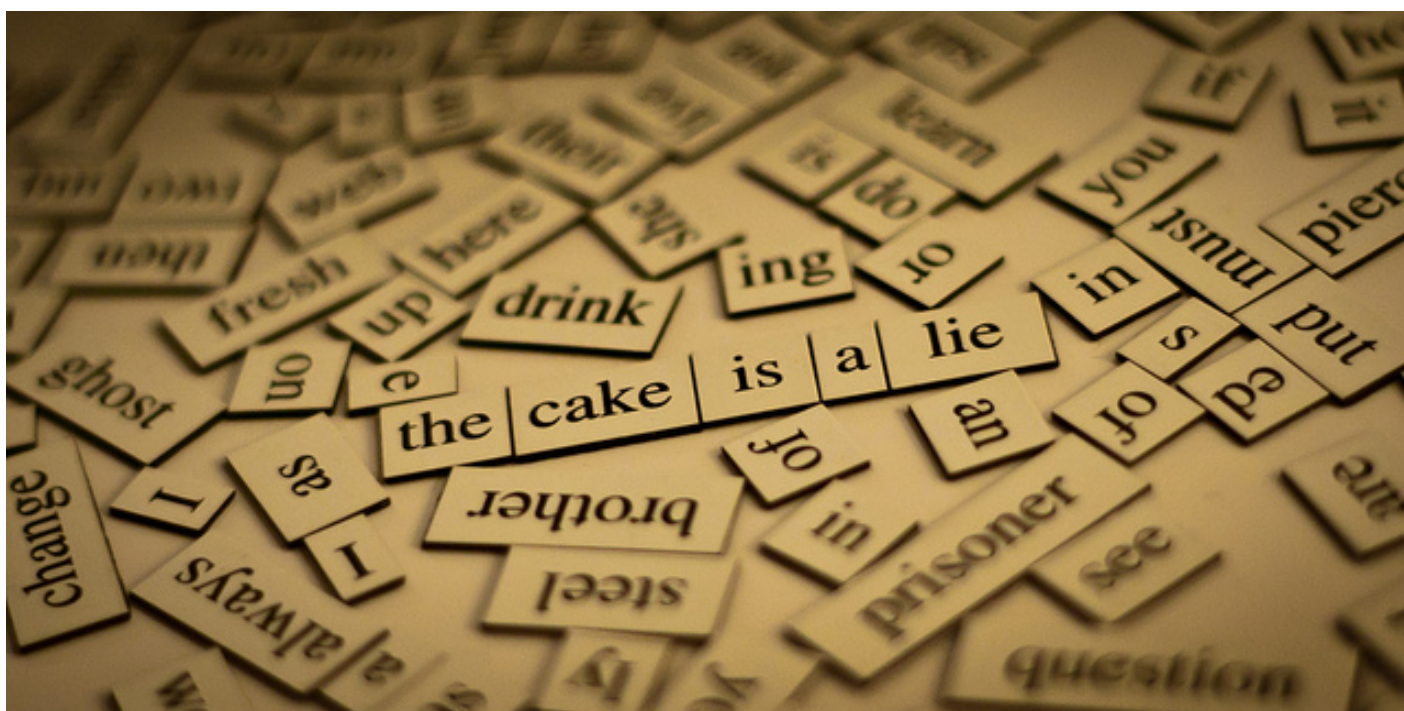


[How Not to Become a Writer](#) [1]

June 8, 2015 [Advice](#) [2]

Essay by Lâle Davidson

Finalist for the 2014 Talking Writing Prize for Advice Writing



Start out innocently enough, thinking writing is wish fulfillment, but then develop a self-esteem problem. Convince yourself you have to be brilliant, and then take every opportunity to remind yourself that you're not. Try to write a lot of brilliant stories, and when that causes you to completely forget what a story is, consider it proof of your dullness.

Quit often. In fact, every time you can't figure out what happens next, quit.

Convince yourself you have nothing to say, and then try to say something pithy. Get confused about the meaning of the word *pithy* because it's just like the spongy center of a reed (pith).

Go to college and ask to sign up for creative writing your freshman year. When the director tells you that freshmen don't have enough life experience to write, go to India. When you return in the spring, believe the creative writing director when he says you can't possibly catch up to all those who started in the fall. Try to write on your own. Develop a long list of noble reasons to write: to make the world better, to live life more fully, to transcend.

Get intimidated by the list and quit.

When you start again, prop yourself up with grandiose delusions of grandeur and become redundant. Use far too many refractory, paradoxical, illusory adjectives and adverbs. Put words together in such ornate ways they form a wrought iron fence that keeps people out of the story. An overwrought iron fence. Be insulted when your peers say your writing

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is overwrought. Better yet, be ashamed. Be very ashamed.

Go back to the creative writing director your junior year, and when he says you can't take the course because he likes to start working with writers when they're young, point out the contradiction and insist on taking the course. When he says he's glad to see you finally stand up for yourself, take the course and get writer's block.

When the semester is over and the writing director sits you down to point out your writer's block, fight against his assessment but secretly believe him when he says you will never overcome it and that you should quit now.

Quit for two weeks, then tell yourself there is no reason to write unless it is totally new, totally avant-garde. Write avant-garde things that you don't understand and don't really enjoy. Make sure you spell avant-garde wrong, too.

Refuse all advice on technique and insist that no one understands you because you're just too brilliant for them.

Write your stories very slowly, word by word, trying to please everyone but yourself. When you can't figure out what the stories are about, end them all by making the main character jump out a window or vanish or spontaneously combust.

Convince yourself there's a club of people who know what great literature is and they won't give you the password. Hate everything you read. Scratch that. Don't read. But if you do, tell yourself you could have written what they wrote, but didn't, for some reason.

Graduate from college and go to New York City to wait tables so you have time to write. Omit the writing and just wait tables. Convince yourself you are basically a boring, stupid person, but your emotional problems and complex family history make you interesting. But don't let yourself write autobiographical fiction; that would prove you have no imagination.

Apply to graduate school, but only apply to the easiest ones, the ones you know will accept you and might even give you a fellowship. Accept the fellowship and take lots of workshops where people make random comments about what they like and don't like, filled with vague generalizations such as, "This story is all frosting and no cake."

Whenever you develop any kind of problem with your writing, roll around on the ground and gnash your teeth. Don't forget the *g* before *nash*. It makes it more chewy and satisfying.

Send your work out only to the best magazines and get rejected a million times.

Quit again. But write just enough to keep the sore festering. Send more work out, but to protect yourself, don't look at it too closely. That way, it's sure to be full of proofreading errors and get rejected out of hand.

When you get rejected out of hand, whine about how corporate and soulless the publishing world has become. Whine that you are cursed like Cassandra to speak the truth but never be taken seriously, because, yes, God really is taking time out of His seven-billion-soul schedule to hypnotize all the magazine editors into rejecting you, God is trying to teach you to believe in your brilliance without needing to hear it from others, because God really has nothing else to do but think about you.

No, really.

And when you've finally figured out how not to become a writer, write it all down, because you can't help yourself. Quitting has never been a real possibility.

Art Information

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Lâle Davidson's work has appeared in the *North American Review*, *Little Magazine*, *Artists Unite*, *Eclectica Magazine*, *Collagist* and *Gone Lawn*, and is forthcoming in *Big Lucks*. Her story "The Opal Maker" was a finalist for the Franz Kafka Award in Magic Realism issued by *Doctor T.J. Eckleburg Review* at Johns Hopkins University. Her magical realist novel *The Ciphery*—which starts with a spontaneous combustion—was a finalist for the Heekin Group Foundation's James Fellowship. She was recently promoted to Distinguished Professor at SUNY Adirondack in Queensbury, New York, where she teaches fiction.

For thoughts on writing and magic realism, visit [Lâle Davidson's website](#) [4].

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