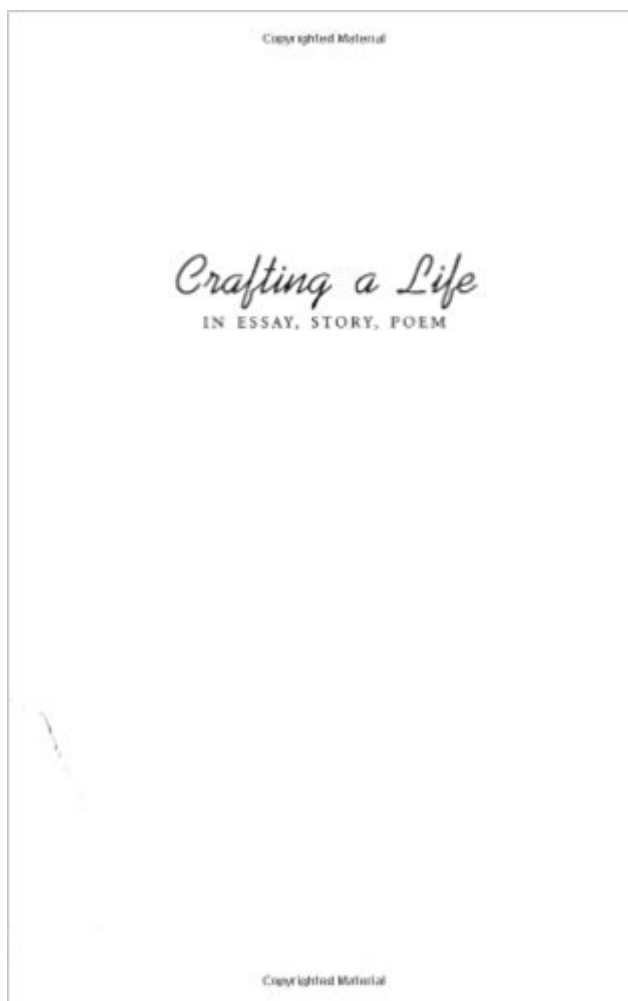


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# Crafting A Life In Essay, Story, Poem



## Synopsis

In *Crafting a Life in Essay, Story, Poem*, Donald Murray demonstrates the craft that has been his discipline and joy for more than half a century. He describes how the writing act has allowed him to live his life twice--once in experience and once again as the evolving draft illuminates the texture and meaning of that experience. Murray takes the reader into his private writer's workshop and not only reveals the basic techniques of writing essays, stories, and poems, but also discusses the attitudes--emotional and mental--that determine the effectiveness of his craft. Beginning and experienced writers will work beside this Pulitzer Prize winning craftsman, catching ideas from life, developing them in language, shaping them into publishable forms. In the first section of the book, Murray talks about attitudes and skills that encourage and initiate writing. Then he deals with specific techniques of writing the personal essay, fiction, and poetry. In the final section, he explains the skills of revision and editing as well as ways to develop a writing community and submit work for publication. *Crafting a Life in Essay, Story, Poem* is both a celebration of the writing process and a practical manual on how to explore the world with the written line. It is a book that every teacher and every student of writing should own.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Murray is the master of teaching writing....[His book] is a treasure trove of potential minilessons for students of all ages.” —Instructor

For nearly 60 years Donald Murray was a tireless explorer, chronicler, and advocate of writers, writing, and the teaching of writing. "We are coaches, encouragers, developers, creators of environments in which our students can experience the writing process for themselves," he wrote in 1972. Through the years and over numerous books, academic articles, newspaper columns, classroom handouts, writing conferences, and warm collegial conversations, thousands of students, writers, and teachers benefited from Don's work. Millions more continue to benefit by the wide circle of his influence over the fields of writing, writing instruction, journalism. Some of Don's most important insights about writing and teaching writing are collected in the Heinemann's *The Essential Don Murray* (edited by Thomas Newkirk and Lisa Miller). A Pulitzer-prize winning journalist, Don was a columnist for *The Boston Globe* and Professor of English at the University of New Hampshire. He was also a writing coach for several national newspapers, wrote poetry for many journals, including *Poetry*, and authored several books on the craft of writing and teaching writing, including *Learning by Teaching*, *Expecting the Unexpected*, *Shoptalk*, and *Crafting a Life in Essay, Story, Poem, and Writing to Deadline*. Read article on [seacoastonline.com](http://seacoastonline.com) featuring Don Murray Â»

Many of the best books on developing writing as an extension of one's aesthetic nature begins with seeing literacy through an organic, personalized viewpoint. Frank Smith and Ralph Fletcher model this type of seeing better than anyone I know. Donald Murray (along with Regie Routman) trail slightly behind them. This book (in six chapters) allows Murray the stage to express his definition of writing...in writing. Chapter Four ranks as my favorite chapter because he virtually gives a high school history lesson on the theory of narrative by explain many terms familiar to the student in a vernacular that he can actually understand! I'm an English major at my very genesis,...and I learned tremendous amounts about these definitions. I disliked very little of this book, but it does speak to an individual who actually knows the value of writing. For the person who rarely writes for entertainment, it may baffle and confuse due to its personification of the process. This does not rank as a criticism; I'm simply pinpointing the audience for this book. Please try it out.

On time and as described.

As a middle school English teacher I find this to be an excellent resource to guide student in the writing process.

I devoured this text over last weekend, although I could have easily read it in just a day. The reason

I didn't? I wanted to savour every morsel of wisdom in it. Don Murray has done an excellent job of addressing some of the common concerns of aspiring writers and teachers of writers everywhere. We can all be writers, but we do not all chose to write. Why? And why not start now? Murray reveals the fears we've held about writing (he goes through all the "writer's excuses" and dispels them one by one) and he helps us focus in on what really helps writers with tidbits from his own experiences as a writer and from a plethora of "published" writers' reflections. He has one chapter on each of the three major forms of writing: essay, story and poem. Each of these felt loaded with valuable tips, examples, anecdotes and his overwhelming encouragement for those of us who still wish to write. As a teacher, I loved how he peeled open his skull and let us peek in to see what goes on in his mind when he writes -- or revises -- or edits -- or just plays with a text, rehearsing it on his mind or on his computer. As a writer, I found myself itching to get back to my computer, back to some of the writing I had neglected. His writing is straightforward but never boring. This is both a textbook and an inspiration tale. I plan on using it in the classes I teach, and as a kick-start for my own writing when it gets mired in the daily grind. Reading about writing just doesn't get better than this!

After reading Murray's book, even the most skeptical reader will be tempted to take up the craft of writing - at least as a hobby! At the same time, Murray teaches important attitudes, skills, and techniques involved in writing a variety of genres and in getting published, so the book also appeals to those interested in writing professionally. Murray's appeal to such a diverse audience begins with his development of an intimate relationship with the reader in the introduction entitled "Why I Write." The reader can easily imagine having a cup of coffee with Murray while he shares the story of his birth as a writer and what motivates him to continue his writing life. But it's not just about him. With charming candor, Murray invites readers to explore the possibilities of a writing life for themselves. While encouraging us to overcome our fear of writing and to develop a writing discipline, Murray comes across as a combination fairy Godmother and Olympic training coach. His maternal tone urges us to give ourselves "permission to write" and provides comforting advice. Yet, like a coach, he also expects us to challenge ourselves, set goals, and stop making excuses for not writing. The first few chapters of the book also focus on "cultivating a writing habit" and provide tips on self-motivation, attitude, subject matter, elements of voice and discovery through keeping an open mind. Once he has his readers convinced of the personal joys and benefits of the craft and confident in their own potential as writers, Murray shifts the focus to teaching techniques for the specific genres of essay, fiction, and poetry. These chapters may easily be used as springboards for writing exercises that are non-intimidating and likely to produce exciting results. In addition, Murray

generously shares samples of his own early drafts with crossed-out lines, notes in the margins and detailed discussions of why he made the changes he made. Anyone who thinks that professional writers simply sit down, receive inspiration and then spontaneously produce masterpieces will learn a lesson from Murray about the energy and commitment involved in the craft of writing. Every step of the way, Murray displays rigorous honesty about himself as a writer, about the joys and struggles of the writer's life and about what it takes to please a reading audience. The book ends with a discussion of the revision process and the usefulness of sharing our writing with a community of others who take the craft seriously. These companions can help us stay motivated, provide feedback about what works, catch mistakes and provide inspiration. If you are interested in a writing career, Murray's last chapters will also help you understand the relationship between writers and editors, how to plan a book and how to prepare a manuscript for publication. However, you need not be a serious writer to enjoy this experience with Murray. He probably will convince you that you need to write at least for yourself, but even if you remain opposed to the idea, you are bound to feel a deeper understanding and appreciation of the writing process.

Crafting A Life by Donald M. Murray was a quick, easy read that was extremely organized. Although I believe there is more to writing, Donald examines poetry, story, and poem with great detail. He takes the reader through his own process and allows the writer in each of us to be cultivated. The first two chapters in this book seemed redundant in that the same information seemed to be repeated over and over but the chapters on the three areas of writing that Murray focuses on are clearly organized and informative. Murray allows his personal voice to shine through, which gives the reader a sense that he is right there reading/working along with you. If you are looking for a "How-To" guide, this is not the place to look. This book will, however, help to guide the writer that grows inside each of us.

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