle, we begin to see what's working not just in others' work, but also our own. Knowing that you will not be judged makes the writing easier, because if you're anticipating criticism, you tighten up and close off access to the most creative part of you. This method counters that constriction with ease and expansion, which reconnects us with the pleasure of writing and self expression.

How it works in practice, and it usually happens in a group setting: You're given a writing prompt and a narrow window in which to write (anywhere from ten to twenty minutes). You write quickly and freely, and then we take turns sharing our work. We do not criticize, question, consult or suggest; we listen, reflect back, point out what we loved most.

To be clear, this isn't flattery; this is about strengthening an entirely different set of muscles than we normally flex when it comes to writing and listening. And it changes both writer and listener.



WE LEARN WRITING BY
DOING IT. THAT SIMPLE.

Natalie Goldberg,
Writing Down the Bones

As Suzanne will tell you, validation in creative work is rare indeed; everyone wants to fix. But when we go in to fix, too early and too often, it's like overplucking your eyebrows—keep going and you'll have nothing left to define it.

The reason this works, and you'll read more about this method in *Unfollow Your Passion*, is because it aims to turn down the voice of the internal critic and retrain your brain to associate expression and sharing with pleasure and reward (instead of punishment). And it's incredibly freeing.

Instead of being focused on flaws, you start to lean into what makes your work brilliant and fluid and fun, while reducing the fear around making and sharing. You also learn to tune into craft and tools that make your writing even better. Why would you want to make your own writing better if you're not a) trying to earn a good grade or b) do this professionally? Same reason you might want a sharp knife in the kitchen, even if you're not a chef—because the sharper that knife, the more effective and precise a tool it is, and the better you can work with it, regardless of what you're cutting.

Ready?

This guide is designed to give you some practice with this method, even without anyone in the room. I'll give you a series of prompts and how much time to spend on each. I find working in a short time window creates urgency and focus. But if you want to keep going, don't let me stop you!

These prompts are in an order, but you can certainly do them as you please. You can do one a day, one a week—again, up to you. There is no trophy for finishing first.



I BELIEVE THAT WHAT WE WANT TO WRITE WANTS TO
BE WRITTEN...MY JOB, THEN, IS TO SHOW UP ON THE
PAGE AND LET THAT SOMETHING MOVE THROUGH ME.

Julia Cameron, *The Right to Write*

How to Write to a Prompt

The goal here is not to “write something publishable” or produce a finished asset. It’s to give yourself access to the page again, and to your own thoughts, memories, ideas.

Rather than try to “come up” with something, think of these prompts as ways to write down the things that rise up in your mind, and I mean anything:

...**images**, random as they may seem

...**memories**, even things you haven’t thought of in years

...**sensory details** like the way something looked, or smelled, or tasted

...**lines of dialogue**, things people said, didn’t say, should have said

...**what you remember** about the weather or what you were wearing

Let it all come washing out however it comes, and use this little window of time to get it down. It doesn’t matter what order or what format it takes. Grammar doesn’t matter. If you forget a detail, make one up. You can even write about how you’re not sure what to write about. Your job is to get in the boat and start rowing.

A Word on Your Writing Tools

Is it better to write by hand or type? I get this question a lot. There is no “right” answer. Whatever gives you the feeling you want and makes you feel closer to the work itself. For some people, being on the computer is exhausting and they love holding a pen and writing longhand in a paper journal. The sensory experience of hand writing can create a sense of flow and intimacy with the page while slowing you down in a good way.

For others, typing is simply lighter, faster. I tend to do more typing than writing, only because I can get more words out in a shorter time.



INSPIRATION DOES NOT COME
LIKE A BOLT, NOR IS IT A KINETIC,
ENERGETIC STRIVING, BUT IT
COMES INTO US SLOWLY AND
QUIETLY AND ALL THE TIME.

Brenda Ueland, *If You Want to Write*

But I'll often grab a journal when I want to get closer to the words themselves.

Of course you can do the work in this guide in any format you like, and you can change it one day to the next! There is no magic tool for unlocking your intuition and skill; only what helps you keep doing it. So grab whatever tool you feel like using and let's jump in!

Take a Moment Before You Begin

Before you start writing, take a moment to find quiet; get very, very still. Writing is a physical act, and that means you need more than your mind to do it. Your body is a tuning fork for your work, and only when it's very still can it pick up on the vibrations coming through. Turn your attention to your feet, your knees, your hands, your shoulders, the backs of your eyelids. Your breath, rising and falling without any effort on your part. You're ready to begin.



WHAT PEOPLE DON'T REALIZE IS THAT WRITING IS PHYSICAL...
YOU CAN BREAK THROUGH THE MIND BARRIERS TO WRITING
THROUGH THE PHYSICAL ACT OF WRITING.

Natalie Goldberg, *Writing Down the Bones*

Part 1: Unsubscribe Yourself

I talk a lot in my book about unsubscribing ourselves from other people's agendas. About taking stock of what we believe, and have been led to believe, about what your lives can or should look like. For this, the page is pivotal. You can't choose what to think or do until you know what's driving you toward certain assumptions or beliefs. Writing functions as a clarifier, a distillery of what's in our minds and bodies. To write it is to give yourself insights, clarity, and an advantage over those who don't.

PROMPT #1

Something that you believed to be true, or fixed, or permanent, that turned out not to be.

It might have been an idea you had about relationships, or something you swore was true about your mother, your best friend, yourself. When, and how, did that turn? What did you discover?

When did you discover it? Where were you, what was happening, what changed? Maybe there are a few things that come to mind—that's ok too! You might find yourself leaping from story to story.

Leap away! Set a timer for 15 minutes. Start writing.

PROMPT #2

What's one thing (idea, notion, belief, practice) that you'd like to "unsubscribe" from?

Maybe it's something you've been doing for a long time that you're really over, or simply don't want to do or believe or take on anymore. If you could hit the unsubscribe button on an idea, practice, action, group, or anything at all, what would that be? Why? Set a timer for 10 minutes. Start writing.

READ YOUR WORK

Without criticism or judgment, read over what you just wrote. What surprises you about it? What did you not see coming until it was right there on the page? How did it feel to get it down and out of your head? Did you learn something new or were you reminded of something you've known? Most importantly, what did you love? Circle, underline, or highlight the images or moments that struck you, where the writing shifted pace or zoomed in. Take notice of how your own writing craft took shape on the page, and stay a moment to admire it.

Part 2: Dump the Bucket List

Do you have a bucket list? An actual, literal list? Or maybe it's just in your head, the things you know you want to do or try. I have mixed feelings about the bucket list idea—while I love the spirit of it, I don't love the emphasis on one singular action or experience as the bearer of meaning and value. While a bucket list can inspire what you might embark on next, it can make you think that your life isn't complete without doing "x." And I can't imagine that's true. In the next series of prompts, we're going to explore what's on your list or on your mind, and what it actually means.

PROMPT #3

What are some of the things on your bucket list? And why are they there?

Are they things you look forward to, things you genuinely love doing, or things you want to try once? Are they things you're almost sure you won't like doing, but want to have done, regardless of the effort, anxiety, or discomfort? Is part of it just being able to say you've done it? No judgment here. Just write it out so that you get clear. Set a timer for 10 minutes. Start writing.

PROMPT #4

What's one thing you know you want to actually, literally, physically do within the next 6 months?

Imagine what it will be like, what excites you about it, what you anticipate feeling and seeing and experiencing. Put as much sensory detail as you can around it so that it feels real. Let yourself write freely and without apology about what this means to you, and what it will mean for you to have done it. Set a timer for 10 minutes. Start writing.

READ YOUR WORK

Again, read through what you wrote. What you're doing when you read your work is essentially what you'd do in a Gateless Writing workshop: Point out what you love and why, what your favorite moments are, your favorite details. You're not only affirming the work and really seeing it without fixing it; you're reminding yourself of your capacity for expressing your story, too.

Part 3: Get Curious

There's a lot of talk these days about inspiration and motivation. And I think they're both overrated. What gets short shrift is curiosity. Because while motivation is all big speeches and soundtracks, curiosity is a whisper. It starts quietly, somewhere in the back of your mind, and if you listen to it, it will lead you. Far too often, we're told to quash that pesky, mischievous voice, to ignore it in favor of what we "should" do. But it's that curiosity that leads to possibility, meaningful exploration, and action. So let's take some time to listen to what that voice is telling you.

PROMPT #5

What's one thing you've always been curious about? Even if it seemed silly or inconvenient?

Maybe there are several things. But zoom in on one to start and follow it. What does that curiosity wonder about or suggest? Where has it led you and where is it leading you now? Set a timer for 15 minutes. Start writing.

PROMPT #6

A time you followed your curiosity.

What happened? Did it get you in trouble? Did you live to regret it? Or perhaps you were so glad you listened and asked. There is no guarantee that following your curiosity makes things easier—quite the opposite! It can, however, reveal things to you. What's the scene? Who was there? What happened? Set a timer for 15 minutes. Start writing.

READ YOUR WORK

Try reading your work aloud to yourself. Listen to the words, the rhythm of the lines, the images that take shape. It really is astonishing what can come pouring out of you in just a tiny window of time. What did writing about your curiosity spark for you? Where might it take you next?

Go back and reread your work on all of these prompts a week, even a month, from now. The writing you did may not change, but your perspective will and you might see new ideas or connections you missed before.

Want to Do More Writing?

What was it like for you to write this way? I find that once people write to timed prompts, they just want to do more of it. They're hungry for more prompts!

So I've got more where those came from! I created a series of audio writing prompts called 30 Days on the Page, and you can access that program here:

territrespicio.com/30days.

Of course, the idea is to find your prompts everywhere and anywhere—in a conversation you overhear, in the color of a coat that catches your eye, in a memory that surfaces. The great part about this kind of writing is that you can simply start anywhere, with anything, and follow it to see where it goes.



WE SHOULD WRITE BECAUSE
WRITING BRINGS CLARITY
AND PASSION TO THE ACT OF
LIVING... A FELT PATH THROUGH
THE WORLD WE LIVE IN.

—
Julia Cameron, *The Right to Write*



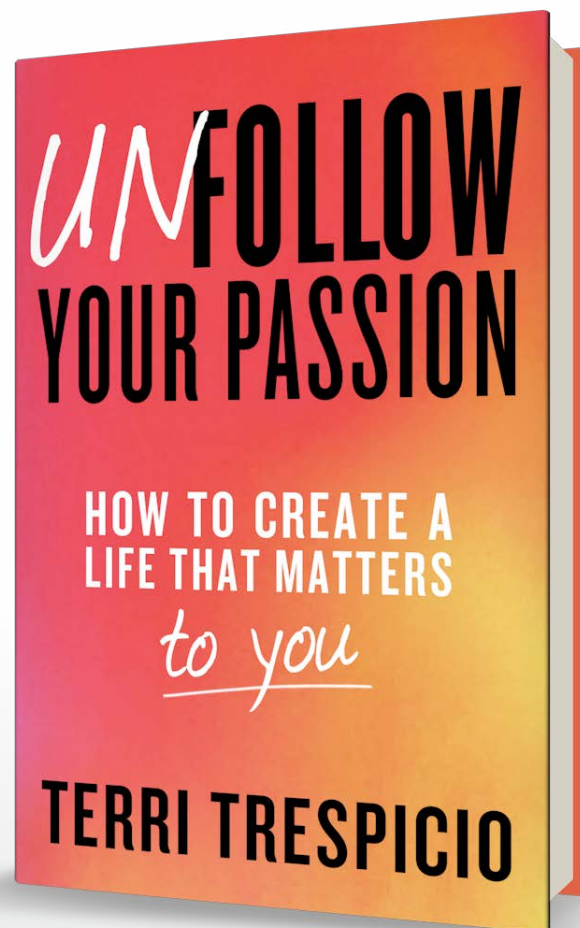
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Terri Trespicio is an award-winning writer, speaker, brand advisor, and author of *Unfollow Your Passion: How to Create a Life That Matters to You* (Atria / Simon & Schuster, December 2021). Her TEDx talk, “Stop Searching for Your Passion,” has been viewed more than seven million times. A former magazine editor at Martha Stewart, her writing has been featured in *Marie Claire*, *Jezebel*, *Business Insider*, *Oprah* magazine, and others. She earned her MFA in creative writing from Emerson College, and won first place for creative nonfiction in the Baltimore Review’s 2016 literary contest. She leads writing workshops and retreats, and consults with individuals and organizations to craft their brand messaging. She lives in Manhattan. Visit TerriTrespicio.com for more information.

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