**Some Books about Writing**

**Inspirational Books**

*If You Want to Write,* by Brenda Ueland. Perhaps the preeminent book in the inspirational category, *If You Want to Write* has chapter titles like “Everybody is Talented, Original and has Something Important to Say,” “The Imagination Works Slowly and Quietly,” and “Be Careless, Be Reckless, Be a Lion, Be a Pirate when You Write.” Ueland lived 93 rich years, and her exuberant voice is evident in every page of this book, which was originally published in 1938 and reissued in 1987, two years after her death. If you like this book, you may also be interested in *Strength to your Sword Arm*, a collection of Ueland’s essays.

*The Courage to Write,* by Ralph Keyes. Subtitled “How Writers Transcend Fear,” Keyes’ work is a natural for anyone who finds that coming up with the right words isn’t the only difficult thing about writing. He writes about the fear of not being good enough, the fear of hurting the people we write about, the fear of the total nakedness and vulnerability exposed in good writing. Reading this book is an affirmation that we’re not alone in our fears and that we can write in spite of them.

*Bird by Bird*, by Anne LaMott. A very popular book that’s hard to describe. Perhaps the subtitle—Some Instructions on Writing and Life—makes the subject clearer. Lamott tells about how she became a writer and how she overcame some of the classic pitfalls of the writing life. Along the way she is very funny, which makes the book entertaining as well as informative.

*Writing from the Inside Out,* by Dennis Palumbo. Palumbo is a writer who became a therapist who works with writers. Thus, he’s a guy who understands what writers go through and is able to support them in moving forward. Subtitled “Transforming your Psychological Blocks to Release the Writer Within,” this book is really a series of essays on such subjects as inspiration, faith and doubt and deadline dread, using case studies from his practice to bolster his points. It’s a book you can pick up and put down—no need to read continuously.

*Writing Down the Bones* and *Wild Mind*, by Natalie Goldberg. It’s hard to describe these two books, which both consist of essays and exercises. Goldberg is a Zen Buddhist who considers her writing a practice, and what she’s teaching here is not so much about writing as it is about creativity—about finding and writing from one’s own creative depths. The essays are enlightening and inspiring, and the exercises are useful. If you’d like to know more about Goldberg herself, try her autobiography, *The Long Quiet Highway.*

**Structure/Technique Books**

*On Writing Well,* by William Zinsser. This is a more general book for writers of nonfiction, a classic that has been selling steadily and well since its original release in 1976. Zinsser talks about writing and rewriting, about the necessity of writing regularly, whether one is inspired or not, about tailoring one’s work for an audience. He also has specialty chapters on topics such as the interview, the travel article and the memoir. Dry as all this may sound, in Zinsser’s hands it makes for entertaining reading. Zinsser wrote numerous other books, and has edited a whole series about writing particular kinds of books, including one called *Writing about your Life.*

*Writing for Story,* by Jon Franklin. This is the book of books for writers of narrative nonfiction. Franklin shows how to use the techniques of fiction to tell true stories. A two-time Pulitzer Prize winner for newspaper writing, he deconstructs two of his award-winning stories and shows how they fit into a complication-resolution format that is very satisfying for a reader. An excellent how-to for writers interested in this genre.

*Your Life as Story,* by Tristine Rainer. This is a great book for people who would like to write a memoir rather than a straight autobiography. Rainer encourages her readers to look at their lives and see the threads that run through them. Then she demonstrates how to use those threads to create a structure for the memoir—to take the raw materials of a life and give it a shape that makes it a story.

*The Writer’s Journey*, by Christopher Vogler. Back in the 1980s, a series of TV interviews between Bill Moyers and Joseph Campbell called *The Power of Myth* launched new interest in myths as models for stories, filled with heroes/heroines setting off on quests and facing obstacles. Vogler’s book tells how writers can use mythic structure to tell a story. Although he is involved in evaluating screenplays, the structure can be used for other kinds of writing as well. The book is quite detailed and provides a good outline for writers to follow.

*How to Write the Story of Your Life*, by Frank Thomas. This is a very basic book for people who are interested in writing a straight, chronological autobiography. Each chapter deals with a different segment of life, and there are questions that get you started in writing about a particular topic.

*Write from Life*, by Meg Files. Written by a college teacher, this book starts with a chapter on finding materials for stories and ends with a chapter on revising what has been written. In between is lots of practical information, with writing exercises in every chapter.

*Writing and Publishing Personal Essays*, by Sheila Bender. Bender is the woman behind the website writingitreal.com. She’s a poet and essayist, and in this book she explains the different types of essays, gives examples of each and provides writing exercises to help you as you put them together.

*Writing the Memoir: From Truth to Art,* by Judith Barrington. This book concentrates specifically on memoir rather than autobiography. In other words, it’s about writing about a certain segment of your life that you select to fit a theme. Thus, there’s a lot of information about finding a structure, along with issues such as writing about living people, moving around in time, etc. At the end of each chapter are “suggestions for writing.”