

# The Rules of Writing Practice

*Drawn from Natalie Goldberg's books Writing Down the Bones and Wild Mind and her tape series, "Writing the Landscape of Your Mind"*

**1. Keep your hand moving.** Writing practice is based on a timed exercise. Keep your hand moving for the whole writing period—be it ten minutes or two hours. Keeping your hand moving enables you to separate the creator from the editor so the editor can't sabotage your efforts. No matter what happens, keep your hand moving.

**2. Stick with first thoughts.** First thoughts are the way you first flash on something—what you really see, feel, think, and want to say. First thoughts are not orderly, proper or polite. But they are the place from which your writing comes alive. First thoughts carry energy. So whatever flashes through your mind, write it down. Don't worry if it's logical or if it makes sense. It's good if your writing surprises you.

**3. You're free to write the worst crap in the world.** We call it writing "practice" for a reason. We don't expect pianists, football players or opera singers to get good without years of training, repetition, and practice. It's the same thing with writing. You have to be willing to write a lot of junk before you write something good. Expecting that you will write a lot of junk for a long time gives you a tremendous amount of freedom.

**4. Don't worry about punctuation, grammar, syntax or spelling.** That's not the job of the creator. It's the job of the editor. Your job is to get your wild mind on the page without worrying about form, structure or "doing it right."

**5. Be specific.** Use the specific names of things if you can. The type of car. The breed of dog. Avoid labels. Get below the label and be specific to the person.

**6. Don't cross out.** When you do writing practice, you're training yourself to put down whatever comes through you. Crossing out is the editor sneaking in. When you're in the middle of writing, you don't know whether something is powerful or not. Sometimes our mistakes end up being our best writing.

**7. Lose control.** Let it rip. Say what you want to say, not what you think you should say.