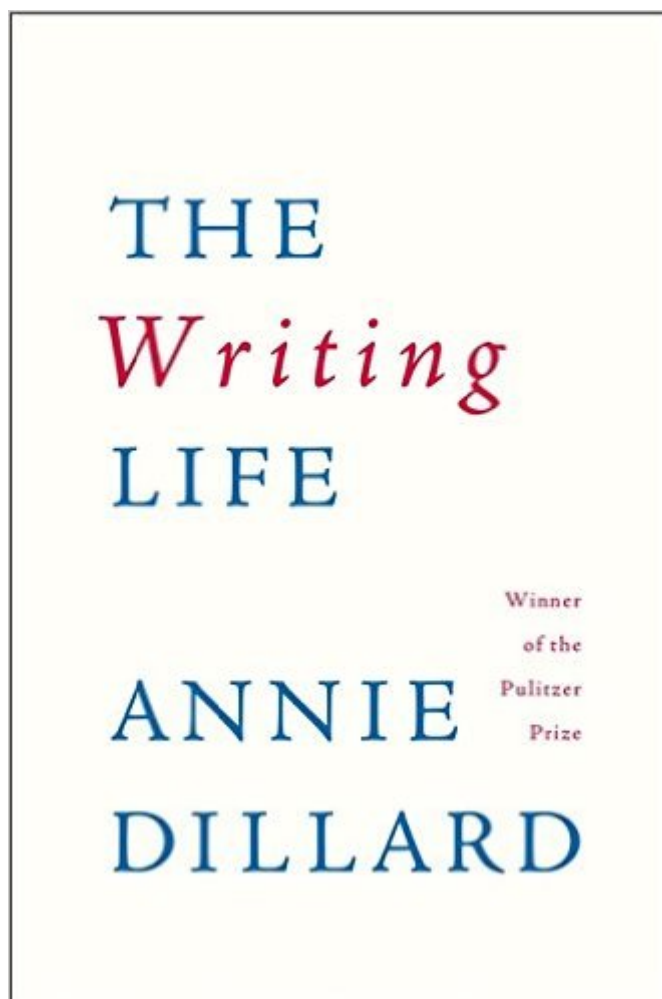


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# The Writing Life



## Synopsis

Â In this collection of short essays, Annie Dillardâ™ the author of *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* and *An American Childhood*â™ illuminates the dedication, absurdity, and daring that characterize the existence of a writer. A moving account of Dillardâ™s own experience, *The Writing Life* offers deep insight into one of the most mysterious professions.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

All of the negative reviews of this book I've seen so far mention that it's not a "how-to" book. Very good! You got the point. Dillard writes about writing, what it means to write, what happens when you write. Sure, there are insights into writing that others may use just as a book about someone's life might produce some insights into living. However, this book never claims and never is a "how-to" book. There are enough cheezy "here are the secrets to writing" out there; Dillard knew better than to add to the drivel. Instead she gives us a brilliant look at the life that one writer leads. Don't judge this book for being something that it isn't. That would be like saying an orange didn't perform so well at being pasta.

If someone of Annie Dillard's stature can write like this while claiming to abhor the whole process, then there's hope for all of us writers. Writing is a lonely process, as I quickly learned when I began writing my memoir, *Baby Catcher* (Scribner 2002). It helped considerably to know that the agonizing moments I experienced while trying to craft just the right phrase, the perfect sentence, the

hang-together paragraph were shared by Ms. Dillard and, by extension I suspect, most other serious writers as well. As we authors and as-yet unpublished writers sit alone and get RST of wrists and fingers and forearms from incessant pounding of the keyboard, staring out the window at a telephone wire or a bare tree or a garage wall, it's immeasurably helpful to know that Annie Dillard is sitting in a remote cabin somewhere, doing the same thing. It makes it possible to go on and get down to the business of writing for yet another day. Now: if only I could write as beautifully and with such seeming lack of effort as she does...

Most writers avoid writing because they are afraid. My writing career came to an abrupt pause in high school when a English teacher read my anon piece and proclaimed it poetry without an explanation. What did that mean? Annie Dillard's *Writing Life* speaks to the poet in me. It speaks to the writer's avoidance I see in myself and fellow writers. It talks of other writer's who have also had such difficulties. It talks about writer's writing spaces. It told me how writers that I admired were able to hold down normal jobs and still be prolific writers. I consume books about writing, this is the only book, small and sweet which spoke to my heart. I bought it because it was a book about writing, but found that it was a book about life.

I loved this book. I read it slowly, savoring it like dense, good chocolate. Carolyn M. Jupp, fellow reviewer, wrote that she felt disappointed in the lack of practical writing advice. Certainly, this is not a book filled with writing excercises, stylistic suggestions, or even much in the way of encouragement. Rather, it's a peek into the mind of a profoundly talented artist and I found it infinitely more helpful than the dozens of practical writing guides I've read in the past year. Dillard's book is filled with gorgeous metaphors, and if you look closely enough, and then maybe look up to see a cloud passing by, you will learn from them. I promise.

Do not read this book if you expect that your motor will be awakened for the first time; look elsewhere if you've not been an exhausted writer, humiliated in your attempts to lay down a long line of text. She didn't write this book for you. This book was written for they who have entered that room and turned their backs on it. To all others, she urges you to go and learn a useful trade. Sorry. *The Writing Life* is comfort for the writer: that "It takes years to write a book--between two and ten years. Less is so rare as to be statistically insignificant". In this book, Annie lays out the long labor of writing good work. It's not a text book, it's not 'writing for dummies'. It is beautifully stark and powerful writing, laced with the same brilliance that fills her novels. She doesn't aim to teach you

how to crank out 5 pages a day, 25 a week, three books a year, a career of comfort and success--she stares the word white in the face, says it's useless to tame it, it's useless to expect--and still the words come. She says slow at first, and slow in the middle and end. Always slow, one sentence at a time. She says: "Get to work. Your work is to keep cranking the flywheel that turns the gears that spin the belt in the engine of belief that keeps you and your desk in midair". Tired writers, find some rest here and then move on: inward and upward. This book is so full of joys and wisdom, I read it through once, and opened it again. I'm now on my second read in a week and finding the desire to write ever stronger in my hands and my gut. It's great. Go read.

This book was not meant to inspire writers who are aiming for three books a year, and a story a day. It is not a how-to book. It is an autobiography. More, I think it is a message from one writer to another. It's like a "hey, we all go through this." The book itself is well written. The grammatical errors irritated me at times, but it was written in a casual tone. The practical tone it was written in is nice. It's more factual than "you must do this and this and this". I enjoyed the narratives: they have opinions, and hinted ideas and suggestions, but often times you as the reader get to decide. What I found most enjoyable about this book is actually the ironic humour. It is not "hahaha" humour. It is simply interesting reading about a fellow writer's frustrations. Indeed, Dillard's self-contempt at times can be hilarious. I would believe that this book is meant more for those who write or have written. It's something for writers to connect with each other. It's like a mountain biker talking to another mountain biker. A baseball player would not be able to fully appreciate the difficulties and the experiences. This is a great book though. But it's got a certain audience.

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