What Writing Fiction Will Teach You About Writing Documentation
Go Set a Watchman, by Harper Lee
(1,599,189 copies sold)
Old School (Diary of a Wimpy Kid #10), by Jeff Kinney
(1,483,855 copies sold)
Grey, by E.L. James
(1,406,868 copies sold)

Data from Nielsen BookScan
The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up, by Marie Kondo (1,143,422 copies sold)
The Process of Writing Fiction
1. Never open a book with weather.
2. Avoid prologues.
3. Never use a verb other than "said" to carry dialogue.
4. Never use an adverb to modify the verb "said"...he admonished gravely.
5. Keep your exclamation points under control. You are allowed no more than two or three per 100,000 words of prose.
6. Never use the words "suddenly" or "all hell broke loose."
7. Use regional dialect, patois, sparingly.
8. Avoid detailed descriptions of characters.
9. Don't go into great detail describing places and things.
10. Try to leave out the part that readers tend to skip.

My most important rule is one that sums up the 10. If it sounds like writing, I rewrite it.

Elmore Leonard’s Ten Rules of Writing
Stop talking about yourself in the third person. Makes you sound like a fool.

Justified, adapted from Elmore Leonard’s Pronto and Riding the Gap
1. Never start a piece of documentation with a general description of your community or ecosystem.
2. Better yet, avoid starting with anything that isn’t relevant to your documentation.
3. Keep your verbs simple and actionable.
4. Write clearly. Don’t use adverbs or other fancy parts of speech if you don’t need ‘em.
5. Keep your exclamation points under control.
6. Keep surprises out of your documentation.
7. Use jargon sparingly.
8. Link to in-depth information but don’t rehash it in your documentation.
9. Leave out anything else that’s not relevant to the task at hand.
10. Try to leave out the part that readers tend to skip.
Understand Your Audience
“Your audience is one single reader. I have found that sometimes it helps to pick out one person—a real person you know, or an imagined person—and write to that one.”

John Steinbeck, author of *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Of Mice and Men*
Write What You Know
“Every secret of a writer’s soul, every experience of his life, every quality of his mind, is written large in his works.”

Virginia Woolf, author of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *A Room of One’s Own*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion Clues</th>
<th>Transitions</th>
<th>Introductory Words</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Additionally</td>
<td>In my opinion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Obviously</td>
<td>Based on what I know</td>
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<tr>
<td>Better / Best</td>
<td>Of course</td>
<td>I know you will have to agree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Worst</td>
<td>Consequently</td>
<td>My favorite</td>
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<td>Definitely</td>
<td>Besides</td>
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<td>Favorite</td>
<td>Furthermore</td>
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<td>Worthwhile</td>
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<td>Inferior</td>
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<td>Optimal</td>
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@thursdayb
“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.”
“For sale, Baby shoes, Never worn.”

Ernest Hemingway, author of *The Sun Also Rises* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*
Emotion Matters

@thursdayb
*The Muppet Christmas Carol*, adapted from Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*
1. Scrooge starts out the story like it’s any other day, until Marley’s ghost shows up and kicks off the rising action.
2. Each of the three ghosts of Christmas — Past, Present, and Future — keep that rising action building.
3. Scrooge has his grand epiphany which is the climax of the whole story.
4. The action falls, giving Scrooge an opportunity to prove that he really is reformed and confirming that we’ve got a happy ending.
Kill Your Darlings

@thursdayb
Provide Context
*Game of Thrones*, adapted from George R.R. Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire*
Set a Reading Order
Maintain the Canon
Encourage Fan Fiction
Use Beta Readers and Workshops
Sabrina, the Teenage Witch, adapted from Archie Comics’ Sabrina, the Teenage Witch
Reading and Writing are Connected Habits
“Just write every day of your life. Read intensely. Then see what happens. Most of my friends who are put on that diet have very pleasant careers.”

Ray Bradbury, author of Fahrenheit 451 and The Martian Chronicles
Sin and Syntax, by Constance Hale

Bird by Bird, by Anne Lamott

The Seven Basic Plots, by Christopher Booker

On Writing, by Stephen King