

reader Views

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A Compilation of Craft Books for Fiction and Non-Fiction (listed in alphabetical order).

We're adding to this list regularly, so please email your recommendations to:
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[Before and After the Book Deal: A Writer's Guide to Finishing, Publishing, Promoting, and Surviving Your First Book](#) by Courtney Maum

AMAZON BLURB: Everything you've ever wanted to know about publishing but were too afraid to ask is right here in this funny, candid guide written by an acclaimed author.

There are countless books on the market about how to write better but very few books on how to break into the marketplace with your first book. Cutting through the noise (and very mixed advice) online, while both dispelling rumors and remaining positive, Courtney Maum's *Before and After the Book Deal* is a one-of-a-kind resource that can help you get your book published.

[Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life](#) by Anne Lamott

AMAZON BLURB: For a quarter century, more than a million readers—scribes and scribblers of all ages and abilities—have been inspired by Anne Lamott's hilarious, big-hearted, homespun advice. Advice that begins with the simple words of wisdom passed down from Anne's father—also a writer—in the iconic passage that gives the book its title:

“Thirty years ago my older brother, who was ten years old at the time, was trying to get a report on birds written that he'd had three months to write. It was due the next day. We were out at our family cabin in Bolinas, and he was at the kitchen table close to tears, surrounded by binder paper and pencils and unopened books on birds, immobilized by the hugeness of the task ahead. Then my father sat down beside him, put his arm around my brother's shoulder, and said, ‘Bird by bird, buddy. Just take it bird by bird.’”

[Blind Insights into the Writing Process](#) by Richard Krause

AMAZON BLURB: Oedipus's vision starts blind. A book on writing suggesting anything else is imposed, a handbook of techniques unlike these epigrams and prose poems that are essentially beyond the writer, just as the creative process is, if they are honest, beyond anyone. *Blind Insights into the Writing Process* is a book of sightings outside the terrestrial landscape of everyday vision that as rich as it is often gets in the way of true access. These insights came about without conscious calculation, almost beyond effort; they are the result of blind, unashamed reaching.

[Body Work: The Radical Power of Personal Narrative](#) by Melissa Febos

AMAZON BLURB: In this bold and exhilarating mix of memoir and master class, Melissa Febos tackles the emotional, psychological, and physical work of writing intimately while offering an utterly fresh examination of the storyteller's life and the questions which run through it.

Drawing on her own path from aspiring writer to acclaimed author and writing professor—via addiction and recovery, sex work and academia—Melissa Febos has created a captivating guide to the writing life, and a brilliantly unusual exploration of subjectivity, privacy, and the power of divulgence. Candid and inspiring, *Body Work* will empower readers and writers alike, offering ideas—and occasional notes of caution—to anyone who has ever hoped to see themselves in a story.

[Craft in the Real World: Rethinking Fiction Writing and Workshopping](#) by Matthew Salesses

AMAZON BLURB: The traditional writing workshop was established with white male writers in mind; what we call craft is informed by their cultural values. In this bold and original examination of elements of writing—including plot, character, conflict, structure, and believability—and aspects of workshop—including the silenced writer and the imagined reader—Matthew Salesses asks questions to invigorate these familiar concepts. He upends Western notions of how a story must progress. How can we rethink craft, and the teaching of it, to better reach writers with diverse backgrounds? How can we invite diverse storytelling traditions into literary spaces?

[Fearless Confessions: A Writer's Guide to Memoir](#) by Sue William Silverman

AMAZON BLURB: The rise of interest in memoir recognizes the power of the genre to move and affect not just individual readers but society at large. Sue William Silverman covers traditional writing topics such as metaphor, theme, plot, and voice and also includes chapters on trusting memory and cultivating the courage to tell one's truth in the face of forces—from family members to the media—who would prefer that people with inconvenient pasts and views remain silent.

[Going Short: An Invitation to Flash Fiction](#) by Nancy Stohlman

AMAZON BLURB: Flash fiction is changing the way we tell stories. Carving away the excess, eliminating all but the most essential, flash fiction is putting the story through a literary dehydrator, leaving the meat without the fat. And it only looks easy.

Enter *Going Short: An Invitation to Flash Fiction*. In this, her treatise on the form, veteran writer Nancy Stohlman takes us on a flash fiction journey: from creating, sculpting, revisioning and collecting stories to best practices for writers in any genre. It is both instructive and conversational, witty and practical, and presented in flash fiction chapters that demonstrate the form as they discuss it. If you're already a flash fiction lover, this book will be a dose of inspiration. If you teach flash fiction, you'll want it as part of your repertoire. And if you're new to the form, you might just find yourself ready to begin.

[Handling the Truth: On the Writing of Memoir](#) by Beth Kephart

AMAZON BLURB: Writing memoir is a deeply personal, and consequential, undertaking. As the acclaimed author of five memoirs spanning significant turning points in her life, Beth

Kephart has been both blessed and bruised by the genre. In *Handling the Truth*, she thinks out loud about the form—on how it gets made, on what it means to make it, on the searing language of truth, on the thin line between remembering and imagining, and, finally, on the rights of memoirists. Drawing on proven writing lessons and classic examples, on the work of her students and on her own memories of weather, landscape, color, and love, Kephart probes the wrenching and essential questions that lie at the heart of memoir.

[How Fiction Works](#) by James Woods

AMAZON BLURB: James Wood's *How Fiction Works* is a scintillating study of the magic of fiction—an analysis of its main elements and a celebration of its lasting power.

Here one of the most prominent and stylish critics of our time looks into the machinery of storytelling to ask some fundamental questions: What do we mean when we say we “know” a fictional character? What constitutes a telling detail? When is a metaphor successful? Is Realism realistic? Why do some literary conventions become dated while others stay fresh?

[In the Margins: On the Pleasures of Reading and Writing](#) by Elena Ferrante

AMAZON BLURB: Here, in these four crisp essays, Ferrante offers a rare look at the origins of her literary powers. She writes about her influences, her struggles, and her formation as both a reader and a writer; she describes the perils of “bad language” and suggests ways in which it has long excluded women's truth; she proposes a choral fusion of feminine talent as she brilliantly discourses on the work of Emily Dickinson, Gertrude Stein, Ingeborg Bachmann, and many others.

[Inside Story: The Power of the Transformational Arc](#) by Dara Marks

AMAZON BLURB: The transformational arc is the deeper line of structure found inside the story. Knowing how to work with the arc enhances your ability to: Express your unique point of view Give meaning and urgency to the line of action Infuse your characters with richness, subtlety, and surprise Develop a powerful emotional undercurrent Make your stories stand out and get attention A strong transformational arc is the single most important element that makes the difference between a good screenplay and a great one. *Inside Story* delivers what the name implies: it's the real inside scoop on how to write a great screenplay with depth, dimension, and substance. It is a must-have for any serious screenwriter, playwright, or novelist.

[Meander, Spiral, Explode: Design and Pattern in Narrative](#) by Jane Alison

AMAZON BLURB: As Jane Alison writes in the introduction to her insightful and appealing book about the craft of writing: “For centuries there's been one path through fiction we're most likely to travel— one we're actually told to follow—and that's the dramatic arc: a situation arises, grows tense, reaches a peak, subsides ... But something that swells and tautens until climax, then collapses? Bit masculoexual, no? So many other patterns run through nature, tracing other deep motions in life. Why not draw on them, too?”

[On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft](#) by Stephen King

AMAZON BLURB: Part memoir, part master class by one of the bestselling authors of all time, this superb volume is a revealing and practical view of the writer's craft, comprising the basic tools of the trade every writer must have. King's advice is grounded in his vivid memories from childhood through his emergence as a writer, from his struggling early career to his widely reported, near-fatal accident in 1999—and how the inextricable link between writing and living spurred his recovery. Brilliantly structured, friendly and inspiring, *On Writing* will empower and entertain everyone who reads it—fans, writers, and anyone who loves a great story well told.

[Refuse to Be Done: How to Write and Rewrite a Novel in Three Drafts](#) by Matt Bell

AMAZON BLURB: From lauded writer and teacher Matt Bell, *Refuse to Be Done* is encouraging and intensely practical, focusing always on specific rewriting tasks, techniques, and activities for every stage of the process. You won't find bromides here about the "the writing Muse." Instead, Bell breaks down the writing process in three sections. In the first, Bell shares a bounty of tactics, all meant to push you through the initial conception and get words on the page. The second focuses on reworking the narrative through outlining, modeling, and rewriting. The third and final section offers a layered approach to polishing through a checklist of operations, breaking the daunting project of final revisions into many small, achievable tasks.

[Stein On Writing: A Master Editor of Some of the Most Successful Writers of Our Century Shares His Craft Techniques and Strategies](#) by Sol Stein

AMAZON BLURB: Provides immediately useful advice for all writers of fiction and nonfiction, whether they are newcomers or old hands, students or instructors, amateurs or professionals. As the always clear and direct Stein explains here, "This is not a book of theory. It is a book of usable solutions--how to fix writing that is flawed, how to improve writing that is good, how to create interesting writing in the first place." With examples from bestsellers as well as from students' drafts, Stein offers detailed sections on characterization, dialogue, pacing, flashbacks, trimming away flabby wording, the so-called "triage" method of revision, using the techniques of fiction to enliven nonfiction, and more.

[Story Genius: How to Use Brain Science to Go Beyond Outlining and Write a Riveting Novel](#) by Lisa Cron

AMAZON BLURB: Cron takes you, step-by-step, through the creation of a novel from the first glimmer of an idea, to a complete multilayered blueprint—including fully realized scenes—that evolves into a first draft with the authority, richness, and command of a riveting sixth or seventh draft.

[Syllabus: Notes from an Accidental Professor](#) by Linda Barry

AMAZON BLURB: Barry teaches a method of writing that focuses on the relationship between the hand, the brain, and spontaneous images, both written and visual. It has been embraced by people across North America—prison inmates, postal workers, university students, high-school teachers, and hairdressers—for opening pathways to creativity.

Syllabus takes the course plan for Barry's workshop and runs wild with it in her densely detailed signature style. Collaged texts, ballpoint-pen doodles, and watercolor washes adorn *Syllabus*'s yellow lined pages, which offer advice on finding a creative voice and using memories to inspire the writing process. Throughout it all, Barry's voice (as an author and as a teacher-mentor) rings clear, inspiring, and honest.

[Tell it Slant: Writing and Shaping Creative Nonfiction](#) by Brenda Miller

AMAZON BLURB: “Tell all the Truth but tell it Slant.”—Emily Dickinson

With these words, Dickinson offers sound advice for nonfiction writers: Tell the truth but become more than mere transcribers of daily life. Since 2003, Tell It Slant has set the standard for creative nonfiction instruction, showing writers how to move beyond mere facts and, instead, make the most of their own “slant” on the world.

[The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop: How To Decolonize the Creative Classroom](#) by

AMAZON BLURB: This easy-to-use guide explains how to recruit, nourish, and fortify writers of color through innovative reading, writing, workshop, critique, and assessment strategies. A captivating mix of memoir and progressive teaching strategies, *The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop: How to Decolonize the Creative Classroom* demonstrates how to be culturally attuned, twenty-first century educators.

[The Art of Memoir](#) by Mary Karr

AMAZON BLURB: Anchored by excerpts from her favorite memoirs and anecdotes from fellow writers’ experience, *The Art of Memoir* lays bare Karr’s own process. (Plus all those inside stories about how she dealt with family and friends get told—and the dark spaces in her own skull probed in depth.) As she breaks down the key elements of great literary memoir, she breaks open our concepts of memory and identity, and illuminates the cathartic power of reflecting on the past; anybody with an inner life or complicated history, whether writer or reader, will relate.

[The Art of Time in Memoir: Then, Again](#) by Sven Birkerts

AMAZON BLURB: Examines the human impulse to write about the self. By examining memoirs such as Vladimir Nabokov’s *Speak, Memory*; Virginia Woolf’s unfinished *A Sketch of the Past*; and Mary Karr’s *The Liars’ Club*, Birkerts describes the memoirist’s essential art of assembling patterns of meaning, stirring to life our own sense of past and present.

[The Artist’s Way](#) by Julia Cameron

AMAZON BLURB: Guides readers in uncovering problems areas and pressure points that may be restricting their creative flow and offers techniques to free up any areas where they might be stuck, opening up opportunities for self-growth and self-discovery.

The program begins with Cameron’s most vital tools for creative recovery – *The Morning Pages*, a daily writing ritual of three pages of stream-of-consciousness, and *The Artist Date*, a dedicated block of time to nurture your inner artist. From there, she shares hundreds of exercises, activities, and prompts to help readers thoroughly explore each chapter. She also offers guidance on starting a “Creative Cluster” of fellow artists who will support you in your creative endeavors.

[The Lie That Tells a Truth: A Guide to Writing Fiction](#) by John Dufresne

AMAZON BLURB: Drawing upon the wisdom of literature’s great craftsmen, Dufresne’s lucid essays and diverse exercises initiate the reader into the tools, processes, and techniques of

writing: inventing compelling characters, developing a voice, creating a sense of place, editing your own words. Where do great ideas come from? How do we recognize them? How can language capture them? In his signature comic voice, Dufresne answers these questions and more in chapters such as “Writing Around the Block,” “Plottery,” and “The Art of Abbreviation.” Dufresne demystifies the writing process, showing that while the idea of writing may be overwhelming, the act of writing is simplicity itself.

[The Situation and the Story: The Art of Personal Narrative](#) by Vivian Gornick

AMAZON BLURB: All narrative writing must pull from the raw material of life a tale that will shape experience, transform event, deliver a bit of wisdom. In a story or a novel the “I” who tells this tale can be, and often is, an unreliable narrator but in nonfiction the reader must always be persuaded that the narrator is speaking truth. This book, which grew out of fifteen years teaching in MFA programs, is itself a model of the lucid intelligence that has made Gornick one of our most admired writers of nonfiction. In it, she teaches us to write by teaching us how to read: how to recognize truth when we hear it in the writing of others and in our own.

[The Story Grid: What Good Editors Know](#) by Shawn Coyne

AMAZON BLURB: The Story Grid is a tool developed by editor Shawn Coyne to analyze stories and provide helpful editorial comments. It’s like a CT Scan that takes a photo of the global story and tells the editor or writer what is working, what is not, and what must be done to make what works better and fix what’s not. The Story Grid breaks down the component parts of stories to identify the problems. And finding the problems in a story is almost as difficult as the writing of the story itself (maybe even more difficult.)

The Story Grid is a tool with many applications:

1. It will tell a writer if a Story “works” or “doesn’t work.”
2. It pinpoints story problems but does not emotionally abuse the writer, revealing exactly where a Story (not the person creating the Story...the Story) has failed.
3. It will tell the writer the specific work necessary to fix that Story’s problems.
4. It is a tool to re-envision and resuscitate a seemingly irredeemable pile of paper stuck in an attic drawer.
5. It is a tool that can inspire an original creation.

[The Writer’s Field Guide to the Craft of Fiction](#) by Michael Noll

AMAZON BLURB: Offers a refreshing approach to the craft of fiction writing. It takes a single page from forty contemporary novels and short stories, identifies techniques used by the writers, and presents approachable exercises and prompts that allow anyone to put those techniques to immediate use in their own work. Encompassing everything from micro (how to “write pretty”) to macro (how to “move through time space”), and even how to put all together on page one, this a field guide for anyone who wants to start writing now (or get some shiny new gear for their fiction toolbox.)

[Thrill Me: Essays on Fiction](#) by Benjamin Percy

AMAZON BLURB: Percy challenges the notion that literary and genre fiction are somehow mutually exclusive. The title essay is an ode to the kinds of books that make many readers fall in love with fiction: science fiction, fantasy, mysteries, horror, from J.R.R. Tolkien to Anne Rice, Ursula K. Le Guin to Stephen King. Percy’s own academic experience banished many of these

writers in the name of what is “literary” and what is “genre.” Then he discovered Michael Chabon, Aimee Bender, Cormac McCarthy, Margaret Atwood, and others who employ techniques of genre fiction while remaining literary writers. In fifteen essays on the craft of fiction, Percy looks to disparate sources such as Jaws, Blood Meridian, and The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo to discover how contemporary writers engage issues of plot, suspense, momentum, and the speculative, as well as character, setting, and dialogue. An urgent and entertaining missive on craft, Thrill Me brims with Percy’s distinctive blend of anecdotes, advice, and close reading, all in the service of one dictum: Thrill the reader.

[Working](#) by Robert Caro

AMAZON BLURB: From the two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning author, Caro recalls the moments at which he came to understand that he wanted to write not just about the men who wielded power but about the people and the politics that were shaped by that power. And he talks about the importance to him of the writing itself, of how he tries to infuse it with a sense of place and mood to bring characters and situations to life on the page. Taken together, these reminiscences--some previously published, some written expressly for this book--bring into focus the passion, the wry self-deprecation, and the integrity with which this brilliant historian has always approached his work.

[Writing Hard Stories: Celebrated Memoirists Who Shaped Art from Trauma](#) by Melanie Brooks

AMAZON BLURB: What does it take to write an honest memoir? And what happens to us when we embark on that journey? Melanie Brooks sought guidance from the memoirists who most moved her to answer these questions. Called an essential book for creative writers by Poets & Writers, Writing Hard Stories is a unique compilation of authentic stories about the death of a partner, parent, or child; about violence and shunning; and about the process of writing. It will serve as a tool for teachers of writing and give readers an intimate look into the lives of the authors they love.

[You Can't Make This Stuff Up: The Complete Guide to Writing Creative Nonfiction -- from Memoir to Literary Journalism and Everything in Between](#) by Lee Gutkind

AMAZON BLURB: Whether you're writing a rags-to-riches tell-all memoir or literary journalism, telling true stories well is hard work. In You Can't Make This Stuff Up, Lee Gutkind, the go-to expert for all things creative nonfiction, offers his unvarnished wisdom to help you craft the best writing possible.

Frank, to-the-point, and always entertaining, Gutkind describes and illustrates every aspect of the genre. Invaluable tools and exercises illuminate key steps, from defining a concept and establishing a writing process to the final product. Offering new ways of understanding the genre, this practical guidebook will help you thoroughly expand and stylize your work.