

ONE TRUE SENTENCE: HEMINGWAY'S ADVICE FOR  
LAWYERS IN A MOVEABLE FEAST

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No one emptied the Café des Amateurs though, and its yellowed poster stating the terms and penalties of the law against public drunkenness was as flyblown and disregarded as its clients were constant and ill-smelling.<sup>1</sup>

Reading Hemingway helps you be a better lawyer. Over a sumptuous buffet of tournedos with sauce Béarnaise, plump and sweet-fleshed goujon, trout au bleu, the quirks of literary legends, and financial lessons, *A Moveable Feast* slathers fine advice for the legal practice in general and legal writing in particular.<sup>2</sup>

*A Moveable Feast*—a posthumously published masterpiece, a pseudo-memoir—details Hemingway's intimacies with other luminaries living in Paris in the 1920s:

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\*For Maria, Luke, and the Venerable Bede.

1. ERNEST HEMINGWAY, *A MOVEABLE FEAST* 4 (Mary Hemingway, ed., 1964). I thank Dr. Linda Patterson Miller, Dr. Nancy W. Sindelar, Dr. Stephanie A. Smith, and Director Michael R. Malone for their insights about Hemingway's works.

2. *A Moveable Feast* is full of food and drink. But the title more deeply references shifting holy days, like Easter. Hemingway wrote a friend in 1950: "If you are lucky enough to have lived in Paris as a young man, then wherever you go for the rest of your life, it stays with you, for Paris is a moveable feast." HEMINGWAY, *supra* note 1, at Title Page.

- Gertrude Stein loved Hemingway and insisted he have the run of her place.<sup>3</sup> She was full of advice for him.<sup>4</sup>
- Ezra Pound was the most generous writer Hemingway ever knew, a saint, irascible like many saints.<sup>5</sup> Pound and Hemingway raised money to liberate T.S. Eliot from work so he could write.<sup>6</sup>
- James Joyce ate at Michaud's, "peering at the menu through his thick glasses."<sup>7</sup> Ernest Walsh promised the same award to Joyce and Hemingway.<sup>8</sup> But Stein didn't like Joyce at all.<sup>9</sup>
- F. Scott Fitzgerald criticized his own older works so freely that Hemingway knew Scott's new work must be good.<sup>10</sup> Scott wanted Ernest to read this new book—*The Great Gatsby*—once Scott could get his only copy back from a loan.<sup>11</sup>
- Pablo Picasso advised Hemingway how to *not* visit people. Picasso always promised rich people he would come to events because it made them happy and then something would always happen and he would be unable to appear.<sup>12</sup>
- Sylvia Beach loved jokes and gossip.<sup>13</sup> No one Hemingway ever knew was nicer to him.<sup>14</sup> She loaned him books from Shakespeare and

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3. *Id.* at 117.

4. *Id.* at *passim*.

5. *Id.* at 108, 110.

6. *Id.* at 110–13.

7. *Id.* at 56.

8. *Id.* at 128–29.

9. *Id.* at 28.

10. *Id.* at 153–54.

11. *Id.* at 154.

12. *Id.* at 118.

13. *Id.* at 35.

14. *Id.*

Company before she had any reason to trust him.<sup>15</sup>

Hemingway seemed to need book loans in those days. He tried to be frugal.<sup>16</sup> He sprinkles into *A Moveable Feast* wild advice on money management:

- How to add the cost of a bundle of small twigs plus three short packets of split pine plus the bundle of hard wood you must buy to make a fire to warm your room in Paris in bad weather. But your chimney might not draw and it might fill your room with smoke and waste your fuel and your money and so you should walk on in the rain to a café instead.<sup>17</sup>
- How to save money so you can bet on races.<sup>18</sup> How to spend your winnings.<sup>19</sup> How to move on after your long-shot pick with a huge lead falls just before the finish line.<sup>20</sup>
- How to pay for one trip out of funds you were saving for another trip.<sup>21</sup>

And—the moment you’ve been waiting for—Hemingway pours advice for lawyers like fine but inexpensive wine. Perhaps you will see yourself in these excerpts. Perhaps you will find some of the advice useful.

## 1. SELECTION AND DISCRETION

For reasons sufficient to the writer, many places, people, observations and impressions have been left out of this book. Some were secrets and some were known by everyone and everyone has written about them and will doubtless write more.<sup>22</sup>

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15. *Id.*

16. *See, e.g., id.* at 16 (“But even if I never bought any more clothing ever,” I said, “I wouldn’t have enough money to buy the Picassos that I want.”).

17. *Id.* at 4–5.

18. *Id.* at 50–53.

19. *Id.* at 53.

20. *Id.* at 50.

21. *Id.* at 157, 161.

22. *Id.* at Preface.



Select judiciously. Say important things. And sometimes say why they are important. Don't bury good arguments under layers of marginal ones.

## 2. FLOW

The story was writing itself and I was having a hard time keeping up with it.<sup>23</sup>



When you are flowing, keep going. Maintain the flow and finish while you have momentum. If you stop, you waste time figuring out where you were and where you were going.

## 3. REWRITE

[A]nd I was sure this was a very good story although I would not know truly how good until I read it over the next day.<sup>24</sup>



During the summer we were in Spain and I started the first draft of a novel and finished it back in Paris in September.<sup>25</sup>



That fall of 1925 he was upset because I would not show him the manuscript of the first draft of *The Sun Also Rises*. I explained to him that it would

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23. *Id.* at 6.

24. *Id.*

25. *Id.* at 183.

mean nothing until I had gone over it and rewritten it and that I did not want to discuss it or show it to anyone first.<sup>26</sup>



Schrums was a good place to work. I know because I did the most difficult job of rewriting I have ever done there in the winter of 1925 and 1926, when I had to take the first draft of *The Sun Also Rises* which I had written in one sprint of six weeks, and make it into a novel.<sup>27</sup>



When you finish the first writing and a round of editing, set your work aside and return to it refreshed. Embrace the process of rewriting, editing, and proofreading. There is no great writing. Only great rewriting. In Hemingway's final interview, he extolled rewriting:

Interviewer: Do you do any rewriting as you read up to the place you left off the day before? Or does that come later, when the whole is finished?

Ernest Hemingway: I always rewrite each day up to the point where I stopped. When it is all finished, naturally you go over it. You get another chance to correct and rewrite when someone else types it, and you see it clean in type. The last chance is in the proofs. You're grateful for these different chances.

I: How much rewriting do you do?

EH: It depends. I rewrote the ending to *Farewell to Arms*, the last page of it, thirty-nine times before I was satisfied.

I: Was there some technical problem there? What was it that had stumped you?

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26. *Id.* at 184.

27. *Id.* at 202.

EH: Getting the words right.<sup>28</sup>

Hemingway wrote and rewrote and rewrote. You really think your first draft or two are good enough? Are you better than Ernest Hemingway?

#### 4. EDIT

Scott was very articulate and told a story well. He did not have to spell the words nor attempt to punctuate and you did not have the feeling of reading an illiterate that his letters gave you before they had been corrected.<sup>29</sup>



You might be articulate. You might tell stories as well as F. Scott Fitzgerald. But if you misspell words and botch punctuation, you will seem illiterate. Proofread. Edit. Proofread again.

#### 5. MORE REWRITING

But she disliked the drudgery of revision and the obligation to make her writing intelligible, although she needed to have publication and official acceptance, especially for the unbelievably long book called *The Making of Americans*.<sup>30</sup>



Embrace the process of revising so your work reaches maximum intelligibility and persuasiveness. If rewriting were easy, your client wouldn't pay you much

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28. George Plimpton, *Ernest Hemingway, The Art of Fiction No. 21*, THE PARIS REVIEW (Spring 1958), <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/4825/the-art-of-fiction-no-21-ernest-hemingway>.

29. HEMINGWAY, *supra* note 1, at 172–73.

30. *Id.* at 17.

to do it. If rewriting were easy, how would we choose the winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature?

## 6. REMOTE WORK

I had written journalism for Toronto and the checks for that were due. I could write that anywhere under any circumstances and we had money to make the trip.<sup>31</sup>



Don't feel guilty about working remotely so long as your work is good.

## 7. PAINT IN COLOR

I brought mandarines and roasted chestnuts to the room in paper packets and peeled and ate the small tangerine-like oranges and threw their skins and spat their seeds in the fire when I ate them and roasted chestnuts when I was hungry.<sup>32</sup>



They always caught some fish, and often they made excellent catches of the dace-like fish that were called *goujon*. They were delicious fried whole and I could eat a plateful. They were plump and sweet-fleshed with a finer flavor than fresh sardines even, and were not at all oily, and we ate them bones and all.<sup>33</sup>

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31. *Id.* at 7.

32. *Id.* at 11.

33. *Id.* at 43.



It was early and we sat on my raincoat on the fresh cropped grass bank and had our lunch and drank from the wine bottle and looked at the old grandstand, the brown wooden betting booths, the green of the track, the darker green of the hurdles, and the brown shine of the water jumps and the whitewashed stone walls and white posts and rails, the paddock under the new leafed trees and the first horses being walked to the paddock.<sup>34</sup>



Give concrete examples. Use visceral language.

## 8. GOOD HABITS

The blue-backed notebooks, the two pencils and the pencil sharpener (a pocket knife was too wasteful), the marble-topped tables, the smell of early morning, sweeping out and mopping, and luck were all you needed.<sup>35</sup>



There was going to be everything that a man needed to write except to be alone.<sup>36</sup>



I could always go to a café to write and could work all morning over a *café crème* while the waiters cleaned and swept out the café and it gradually grew warmer.<sup>37</sup>

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34. *Id.* at 51–52.

35. *Id.* at 91.

36. *Id.* at 186.

37. *Id.* at 197.



Embrace good writing habits and routines. Get in the zone to write. But don't wait for the zone to come to you. Go to it. Make it happen.

## 9. REJOICE

It was wonderful to walk down the long flights of stairs knowing that I'd had good luck working.<sup>38</sup>



Going down the stairs when I had worked well, and that needed luck as well as discipline, was a wonderful feeling and I was free then to walk anywhere in Paris.<sup>39</sup>



Some days it went so well that you could make the country so that you could walk into it through the timber to come out into the clearing and work up onto the high ground and see the hills beyond the arm of the lake.<sup>40</sup>



Take pride in your work. Rejoice. Have fun.

## 10. FINISH, AND PLAN

I always worked until I had something done and I always stopped when I knew what was going to

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38. *Id.* at 12.

39. *Id.* at 13.

40. *Id.* at 91.

happen next. That way I could be sure of going on the next day.<sup>41</sup>



Finish when you can. If you're on a roll, get it done before you leave if practicable. But if you can't finish, make a plan for tomorrow. Make a note about where you left off and about your vision for the next steps.

### 11. "PICK UP HERE"

I had learned already never to empty the well of my writing, but always to stop when there was still something there in the deep part of the well, and let it refill at night from the springs that fed it.<sup>42</sup>



If you can't finish a piece before retiring for the day, at least put yourself in a good position to know where to pick up the next day. Type "PICK UP HERE."

### 12. WRITER'S BLOCK

But sometimes when I was starting a new story and I could not get it going, I would sit in front of the fire and squeeze the peel of the little oranges into the edge of the flame and watch the sputter of blue that they made. I would stand and look out over the roofs of Paris and think, "Do not worry. You have always written before and you will write now."<sup>43</sup>

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41. *Id.* at 12.

42. *Id.* at 26.

43. *Id.* at 12.



If he could write a book as fine as *The Great Gatsby*  
I was sure that he could write an even better one.<sup>44</sup>



If you're stuck, have confidence. You have written  
good things before. You will again.

### 13. ONE TRUE SENTENCE

"All you have to do is write one true sentence. Write  
the truest sentence that you know." So finally I  
would write one true sentence, and then go on from  
there. It was easy then because there was always  
one true sentence that I knew or had seen or had  
heard someone say.<sup>45</sup>



Your first sentence is critical. Make it true. Make  
your audience want to read more.

### 14. PLAIN LANGUAGE

If I started to write elaborately, or like someone  
introducing or presenting something, I found that I  
could cut that scrollwork or ornament out and throw  
it away and start with the first true simple  
declarative sentence I had written.<sup>46</sup>



I liked some of his short stories very much. They  
were simply written and sometimes beautifully

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44. *Id.* at 176.

45. *Id.* at 12.

46. *Id.*

written and he knew the people he was writing about and cared deeply for them.<sup>47</sup>



The big cafés were cheap then too, and all had good beer and the apéritifs cost reasonable prices that were clearly marked on the saucers that were served with them.<sup>48</sup>



“Please try to make it clear.”<sup>49</sup>



Avoid long wind-ups and legalese and ornamentation. Use plain language. Write clear sentences. Write simply. And beautifully. And sometimes passionately.

Be honest and clear.

## 15. BALANCE

It was in that room too that I learned not to think about anything that I was writing from the time I stopped writing until I started again the next day. That way my subconscious would be working on it and at the same time I would be listening to other people and noticing everything, I hoped; learning, I hoped; and I would read so that I would not think about my work and make myself impotent to do it.<sup>50</sup>

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47. *Id.* at 27–28.

48. *Id.* at 100.

49. *Id.* at 168.

50. *Id.* at 13.



It was necessary to get exercise, to be tired in the body, and it was very good to make love with whom you loved.<sup>51</sup>



“Don’t you work so hard now that you don’t eat properly.”<sup>52</sup>



Give yourself distance and peace and space and balance. Maintain your health.

## 16. CRITICISM

She told me that I was not a good enough writer to be published there or in *The Saturday Evening Post* but that I might be some new sort of writer in my own way but the first thing to remember was not to write stories that were *inaccrochable*. I did not argue about this nor try to explain again what I was trying to do about conversation. That was my own business and it was much more interesting to listen.<sup>53</sup>



So after we had left Lausanne and gone down to Italy I showed the racing story to O’Brien, a gentle, shy man, pale, with pale blue eyes, and straight lanky hair he cut himself, who lived then as a boarder in a monastery up above Rapallo.<sup>54</sup>

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51. *Id.* at 25.

52. *Id.* at 70.

53. *Id.* at 15.

54. *Id.* at 74.



He was a critic already so I asked him if he would have a drink and he accepted.

“Hem,” he said, and I knew he was a critic now since, in conversation, they put your name at the beginning of a sentence rather than at the end, “I have to tell you I find your work just a little too stark.”

“Too bad,” I said.

“Hem it’s too stripped, too lean.”

“Bad luck.”

“Hem too stark, too stripped, too lean, too sinewy.”

I felt the rabbit’s foot in my pocket guiltily. “I’ll try to fatten it up a little.”

“Mind, I don’t want it obese.”

“Hal,” I said, practicing speaking like a critic, “I’ll avoid that as long as I can.”<sup>55</sup>



Accept criticism. Invite it. Befriend some critics. But keep your writing stark and lean and clean even if they are bad critics and say otherwise.

## 17. REPUTATION

She had such a personality that when she wished to win anyone over to her side she would not be resisted, and critics who met her and saw her pictures took on trust writing of hers that they could not understand because of their enthusiasm for her as a person, and because of their confidence in her judgment.<sup>56</sup>

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55. *Id.* at 95–96.

56. *Id.* at 17.



“I don’t know, Tatie. They say so and they ought to know.”<sup>57</sup>



Reputation matters. Earn trust. You want the judge to trust you to clear the thicket of a complex case and lead the judge down the true path. You want the other side in the deal to trust you.

## 18. STYLE

She had also discovered many truths about rhythms and the uses of words in repetition that were valid and valuable and she talked well about them.<sup>58</sup>



Pay attention to style. Your writing should sound good.

## 19. ECONOMY

This book began magnificently, went on very well for a long way with great stretches of great brilliance and then went on endlessly in repetitions that a more conscientious and less lazy writer would have put in the waste basket.<sup>59</sup>



Avoid needless repetition. Be conscientious of the judge and law clerks.

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57. *Id.* at 53.

58. *Id.* at 17.

59. *Id.* at 17–18.

## 20. WAR STORIES

You could always mention a general, though, that the general you were talking to had beaten. The general you were talking to would praise the beaten general greatly and go happily into detail on how he had beaten him.<sup>60</sup>



Cherish your war stories. Some will come earlier in your career than you expect. Keep track of them. When you close a case or a deal or an estate, take the time to write a note to yourself about it. What was the problem? Where was the drama and intrigue? How did the knot unravel?

## 21. GENEROSITY

There was no reason for her to trust me. She did not know me and the address I had given her, 74 rue Cardinal Lemoine, could not have been a poorer one. But she was delightful and charming and welcoming and behind her, as high as the wall and stretching out into the back room which gave onto the inner court of the building, were shelves and shelves of the wealth of the library.<sup>61</sup>



Ezra was the most generous writer I have ever known and the most disinterested. He helped poets, painters, sculptors and prose writers that he believed in and he would help anyone whether he believed in them or not if they were in trouble. He worried about everyone and in the time when I first knew him he was most worried about T. S. Eliot who, Ezra told me, had to work in a bank in London and

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60. *Id.* at 28.

61. *Id.* at 35–36.

so had insufficient time and bad hours to function as a poet.<sup>62</sup>



Help others. Mentor. Be a lawyer's lawyer.

## 22. APPEARANCES

"How do you tell a valuable French book?"

"First there are the pictures. Then it is a question of the quality of the pictures. Then it is the binding. If a book is good, the owner will have bound it properly."<sup>63</sup>



It was where Joyce ate with his family then, he and his wife against the wall, Joyce peering at the menu through his thick glasses holding the menu up in one hand . . .<sup>64</sup>



A day or two after the trip Scott brought his book over. It had a garish dust jacket and I remember being embarrassed by the violence, bad taste and slippery look of it. It looked the book jacket for a book of bad science fiction. Scott told me not to be put off by it, that it had to do with a billboard along a highway in Long Island that was important in the story. He said he had liked the jacket and now he didn't like it. I took it off to read the book.<sup>65</sup>

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62. *Id.* at 110.

63. *Id.* at 42.

64. *Id.* at 56.

65. *Id.* at 176.



Make your writing look good. Use large, clear font. Insert pictures. Pay attention to binding rules.<sup>66</sup>

You have heard it said, “Consider your audience.” But I say also be considerate of your audience’s eyes.<sup>67</sup>

### 23. WHICH AUDIENCE?

When they said, “It’s great, Ernest. Truly it’s great. You cannot know the thing it has,” I wagged my tail in pleasure and plunged into the fiesta concept of life to see if I could not bring some fine attractive stick back, instead of thinking, “If these bastards like it what is wrong with it?” That was what I would think if I had been functioning as a professional although, if I had been functioning as a professional, I would never have read it to them.<sup>68</sup>



Be careful of pleasing the wrong audience. Your client might applaud a digression that will annoy the judge.

### 24. WALK

I would walk along the quais when I had finished work or when I was trying to think something out. It was easier to think if I was walking and doing

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66. Brian C. Potts, *40 Writing Hacks for Appellate Attorneys*, 19 SCRIBES J. LEGAL WRITING 49, 54 (2020) (“Follow binding rules, including local rules. Also follow *binding* rules. Some briefs unravel in my hands. See Fed. R. App. P. 32(a)(3) (‘The brief must be bound in any manner that is secure . . .’).”). What sort of bizarre emoji ends that citation sentence? Two sailboats racing eastward, the first and fastest with double motion lines.

67. HEMINGWAY, *supra* note 1, at 50.

68. *Id.* at 209.

something or seeing people doing something that they understood.<sup>69</sup>



Take breaks and good walks to sort through ideas and discover new ones. Many great writers swear by this.

## 25. BACK-UP

But I justified it to myself because I wrote it, even though in the end, when everything I had written was lost, there was only one racing story that survived, because it was out in the mails.<sup>70</sup>



It was one of two stories I had left when everything I had written was stolen in Hadley's suitcase that time at the Gare de Lyon when she was bringing the manuscripts down to me to Lausanne as a surprise, so I could work on them on our holidays in the mountains. She had put in the originals, the typescripts and the carbons, all in manila folders. The only reason I had the one story was that Lincoln Steffens had sent it out to some editor who sent it back. It was in the mail while everything else was stolen. The other story that I had was the one called "Up in Michigan" written before Miss Stein had come to our flat. I had never had it copied because she said it was *inaccrochable*. It had been in a drawer somewhere.<sup>71</sup>



I had never seen anyone hurt by a thing other than death or unbearable suffering except Hadley when

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69. *Id.* at 43.

70. *Id.* at 61.

71. *Id.* at 73–74.

she told me about the things being gone. She had cried and cried and could not tell me. I told her that no matter what the dreadful thing was that had happened nothing could be that bad, and whatever it was, it was all right and not to worry. We would work it out. Then, finally, she told me. I was sure she could not have brought the carbons too and I hired someone to cover for me on my newspaper job. I was making good money then at journalism, and took the train for Paris. It was true all right and I remember what I did in the night after I let myself into the flat and found it was true. That was over now and Chink had taught me never to discuss casualties; so I told O'Brien not to feel so bad.<sup>72</sup>



Save often. Save automatically.

Use a thorough, frequent, and redundant back-up system.

## 26. RISK

In principle I only bet when I had a horse to bet on but I sometimes found horses that nobody believed in except the men who trained and rode them that won race after race with me betting on them.<sup>73</sup>



Make room sometimes for a speculative, long-shot case, in the interests of justice.

A great lawyer in New Mexico once told me this story.<sup>74</sup>

A young man called nearly every attorney in Albuquerque and Santa Fe. He told them that his great-

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<sup>72.</sup> *Id.* at 74.

<sup>73.</sup> *Id.* at 62.

<sup>74.</sup> I simplify, anonymize, and adjust the story here. It was told to me as a true, factual story. I have not independently verified it.

grandfather and a business partner owned a plot of land many years ago.

When the business shut down maybe 80 years ago, the great-grandfather and his partner split the assets. The great-grandfather got the cash. The partner got the land. The two orally agreed that if oil were ever discovered on the land, then the great-grandfather or his heirs would get half the oil profits.

The young man would finish his plea for representation by saying: "Well, I was driving by, and there's all these nodding donkeys on the land gushing black gold!"

And the attorneys on the phone would ask: "How do you know about this agreement?"

"It's part of my family lore."

"Family lore?"

"My great-grandfather told someone in the family, I guess. And eventually my mother heard the story. And she told me."

"Is the agreement in writing?"

"No. It was a handshake."

Then the attorneys on the phone would say something about a verbal agreement being as worthless as the paper it's written on, or about the statute of frauds, and politely decline to take the case.

So the young man kept calling different attorneys.

Finally, one attorney said, "It's worth a shot." And he entered into a contract to represent the young man. This attorney tracked down the current owner of the property and wrote him a letter.

The current owner wrote back a week later: "My family lore tells the same story. We were looking for descendants. Where should I send the check?"

Also do long-shot *pro bono* work sometimes.

## 27. DISTRACTION

Then you would hear someone say, "Hi, Hem. What are you trying to do? Write in a café?"

Your luck had run out and you shut the notebook. This was the worst thing that could happen. If you could keep your temper it would be better but I was not good at keeping mine then and said, "You rotten son of a bitch what are you doing in here off your filthy beat?"

"Don't be insulting just because you want to act like an eccentric."

"Take your dirty camping mouth out of here."

"It's a public café. I've just as much right here as you have."

"Why don't you go up to the Petite Chaumière where you belong?"

"Oh dear. Don't be so tiresome."

Now you could get out and hope it was an accidental visit and that the visitor had only come in by chance and there was not going to be an infestation.<sup>75</sup>



"I'd do anything for you."

"Would you?"

"Of course I would."

"Then keep the hell away from this café. Start with that."<sup>76</sup>



On this evening I was thinking these wholesome but not original thoughts and feeling extraordinarily virtuous because I had worked well and hard on a day when I had wanted to go out to the races very badly.<sup>77</sup>

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75. HEMINGWAY, *supra* note 1, at 91–92.

76. *Id.* at 94.

77. *Id.* at 100.



Avoid distractions when writing.

## 28. FOCUS

I had heard complaining all my life. I found I could go on writing and that it was no worse than other noises, certainly better than Ezra learning to play the bassoon.<sup>78</sup>



“We went to Greece,” I heard him say later. I had not heard him for some time except as noise. I was ahead now and I could leave it and go on tomorrow.<sup>79</sup>



Mr. Lavigne, the proprietor, asked me how my work had gone and I said it had gone very well. He said he had seen me working on the terrace of the Closerie des Lilas early in the morning but he had not spoken to me because I was so occupied.

“You had the air of a man alone in the jungle,” he said.

“I am like a blind pig when I work.”

“But were you not in the jungle, Monsieur?”

“In the bush,” I said.<sup>80</sup>



Or find a way to deal with distractions.

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78. *Id.* at 93.

79. *Id.*

80. *Id.* at 99.

## 29. POWER

I read the menu mimeographed in purple ink and saw that the *plat du jour* was cassoulet. It made me hungry to read the name.<sup>81</sup>



A word like cauterized had a comforting effect on Scott.<sup>82</sup>



Consider the power of your words.

## 30. LEARN

But handicapping beasts that are receiving stimulants, and detecting the symptoms in the paddock and acting on your perceptions, which sometimes bordered on the extrasensory, then backing them with money you cannot afford to lose, is not the way for a young man supporting a wife and child to get ahead in the full-time job of learning to write prose.<sup>83</sup>



“I know it,” I said. “I’ve plenty to learn everywhere.”<sup>84</sup>



Continuously learn to improve your writing. This is your job. And it is demanding.

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81. *Id.*

82. *Id.* at 164.

83. *Id.* at 100.

84. *Id.* at 135.

Stay curious. Always improve.

### 31. STORIES

I told Joyce of my first meeting with him in Ezra's studio with the girls in the long fur coats and it made him happy to hear the story.<sup>85</sup>



"Write the best story that you can and write it as straight as you can."<sup>86</sup>



Tell clear and compelling stories. They make people happy. So they make people listen.

### 32. THE PERFECT WORD

It was a straight answer and Ezra had never given me any other kind verbally, but I felt very bad because here was the man I liked and trusted the most as a critic then, the man who believed in the *mot juste*—the one and only correct word to use—the man who had taught me to distrust adjectives as I would later learn to distrust certain people in certain situations; and I wanted his opinion on a man who almost never used the *mot juste* and yet had made his people come alive at times, as almost no one else did.<sup>87</sup>



Beware of adjectives. Shun adverbs. Strive for clarity.

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85. *Id.* at 129.

86. *Id.* at 183.

87. *Id.* at 134.

*Mot juste*: “the exactly right word or phrasing.”<sup>88</sup>  
This definition is not *mot juste*. And it uses an adverb  
and adjective.

### 33. LEVITY

For a poet he threw a very accurate milk bottle.<sup>89</sup>



The mouth worried you until you knew him and then  
it worried you more.<sup>90</sup>



Consider using humor in your legal writing. But only  
a drop.

### 34. RESPONSIBILITY

He was always trying to work. Each day he would  
try and fail. He laid the failure to Paris, the town  
best organized for a writer to write in that there is  
. . . .<sup>91</sup>



Own your writing problems. Take responsibility for  
them and fix them. Don’t blame others.

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88. *Mot juste*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mot%20juste#:~:text=mot%20juste%20%5Cmoh%2DZHEWST%5C,exactly%20right%20word%20or%20phrasing> (last visited Jan. 23, 2025).

89. Hemingway, *supra* note 1, at 146.

90. *Id.* at 149.

91. *Id.* at 182.

## 35. PRACTICE

Up in that room I decided that I would write one story about each thing that I knew about. I was trying to do this all the time I was writing, and it was good and severe discipline.<sup>92</sup>



Hard work pays.

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So when you're stuck, remember that sometimes Hemingway was stuck, too.

Stand up. Look out your window.

Watch the sun sparkle on New York's steel towers.

Or look at the bridges spanning Lagos.

Or gaze at Mount Fuji rising behind skyscrapers and dream of climbing.

Or look down a Barcelona avenue at La Sagrada Família Basilica and the cranes forever hovering like angels over its spires.

Or open your window on Poydras Street to hear a clarinet sing and to feel the warm, wet blanket of New Orleans, and to smell the jambalaya.

Or scan the Atlantic like Captain Wilkie D. Ferguson, Jr., from the hurricane-resistant crystal ship negotiating the crests of Fourth Street in Miami.<sup>93</sup>

Or lean out your window above Fate and gander down the street at Sticky Fingers Childcare Centre, where you dropped your weans off this morning after getting coffee to go from Grá the Coffee Bar. It is the best

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92. *Id.* at 12.

93. "Even the new federal courthouse triumphantly declares where it's located. . . . There's a subtle, nautical theme in both the architectural and landscaping elements—as if a crystal ship is plowing through the waves at Fourth Street." *Best New Building: Wilkie D. Ferguson Jr. United States Courthouse*, MIAMI NEW TIMES (2007), <https://www.miaminewtimes.com/best-of/2007/people-and-places/best-new-building-6401275>.

coffee in Naas: black as Guinness. This evening you might go downstairs to Fate and grab Chinese takeout to bring to your weans. The duck there is always perfect and they have a fine New Zealand pinot noir but the coffee is not good but it suffices when it must when Grá is closed.

Or look across Main Street at the reflections of two American flags rippling on the windows of the newest law offices in South Bend.<sup>94</sup>

Or look across your parking lot at the cars, some shaded by trees.

And know that you have written well before. You will again. Start with one true sentence. The sooner you start writing, the sooner you can start rewriting. Take comfort knowing that your writing can be garbage because your rewriting will be gold. Edit. Walk. Edit more.

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94. See generally Brian C. Potts, "*Urgllp*," 14 DELMARVA REV. 301, 301 (Nov. 2021).