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**How To Write**

**By Michael LaRocca**

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LEARNING HOW TO WRITE

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As a student of Spanish, my goal was to think in Spanish. Skip the word-by-word translation so I'd have the necessary speed to speak and listen. I know words in Spanish that I'd be hard pressed to translate. Usually profanity, I confess. Chingow!

For years my students here in China have studied grammar, and know it better than you or I. They read. They write. But speaking involves moving faster than that. In conversation, we don't have time to write it first and make sure it's all grammatically flawless, then read it aloud, perhaps after a bit of rehearsal.

So, I try to give them a chance to practice putting words together on the fly, rules be damned. The rules they've internalized will kick in and keep them comprehensible, which will build their confidence in their ability to keep creating conversation that way.

This is not unlike what we go through as authors. First we study rulebooks, perhaps take some classes, and conclude just about everything we're doing is wrong. So many rules to memorize. We might dread sitting down to write with all those constraints.

But really, it's not about memorizing rules at all. It's about internalizing the rules, following them (or not if you prefer) without being consciously aware of what they are. They're there,

but in the background.

The story's what matters. You're supposed to be having fun, not "working." At least not during the creation phase.

We don't always take the time to say, "I've written ten active sentences in a row so maybe I'll whip in a passive one now" or "I need a beat for every X lines of dialogue." I published four novels and edited dozens more before I learned what a beat was. (It's a pause so the reader can catch his/her breath.)

And, of course, since it is writing and not speaking, we can

always go back and revise later. Then rely on editors to catch what we missed, or at least make us wonder why we wrote it this way instead of that way.

Some authors aren't even consciously aware of "the rules." They've never taken a class, never read a book about writing. They're simply avid readers who one day decided to write. But they've internalized the rules as well. It comes from reading.

I've said it before and I'll say it again. If you want to write, you must read. If you don't like reading, maybe writing isn't for you. It's not about writing because you want to say, "I am a writer." It's about writing because you enjoy writing.

And, it's really nice when you've been writing for a long time to go back and read a book about how to write. You might find one or two things to tweak in your technique, as opposed to a daunting laundry list of flaws. It's much easier to internalize one or two new rules than 50 or 100!

Michael LaRocca's website at <http://freereads.topcities.com> was chosen by WRITER'S DIGEST as one of The 101 Best Websites For Writers in 2001 and 2002. He published two novels in 2002 and has two more scheduled for publication in 2004. He also works as an editor for an e-publisher. He teaches English at a university in Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province, China, and publishes the free weekly newsletter Mad About Books.

## **7 Writing Muse Kickers to Fill Up That Blank Page**

**By Shery Ma Belle Arrieta-Russ**

Nothing is more daunting for any writer than having to stare at a blank sheet of paper.

## How To Write

When we stare at a blank sheet of paper, we often think, "What am I going to write?" A few minutes later, it becomes, "Oh my goodness, I can't think of anything to write!" And several minutes later, it turns into something like, "Write, dangnabit! Write! Write! WRITE!"

Some writers call this writer's block. But I call it the "Writing–Muse–Needs–A–Kick" syndrome.

And that's exactly what we're going to do with your writing muse gone truant. We're going to kick her back into gear so you can fill up that blank page.

Here are 7 writing muse kickers for you to try right now:

1. First Line: Begin a story with "There was once a chance I didn't take..."
2. Cliche Starter: Weave a story or poem around the cliché, "keep your powder dry."
3. Power of Metaphor: What does "a string of laughter" make you think of?
4. Proverb Mix: "Beauty breaks the camel's back."
5. Story Words: Use the words "pianist, pencil, high–rise building, running shoes" in a story.
6. What If? Story: What if you're going to write a story about betrayal, with a young man as the main character and a locket as the key object? Set your story on a ranch.
7. Quick Prompt: Write about what you'd say to an uninvited guest.

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For more similar kickers to help start off your writing or even fill up that page you've been staring at since yesterday, pick up a copy of Shery's software for writers, WriteSparks! Lite for free =>

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