





BY ERNEST HEMINGWAY

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ERNEST HEMINGWAY  
ON WRITING



*edited by*

LARRY W. PHILLIPS

*Scribner*

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*This book is dedicated to my Mother and Father; to  
Mr. Edwin Benish; and to Charles ("Pete") Redfield  
of the Silver Coach.*





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## *Foreword*

ERNEST Hemingway's public image as war correspondent, big-game hunter, and deep-sea fisherman has tended to obscure his lifelong dedication to the art of writing. Only those who knew him well realized the extent of that commitment. To Hemingway, every other pursuit, however appealing, took second place to his career as a writer. Underneath his well-known braggadocio, he remained an artist wholly committed to the craft. At some times he showed an almost superstitious reluctance to talk about writing, seeming fearful that saying too much might have an inhibiting effect on his muse.

But at other times, when he was not caught up in the difficulties of a new work, he was willing to converse

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freely about theories on the art of writing, and even his own writing methods. He did this often enough in his letters and other writings to make it possible to assemble this little book.

For readers of Hemingway who would like to know more about his aims and principles as a writer, this collection of his views will provide an interesting sidelight on his books. For aspiring writers who are looking for practical advice on the demanding task of putting words together, these pages will be a gold mine of observations, suggestions, and tricks of the trade.

As Hemingway's publisher and friend, I think it would have pleased him to know that some of the things he learned about literary creation were being shared with writers of another generation. I'm sure he would have come out with some wry or disparaging remark about his own work, but down deep I think he would have been grateful to Larry Phillips for collecting his views on writing in this useful and interesting way.

Charles Scribner, Jr.

## *Preface*

THROUGHOUT Ernest Hemingway's career as a writer, he maintained that it was bad luck to talk about writing—that it takes off “whatever butterflies have on their wings and the arrangement of hawk's feathers if you show it or talk about it.”

Despite this belief, by the end of his life he had done just what he intended not to do. In his novels and stories, in letters to editors, friends, fellow artists, and critics, in interviews and in commissioned articles on the subject, Hemingway wrote often about writing. And he wrote as well and as incisively about the subject as any writer who ever lived. His comments and observations on the craft accumulated over his lifetime into a substantial body of work—comments which are, for the

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most part, easy to excerpt from the text surrounding them.

The process which led to this collection began several years ago, and had its start, as perhaps all such books have their start, with my admiration for the author and his writing, and with my own search for the rules of writing. The idea was originally inspired by Thomas H. Moore, who did a similar book on Henry Miller, noting as he went passages which touched on the subject of writing, and collecting them.

Collecting the opinions of one man on a given subject, as expressed throughout a lifetime, proved to be an interesting exercise. As with anyone's thoughts on a given subject, Hemingway's on writing were scattered, so to speak, to the four corners of his world. As I brought them together again, and assembled them into different categories, something unusual happened. Comments apparently made at random, at different times, often decades apart, and in different cities or countries, magically began to fit together like pieces of a puzzle.

This is perhaps similar to the effect known to transcribers of taped interviews in which a person will sometimes leave a subject in mid-sentence, go on to talk about something else for a time, then resume again the original thought, taking up at the precise point where he left off. When Hemingway's isolated comments on the subject of writing were taken out of widely diverse articles,

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letters, and books, they locked together like some message issued over the years, dictated between the lines of other material. I have attempted here to preserve some of that feeling.

This book contains Hemingway's reflections on the nature of the writer and on elements of the writer's life, including specific and helpful advice to writers on the craft of writing, work habits, and discipline. The Hemingway personality comes through in general wisdom, wit, humor, and insight, and in his insistence on the integrity of the writer and of the profession itself.

I hope that this book will be an aid and inspiration to writers everywhere, for students of writing, and for the general reader—to have collected here in one volume what otherwise would have to be looked up or searched for. Some writers, as Hemingway said in *Green Hills of Africa*, are born only to help another writer to write one sentence. I hope this collection will contribute to the making of many sentences.

Grateful acknowledgment is due to Charles Scribner, Jr., and Michael Pietsch of Charles Scribner's Sons for their invaluable assistance in the preparation of this book.

*Monroe, Wisconsin*  
*January 1984*

LARRY W. PHILLIPS

