

Greetings and felicitations! Glad you're still with me.
Only two more lessons to go!

Welcome to the eighth installment of "Becoming a Better Writer" An investigation in to the art of creativity - in ten easy lessons!

<http://www.easywaytowrite.com>

As always, you can contact me for advice or my opinion anytime at:
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Lesson Eight

Go Your Own Way

Believe it or not, I get many messages from students asking me to clarify what OTHER English and creative writing teachers have said to them.

Now, I have to be careful with my replies in these situations. Not least because I don't want to start needless arguments about what's right and what's wrong when it comes to fiction writing!

I invariably point out that there very few hard and fast rules in most cases. No one knows all the answers and the rules do change over time, according to fashion and usage.

That's good. A static language is a dead language.

Most English teachers have their particular bugbears and will recite them as 'laws' that must be adhered to at all cost. That's okay. They're only human.

This is not always helpful to a novice who might get the impression there is always a right answer, when in fact certain 'rules' are to some degree flexible.

Yes, when it comes to grammar and spelling, there are 'rules'. The novice is obliged to listen and learn them. However, there comes a time in most writer's lives when they realize that most of these rules are broken - and perhaps should be broken - often and regularly.

Experimentation and refinement is not altogether a bad thing.

Once I picked a library copy of *The Great Gatsby* where one singularly retentive individual had 'corrected' the grammatical errors, using a thick black pencil to score through (apparently) redundant adverbs. He'd drawn arrows everywhere to indicate dangling participles and the like. He'd even listed suggested improvements in the margin.

It struck me this person would probably have trouble writing out a shopping list, so perfect would it have to be.

Yes, errors jar. But a good writer can - and should - occasionally break the rules for effect and to show up the inadequacies of the language.

There's nothing wrong with inventing new words either. It's actually a great literary tradition. Shakespeare did it, as did James Joyce, even

Stephen King often uses the word 'insectile' which I have yet find in a standard dictionary! But it's a great word, isn't it? And I'm sure you can guess exactly what it means, can't you?

The point I'm trying to make is that once you consider yourself a writer, and you know the rules, you are perfectly entitled to go your own way.

Words are your tools. You are the craftsman. Use them as you see fit.

And it's not just words.

There are lots of theories about how you should construct plots and prose. Some teachers can get very uppity about them. They'll tell you in what order to introduce elements like scene setting, description, internal monologue. When you can and can't do certain things. The same teachers usually have a battery of texts (from dead authors) to quote from to prove their point.

Don't listen to them!

Take on board what they have to say but ask yourself if these rules are appropriate to your own fiction.

Of course sloppy and undisciplined writing is unforgivable but a fresh new voice with the occasional gaffe can be a joy to read.

Writing is not a static art. Nothing is set in stone.

Writing is a lifelong learning experience. If writing is to be good, challenging and of value, it should be as refreshing and liberating as life itself.

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This is the eighth of ten short lessons on "Becoming a Better Writer." They arrive weekly. You may unsubscribe at any time - but of course, I'd much prefer if you didn't!

Also, you may like to forward this email to writers and colleagues who might find it interesting, fun and educational. No problem but - no editing please!

Best regards and keep writing.

Don't forget, you can contact me for any reason at rob@easywaytowrite.com

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Ciao

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