

Class Extra: DO's and DON'Ts for Writers
With Lessons on Etiquette Included

1. Do keep writing and trying. Don't take anyone's word for it that you *can't* write. A very good friend of mine (who went on to sell five books and win a RITA) was told early on in her writing career (by a very good writing teacher who almost never discouraged anyone) that she would never make it as a writer. If someone *should* tell you something like that, use it in a positive way. Tell yourself that you'll show *her*. Don't strike back at the person, though. Show her through *doing*, not through an angry retort.
2. Don't quit your day job if your income is needed toward your family's expenses. If you do quit, make sure you have at least six months of living expenses in savings and, at minimum, a two-book contract from your publisher.
3. Do stay active and involved in RWA and other writers' organizations. The support system is invaluable. There's nothing better than knowing you aren't alone and having someone with whom to share the heartaches and triumphs.
4. Don't ask other writers how much money they're making or what kind of advance they got. If they volunteer the information, great. If not, it's none of your business. If someone asks *you* one of these questions, the best answer is one I've heard Susan Wiggs use many times: "Not nearly enough," she always says with a grin.
5. Do constantly strive to learn and better your craft. Take courses, read books, study the authors you love (or would love to be like). Keep a writing notebook by your side at all times. Jot down your ideas and thoughts. Copy phrases and words that appeal to you (not to plagiarize, but to study and emulate and be inspired by).
6. Don't compare yourself to other writers and their careers. We are all unique. Comparisons only feed jealousy and jealousy is a negative emotion. It's okay to be a bit envious as long as you don't resent the other person's success. Use positive envy to push you to work harder. (I'm going to get there, too!)
7. Don't gossip about other writers and don't EVER criticize another writer's work. And if you *do* criticize someone else's work – say to use as an example when giving a talk – don't ever mention that author's name and try to disguise the example so people don't guess who it is. This is especially important if an editor or agent is in hearing distance. Always remember the Golden Rule: Treat others the way you would like to be

treated.

8. Do write every single day, even if it's only a few lines or paragraphs. The moment you stop writing, the harder it is to begin again.
9. Do enter contests, if only for that needed push to finish a project.
10. Don't put a contest judge or a published author from your chapter on the spot by asking her/him to read your entire manuscript or give you a blurb or quote. I know it's tempting sometimes, but it's not kosher. If they volunteer, that's one thing. Asking out of the blue is quite another. And if you *do* ask for a favor like that, and they refuse, don't EVER badmouth them to others because of it. Trust me, that will come home to haunt you. You do not want a reputation as a troublemaker, not in the publishing business, which is a very small world, indeed.
11. Do set goals. And write them down. The act of writing down a goal makes it more concrete and it is more likely to be accomplished.
12. Don't beat yourself up if you don't accomplish all your goals. Perhaps they weren't realistic. Re-evaluate and set new goals.
13. When you achieve a measure of success, don't gloat. Yes, it's wonderful to share, but make sure you share with a sense of humbleness and gratitude. Remember to thank those who have helped you along the way. And promise yourself you will pass along the favor whenever you can.
14. Don't be a whiner and a complainer. Don't blame everyone else when you receive a rejection letter or don't make the finals of the Golden Heart or RITA contests. Don't say "the judges are stupid" and "that editor wouldn't know a good book if she fell over it." Learn from rejection. Use it in a positive way. Study the books that DO sell and the manuscripts and books that DO make the finals of the national contests. What makes them special? What made those editors and judges sit up and take notice?
15. Don't monopolize conversations with editors, especially when there's a group of writers involved. Yes, you want to use the opportunity to make the editor interested in you, but again, remember that Golden Rule. You wouldn't like it if someone else in the group never gave you a chance to speak, so don't do it yourself.
16. Don't let writing take over your life. Someone who only thinks about writing, who talks about nothing else, who gives up all other hobbies and interests, who has no other friends but writers, and (most important!)

who neglects her health, her family, her non-writing friends, and her spiritual life, is boring. Not only that, she stands to lose many of those things, all of which contribute to making her a balanced, healthy, happy person.

17. Do give yourself permission to take a breather. This is not a contradiction of “write every day.” Sometimes we simply need a break. If you are going on a vacation that you and your spouse or significant other have been looking forward to for a long time, give yourself permission not to take along your laptop.
18. Don’t give too much weight to ratings from fan magazines and websites and/or reviews. Always remember, a reviewer, no matter how knowledgeable, is *just one person* and his/her comments about your book are *his/her opinion*. Celebrate the good stuff and ignore the bad stuff. You’ll be a happier, more productive writer and person if you do.
19. Never put anything in writing – either in an e-mail or on a chat loop or list serve – that you wouldn’t want spread through the entire writing community. NEVER. I learned this the hard way. I posted something to people I felt were trustworthy confidants and the following week I had it come back to me from my editor. And conversely, do not EVER repeat anything another writer has posted unless she gives you express permission. That includes not forwarding anything, even if it concerns an element of craft or an announcement, without asking for permission first.
20. Do belong to a critique group or work with a critique partner *if you feel comfortable doing so*. Don’t do it simply because others do. And if you do work with critique partners, don’t take everything they say as gospel. Listen, consider, learn, but always remember, this is *your* work, not theirs. Remain true to your vision.
21. Don’t monopolize the published authors in your writing organizations when you attend meetings or conferences. I’ll never forget one RWA chapter meeting where I was really looking forward to talking to a friend I hadn’t seen in six months and one of the newer members of the chapter approached us – someone we hardly knew – just as the friend and I began to visit, and she simply wouldn’t go away. She kept interrupting us and putting her two cents into our conversation and seemed to have no idea she was being rude. Sure, talk to them, but try to be sensitive to the fact they might like a bit of time to themselves occasionally.
22. Along those same lines, don’t act as if the published authors in your chapter or in RWA or any other writing group you might belong to owe you something. They don’t. If they help you, it should be because they

want to, and you should be grateful. I will never forget the authors who helped me when I first started out. They were absolutely wonderful and I talk them up every chance I get.

23. When another author *does* help you – either by offering to read a manuscript or putting in a good word for you to an editor – do pay her back by writing her a nice thank-you note and/or going onto Amazon or Barnes & Noble online and writing a great review of a recent book of hers. You could also write her a fan letter. Nothing means more to an author than to get a fan letter from another writer.
24. Do write fan letters to authors of books you love, whether you know them or not. Said it before, will say it again: nothing means more to an author than to get a fan letter from another writer.
25. Do write online reviews whenever you can. The authors for whom you do this will always remember you, and maybe, when you're published, they'll return the favor. Or if you're already published, they'll return the favor now. It's the principle of what goes around, comes around.
26. Do give thanks for your blessings, and in particular, this marvelous gift you've been given – not just the talent that makes you a writer, but the ability to find joy in writing. Whenever we count our blessings in this way, it serves to remind us of what is really important in life.

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