

Why We Write: Four Reasons

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It's safe to say there are more writers now than at any other time in history. When I went to the AWP conference in Chicago earlier this year, there were 10,000 other writers there. The amount of creative writing programs at universities have exploded from about 50 in the 1980s to over 300 just in the US. There are over 110 million blogs.

Someone get a gun and shoot me. That's a lot of competition.

Seriously though, why do we write? Why are all of us pursuing writing in the face of the increasingly limited attention spans of the broader public? It's not like we're making much money at it, if any.

I think we write for four main reasons:

Why Do We Write? To be fully alive.

Sir Ken Robinson says:

The arts especially address the idea of aesthetic experience. An aesthetic experience is one in which your senses are operating at their peak; when you're present in the current moment; when you're resonating with the excitement of this thing that you're experiencing; when you are fully alive.

We write to be fully alive. Writing draws us into the moment. We see the blades of grass, hear the miniscule chirp of the morning cricket, watch the shade travel from one edge of the yard to the other, seemingly for the first time.

Writing helps us make art out of everyday, ordinary moments.

We write to make a name for ourselves.

[George Orwell says](#) one motivation to write is sheer egoism, that we write out of the "desire to seem clever, to be talked about, to be remembered after death, to get your own back on the grown-ups who snubbed you in childhood, etc., etc."

That's part of it, but I think the motivation goes much deeper than being well-liked in the present moment.

If you're being honest, you would agree that it would be nice to live forever. But if you can't live forever physically, then why can't your memory live forever? We're still talking about Chaucer, Virginia Woolf, Mark Twain, and George Elliott long after their deaths. Why not you?

While this might not be the most unselfish of motivations, it's certainly natural.

We write to change the world.

People consume now more than ever in the history of the world. We eat more, we listen to more music, and we consume more information. However, we've also learned enough about consumerism to know it won't make us happy.

Writing gives us a chance to turn the tides on consumerism. Rather than consume more, we can *make* something.

Isn't that exciting? Every day, when you put your fingers to the keys, you're creating something. And then, with the click of button, you can share it with the world.

Humans have a built in need to make our mark on the world. We want to bring new things to life, to mold things into the image we have in our imaginations, to subdue the earth.

We write not just to change the world, but to create a new world.

We write to discover meaning.

The psychiatrist Victor Frankl posited that the main search of mankind is not happiness or pleasure but meaning. "Life is never made unbearable by circumstances, but only by lack of meaning and purpose," he wrote in *Man's Search for Meaning*.

Writers are uniquely gifted to find meaning for themselves and to help others find meaning. In fact, this has always been the main task of storytellers. Every story matters to the person living it, and our job is to tell the universal stories, the stories that reveal the story of every person on the earth.

We write to bring meaning to the world.

What do you think? Why do you write, and why are there so many people writing today?