“All writing is easy: All you do is sit staring at a blank sheet of paper until drops of blood form on your forehead.” Those famous bons mots, attributed to the journalist and dramatist Gene Fowler, ring true not only with students wrestling with a term paper, but also with people who write professionally, who have devoted their lives to the craft. Though writing is easier for some than others, most writers struggle at some point with putting the right words in the right order. Of all the artistic pursuits, only writing has a term for its own brand of creative difficulty: writer’s block. And yet no matter how hard writing is, many people are compelled to do it. Why? We asked six different writers to answer that question. We also asked them to tell us a little about their process and how they write, and to share the best writing advice they ever received or the best they have to offer. Here is what they had to say.

**JOSHUNDA SANDERS, JOURNALIST**

Joshunda Sanders is a reporter for the Austin American-Statesman in Austin, Texas. She has also written for the Houston Chronicle, Beaumont Enterprise, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, and the San Francisco Chronicle. Her essays have appeared in Secrets and Confidences: The Complicated Truth About Women’s Friendships and Homelands (Seal Press), and My Soul To His Spirit: Soulful Expressions from Black Daughters To Their Fathers (SoulDictates Publishing). She graduated from Vassar College in 2000, where she majored in creative writing, and she earned a Master of Science and Information Studies from the University of Texas in 2009.

**Why I Write**

I write because I need to, because I have tried not writing and I like myself better when I am writing. Writing has been my closest friend, therapist, confidante, and lover. I have used it to keep a record of my survival, successes, heartbreaks, and victories. I believe that writing is what I am meant to do in this world, so I write mostly because I believe it’s part of my destiny.

**How I Write**

When I was 12, I carried a mini-notebook with me. I lived in New York, so I would write on the subway, in Washington Square Park, or while I sat alone in my room and stared out of our apartment window. Being a newspaper reporter changed my process because I have to meet a deadline every day. When I’m writing creatively, it’s an erratic process that involves a binder of loose-leaf paper and writing longhand. For some reason, my best writing happens when I’m not prepared, or at the kitchen table when I’m trying to enjoy breakfast.

**Best Writing Advice**

Two things: Be willing to “kill your babies,” which is a term journalists use to describe cutting your best pieces of prose when they don’t serve the purpose of the story. Sometimes the words and sentences I adore just don’t work for readers. Also, be clear about who and what you’re writing for. My goal when I sit down to write is to be as honest as possible with myself and others. My hope is that people will appreciate the beauty and simplicity of truth or at least the striving for truth in my writing and respond to that.
ELIZABETH SPIRES, POET

Elizabeth Spires has written six collections of poetry, including Worldling, Now The Green Blade Rises, and The Wave-Maker. Her books for young readers include The Mouse of Amherst, I Am Arachne, and, most recently, I Heard God Talking To Me: William Edmondson and His Stone Carvings. Her poems have appeared in many magazines, including The New Yorker, The Atlantic, and Poetry. She teaches writing at Goucher College in Baltimore, Maryland.

Why I Write

I write to make sense of the world, which can be chaotic and confusing at times. I want to hold onto and remember certain fleeting emotions and memories. Another way to answer the question, however, is that I write simply because I have to. I’m compelled! Words are my medium and writing is the way I process the experiences I have.

How I Write

I have a notebook (actually, many notebooks) where I jot down thoughts, impressions, descriptions, dreams. Some of my jottings become the seeds for poems. Then I type up a first draft of a poem (usually it’s very rough and fragmentary), print it out, and annotate it. Then I revise the draft and print it out again. (A poem for me doesn’t feel completely real until I see it on paper.) This process is repeated until the poem is (hopefully) finished. Some poems require 30 or 40 drafts.

Best Writing Advice

It’s probably best if writers trust their own instincts and not depend on advice.
CHRISTOPHER PAOLINI, FICTION WRITER/NOVELIST

Christopher Paolini was just 15 when he wrote the initial draft of Eragon, the first book in his Inheritance Cycle series. All the characters in Eragon are from Paolini's imagination except Angela the herbalist, who is loosely based on his sister. His second book, Eldest (2005), continues the adventures of Eragon, and the third book, Brisingr, was published in 2008. In December 2006, Fox 2000 released their movie adaptation of Eragon. Paolini is currently writing the last book of the Inheritance Cycle.

Why I Write
The main reason I write is my desire to tell a good story, one that inspires a sense of awe and wonder, that makes a reader's scalp prickle and a cold tingle crawl down the spine. That's what I look for in a work of fiction, and I try very hard to give my readers that experience.

Also, I love playing around with people, places, and things that don't actually exist. It's not something I'll do in all my books, I'm sure, but for some reason, I find it immensely satisfying to write about magic, dragons, elves, werecats, ten-mile-high mountains, and other fantastical elements.

How I Write
From my office window I can see the soaring Beartooth Mountains and the winding Yellowstone River below. The scenery is stunning, and staring at it helps me envision Eragon's world. For me, being an author is an exercise in discipline; I work every day whether inspiration strikes me or not. It helps to have a routine. I eat breakfast, write until late afternoon with a short break for lunch and exercise, then eat dinner and relax with a movie. I usually revisit the manuscript in the evening. It's a lot of work, but the story and characters seem so real, I often have difficulty thinking of anything else.

Best Writing Advice
If I could go back in time to when I first started Eragon, I would tell myself, "Don't get discouraged so easily; stick with it. Also, learn everything you can about English, but remember not to slavishly follow the rules. Sometimes you need to use an adverb or the passive voice. Not always, but sometimes."
OLIVIA JUDSON, BLOGGER
Olivia Judson, an evolutionary biologist, writes a weekly blog about the influence of science and biology on modern life titled “The Wild Side” for the New York Times website. She has been a reporter for The Economist and has written for a number of other publications, including Nature, The Financial Times, The Atlantic, and Natural History. She is a research fellow in biology at Imperial College London.

Why I Write
I write because I can earn money from writing, and I like the lifestyle that comes with it. I like setting my own hours and having the freedom to travel where I want to when I want to. Sometimes I miss having a more structured environment—it’s not always easy to be your own boss, and it doesn’t suit everyone. But if you like freedom, writing can bring it. I also enjoy being able to reach a wide audience: My writing is aimed at anyone with any interest in biology, regardless of what they already know.

How I Write
It depends on what I’m writing. If I’m writing short articles, I can do it almost anywhere, without a set schedule. If I’m working on a book, then I write for a set number of hours each day—and here, the most important thing is to take breaks when the schedule says so! Breaks are important; I often have some of my best ideas halfway through a break.

Best Writing Advice
I suffered from terrible writer’s block for years. And the best advice I ever had about writing was from a book, Becoming a Writer by Dorothea Brande. She says, in essence, that just because you have trouble writing does not necessarily mean you shouldn’t be a writer. I found this hugely reassuring!

ANTONIO PONTARELLI, SONGWRITER
Antonio Pontarelli is a singer, songwriter, and electric violinist. He picked up a violin at age three and at age seven began winning awards and competitions. In 2008 he won the People’s Voice Award of the International Songwriting Competition, which has a Teen category and gives away a full scholarship to the Berklee School of Music Summer Program as part of its prize package. He was also Grand Champion of America’s Most Talented Kid competition on PAX TV. Today, Antonio is a junior at the University of Southern California and is recording his debut CD.

Why I Write
I started playing music at a young age, which was closely followed by improvising and then songwriting. My understanding of life and growing up was filtered through musical lenses. When I experienced love, happiness, sadness, and heartbreak, writing lyrics and melody felt like the truest and most natural way of expressing my feelings. Every time I finish a song, I discover another side of myself. Every song I write is formed by my perceptions and ideals, and it helps me define myself and develop a broader understanding of the human experience.

How I Write
As a songwriter, the process always starts with inspiration. The drive to communicate becomes a melody, which is usually the hook, in my head. I sit down at the piano and develop this melody, a short yet defining phrase that conveys a certain tone, feeling, and pace. Then I tackle the challenging business of marrying the melodic idea and lyric. If the melody is urgent and dark, the song could be about a break-up, or disappointment, or even proud chest-beating. In this phase, I establish a point of view and then form a rough back-story to give the lyric context.

Best Writing Advice
Writing is first and foremost about the heart. Your head has an important part to play in the writing process, but the compelling force is the raw emotion that one pours into the pen and instrument. However, to be successful you must continually hone your skills and learn techniques and structures so that when a great idea comes to you, your technical ability supports your creativity. Learn what touches you deeply and write about it: write, write, and rewrite.