

Writers' Insights into Writers, Writings, and Writing

A Recommended Reading List

Compiled by Bill Watkins

Adler, Mortimer J., and Charles van Doren. *How to Read a Book*. Revised and expanded edition. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972.

There's an irony in reading a book to learn how to read a book. But without a doubt, this is the best book on the subject. Many writers do not write well largely because they do not read well. *How to Read a Book*, when followed, will remedy this problem for life. This book also provides a reading list of the great books by the most influential writers.

Augustine, Aurelius. *Confessions*. 2nd edition. Translated by F. J. Sheed. Edited by Michael P. Foley. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006.

Sheed's translation is the best of all the translations of the *Confessions*. In this spiritual autobiography, the fourth century bishop and theologian uses the vehicles of prayer and meditation to reveal his life, motives, actions, influences, culture, theology, understanding of Scripture, and the human need for God. This is the first spiritual autobiography ever written, and its author is the most influential Christian author and thinker—with the exception of the apostle Paul—in church history. Augustine's writing is poetic, deeply spiritual, and theologically profound.

Burnham, Sophy. *For Writers Only*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1994.

A unique book, indeed. Burnham has collected the guidance, practices, and ideas of some of the greatest writers and combined them with her observations and experiences of being a writer. She has created a mosaic of what it means to be a writer, tips on how writing is done, and how to overcome obstacles.

Cameron, Julia. *The Right to Write: An Invitation and Initiation into the Writing Life*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1998; Penguin Group, 2011.

Cameron is an accomplished writer, and her counsel and exercises will enhance any writer's life and abilities. Even after I had been writing for more than twenty years, I found help in Cameron's book that further shaped the way I write and showed me how to get more out of the writing life.

Fuller, Edmund, Clyde S. Kilby, Russell Kirk, John W. Montgomery, and Chad Walsh. *Myth, Allegory, and Gospel*. Edited by John Warwick Montgomery. Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974.

These five authors write essays on four Christian writers: J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, G. K. Chesterton, and Charles Williams. They provide a good deal of insight into these well-known writers, especially into their lives and works.

Gerard, Philip. *Writing a Book That Makes a Difference*. Cincinnati: Story Press, 2000.

This is one of the finest books on writing I have ever read. Gerard knows how to write significant books, and he shows how writers pull off such writing while he gives sound writing advice and plenty of examples to back up his counsel.

Lewis, C. S. *On Stories and Other Essays on Literature*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1982.

Lewis' essays deal with various kinds of literature, how and why they are used, and some of the writers who have used them effectively. His short essay, "It All Began with a Picture ..." tells how he came up with his Narnia series and his science fiction trilogy.

Lockerbie, D. Bruce. *The Timeless Moment: Creativity and the Christian Faith*. Westchester, IL: Cornerstone Books, 1980.

Lockerbie was an educator, prolific writer, and deep thinker. In this book, he provides theological and aesthetic reflections on the creative life, especially the activity of writing. This is an important book for laying a Christian foundation for what Christian writers do and why.

Murphey, Cecil. *Writer to Writer: Lessons from a Lifetime of Writing*. Waterford, VA: OakTara Publishers, 2013.

Cec is a long-time friend and fellow professional who knows more about writing and the writing life than most writers ever will. He is a well of wisdom that cannot be exhausted, but you would do well to drink deeply from Cec's wise counsel in this book.

Norris, Kathleen. *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1993.

This is a fascinating and illuminating book. Norris opens up her life as a writer and a wife who uses the landscape, the weather patterns, the places, and the people of North and South Dakota to open vistas into human life and relationships, the writing life, and spiritual life.

Percy, Walker. *Sign Posts in a Strange Land*. Edited by Patrick Samway. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1991.

This book contains many of Percy's nonfiction essays that yield insight into his mind-set, background, the writing life, and his perspective on a host of issues, places, people, and writings. Percy is one of America's greatest twentieth-century writers.

Ryken, Leland. *Windows to the World: Literature in Christian Perspective*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan; Dallas: Probe Ministries, 1985.

Ryken is an excellent English professor with an astute understanding of Scripture and Christian theology. In this book, he provides an excellent discussion of literature, including what it is, what it is for, and how writers and readers work together to accomplish what literature is communicating.

Sire, James W. *How to Read Slowly: Reading for Comprehension*. Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw, 1978.

Every communicator makes numerous assumptions about reality, truth, the good, and the beautiful, and very few communicators will make those assumptions explicit. But if you know how to read worldviewishly—that is, philosophically and theologically—you will discover these assumptions, see how they are used, and begin to understand if they make the communicator's case stronger or weaker or even bury it under self-refuting reasoning and other fallacious errors. Sire's book will help you learn how to dig beneath the surface and mine the riches while purging the worthless ore.

Trimble, John R. *Writing with Style: Conversations on the Art of Writing*. 3rd ed. New York: Pearson, 2010; 1st ed., Prentice-Hall, 1975.

I first encountered Trimble's book in a college writing class. It taught me more about writing than almost any other book I've read since. And it did this simply, clearly, creatively, and with many illuminating examples of good and bad writing. The chapter on punctuation is worth the price of the book—seriously!

Zinsser, William. *On Writing Well: An Informal Guide to Writing Nonfiction*. 7th revised and updated ed. New York: HarperCollins, 2006.

Zinsser provides a clear, accessible, and pithy guide to writing nonfiction. He covers the principles of good writing, the methods writers use, the various forms nonfiction writing can take, and the attitudes writers should consider having and expressing in and about their work.