

Stephen king and langston hughes – perspectives on good writing

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In *How to Be a Bad Writer (in Ten Easy Lessons)*, by Langston Hughes, and *Everything You Need to Know About Writing Successfully – in Ten Minutes*, by Stephen King, the reader is advised on a variety of writing topics. Hughes, a product of segregation and racism, uses biting humor and sarcasm to rail against bad writing, whereas King, a former teacher and a product of the counterculture movement, uses folksy charm to instruct us. King cleverly prefaces his advice with a self-effacing story about learning to write in his sophomore year of High School.

In essence, he says that if he could do it, then so can we, if we listen. King values brevity (remove every extraneous word) and warns us not to get on a soapbox and preach. King also has great respect for the process, from drafting to submission etiquette, and belittles those of us who do not know the markets. In conclusion, he states, “ And if you listened, you can write everything and anything you want. ” It sounds seductively simple, and that is King’s greatest success. He makes you believe.

Hughes takes the gloves off in *How to Be a Bad Writer (in Ten Easy Lessons)*. He scolds us with ten critical statements and leaves us to do the reverse engineering. Hughes places a premium on honesty, devoting half of his essay to that message. One example is, “ Never write about anything you know, your home town, or your home folks, or yourself. ” Hughes attacks dishonesty, verbosity, and affectation with, “ Have nothing to say, but use a great many words, particularly high-sounding words, to say it. When you add Hughes’ instruction to use stereotypes of older stereotypes, his anger is evident. Sadly, Hughes' race-related advice, if not some of his terminology,

remains relevant. There is no universally correct way to be a successful writer and I find it comforting that neither author refers to his advice as rules or laws. King and Hughes have given us valuable reference tools to assist in developing our own techniques. It is up to us to choose how we will apply their advice.