

Karen Bender's Ten Commandments for Becoming a Writer

1. Write.
2. Create a writing schedule for yourself. (Writing an hour a day or a page a day or every other day—whatever feels right.) Try to stick to it. Watch your work grow.
3. Feel how it feels when the writing's going well. Remember that feeling. It will come back.
4. Pretend you're a great writer. Do whatever you need to further this idea. Buy a scarf a great writer would wear. Make up a great writer name. Write a line you think a great writer would write. Write a story you think a great writer would write.
5. Do not show your work to anyone who says things like: "Well, it's not as good as Shakespeare" or, similarly, "It's better than Shakespeare!" Do not show your work to anyone who says, "Why are you doing this?" or "Why do you want to write about these people?" or anything that makes you doubt your work.
6. Read. Reread works that you loved as a child. Read new works that people recommend. Don't feel like you have to like a book because everyone else does.
7. Understand that when you write something honest—whether it is funny or sad or angry or whatever—it will help the person who reads it, for that person will probably have experienced something like that, too.
8. Find one or two writing buddies who will read your work for you. Call these people when you're feeling down about your writing, or up, or anything.
9. Learn patience. View rewriting as simply a task. Look for what's working. Then think: What do I want to try to do another way? Rewriting means taking one thing at a time—it's just doing a job.
10. Remember that only YOU can write down your version of the world.