

## 9 Habits of Highly-Effective Writers

by Mrs. Steffen

1. **Paragraphs:** All writing needs a beginning, middle, and ending; essay writing needs an introduction, body, and conclusion. Each new “section” of your writing needs to be indented on the first line only.
2. **Narrow your focus:** Especially in narratives, writers tend to write event after event over the course of a long period of time. It's just not that interesting to your reader! Instead, narrow your focus to one part of the event sequence and give lots of interesting details about that small moment.
3. **Show, don't tell!** Instead of telling me facts about people and situations in a story, *show* me. Do this by imagining the person or scene in your mind and painting a picture of that with your words. For example, instead of saying, “I was mad when I had to set the table”, you might say something like, “Sighing heavily, I pulled the plates from the cupboard and with an irritated look began to set them on the kitchen table.” Now you've shown me your job and your attitude without even telling me!
4. **Thoughts and feelings, not just facts:** Your story will come alive when you tell more than the facts. What were you thinking at that time? What were you feeling?
5. **Concrete versus abstract:** This applies to all types of writing, not just narratives. Use words that have one meaning, instead of words like “good” and “fun” and “fine” and “nice”, that can have multiple meanings. Tell me what you really mean. For example, instead of describing someone's hair as “long”, you might say that “her hair just barely brushed her shoulders.” Can you see the difference?
6. **Sensory details:** Again, picture the scene you're telling me about. Then ask yourself: What does it look like? What does it smell like? What does it sound like? What does it feel like? Your writer should be written so concretely that the reader can almost see, taste, smell, hear, or feel the scene.
7. **Hook your reader:** This also applies to all types of writing. Catch your reader from the very start. Don't bore him/her with lots of background details leading up to your story's point. You might even try starting from the “target” or the point of greatest emotion in your story. Then work backwards from there.
8. **Fill in the gaps:** Some stories and writing have “holes” or gaps where the reader is left with questions. Have someone else read your writing and tell you where they are confused. Also, read through it yourself and imagine you are hearing it for the first time. What doesn't make sense? What details do you need to add?
9. **Elaborate!** Sometimes you just need to tell me more. Here's your chance to have “agency” and plug through even when you feel like being done.