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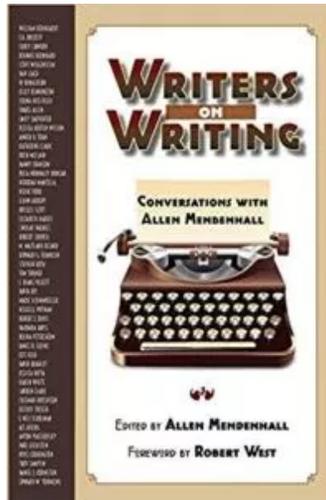
“WRITERS ON WRITING”: A TREASURE TROVE OF ADVICE

By [Emily Kleinhenz](#) | June 6th, 2019 | Categories: [Books](#), [Culture](#), [Writing](#)

Approach this charming collection of writers' conversations with an expectation to encounter some thought or piece of advice that you didn't know you needed or wanted, and you will find yourself delighted with a fresh dose of enthusiasm for thoughtful, meaningful writing and story-telling.

Writers on Writing: Conversations with Allen Mendenhall, edited by Allen Mendenhall (230 pages, Red Dirt Press, 2019)

Writers on Writing: Conversations with Allen Mendenhall features more than 40 interviews with thoughtful writers, many of them novelists, some memoirists, poets, and biographers. The editor and interviewer Allen Mendenhall invites a wide selection of writers to engage in a contemplative exploration of a writer's life: from the necessary perseverance during the writing process to the quirky development of characters, from the writer's relation to community to his pull to imagination. This book offers serious, reflective voices and



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casual, warm tones as it showcases the various idiosyncratic personalities of the interviewees, as well as a wide range of topics related to writing and the authors' published works.

As Robert West informs in the Foreword, the word "interview" denotes two people facing each other, learning from each other by observing, by taking each other in—"more of a two-way affair," he asserts (9). Mr. Mendenhall invites the readers to join this conversation, to "take in" these writers. There is much to be gleaned in the presence of thoughtful company. What better way to ponder and appreciate writing than in the company of experienced as well as new writers themselves?

Listen and chime in as Dan Leach and Jessica Hooten Wilson offer their experiences with juggling teaching and writing. Emily Carpenter and DJ Donaldson describe their creative process and the development of their stories, unique to them but nevertheless relatable to some.

Engage in the consideration of the role of religion as Glenn Arbery, a senior contributor to this journal, contemplates the relationship of a writer to religion: "Simply as a *writer*, I can say that religion is now and has always been one of the central dimensions of human life; it pervades Homer and Virgil, for example.... To treat religious realities in fiction—including concerns about salvation—seems to me completely natural for a novelist; it's mimetically accurate; it's both in keeping with the traditions out of which we come and a way of thinking about the prospects, personal and cultural, that lie before us" (103). Religion—as well as culture, personal experiences, and local community—saturates the mind of the writer, and these ideas naturally flow through the writer's fingers onto the keyboard.

Russell Scott, a novelist and physician, echoes this, referring to his medical career: "Everything you do affects your writing" (105). Yes, including engaging with other writers from the other side of the page. So take Barbara Davis's advice and "surround yourself with people who 'get it,' who get what you do, and why you do it" (179). These writers possess a plethora of experiences and bits of advice to share. And if anything, *Writers on Writing* is a starting place for readers in search of

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a good book by an author who isn't dead: novels of nearly every genre, ranging from Southern gothic thrillers to short fiction.

If you sit down and read this book with a certain expectation for that "magic" writer's tip that just solves everything, for guidelines on the creative process or overcoming writer's block, or for a tutorial on outlining novels, more than likely you will be unsatisfied. *Writers on Writing* is not a grocery store with marked aisles containing every brand of tomato paste one could desire; it is an antique shop in which all the faded figurines, paintings, old-fashioned glass bottles, dusty sets of silver cutlery are in some sense valuable, a past or future heirloom perhaps, but are not valuable to everyone at every time, and a browsing visitor never knows what treasure he may discover. Pan through the vast waters of these interviews, and you will acquire gold.

So, writers, approach this charming collection of writers' conversations with an expectation to encounter some thought or piece of advice that you didn't know you needed or wanted, and you will find yourself delighted with a fresh dose of enthusiasm for thoughtful, meaningful writing and story-telling.

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