



# How to Write Like Tolstoy: A Journey into the Minds of Our Greatest Writers

*Richard Cohen*

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## **How to Write Like Tolstoy: A Journey into the Minds of Our Greatest Writers** Richard Cohen

For anyone who has ever identified with a hero or heroine, been seduced by a strong opening sentence, or been powerfully moved by a story's end, *How to Write Like Tolstoy* is a thought-provoking journey inside the minds of the world's most accomplished storytellers, from Shakespeare to Stephen King.

**“I have tried, as far as possible using the words of the authors themselves, to explain their craft, aiming to take readers on a journey into the concerns, techniques, tricks, flaws, and, occasionally, obsessions of our most luminous writers.”—from the Preface**

Behind every acclaimed work of literature is a trove of heartfelt decisions. The best authors put painstaking—sometimes obsessive—effort into each element of their stories, from plot and character development to dialogue and point of view.

What made Nabokov choose the name *Lolita*? Why did Fitzgerald use first-person narration in *The Great Gatsby*? How did Kerouac, who raged against revision, finally come to revise *On the Road*? Veteran editor and teacher Richard Cohen draws on his vast reservoir of a lifetime's reading and his insight into what makes good prose soar. Here are Gabriel García Márquez's thoughts on how to start a novel (“In the first paragraph you solve most of the problems with your book”); Virginia Woolf offering her definition of style (“It is all rhythm. Once you get that, you can't use the wrong words”); and Vladimir Nabokov on the nature of fiction (“All great novels are great fairy tales”).

Cohen has researched the published works and private utterances of our greatest authors to discover the elements that made their prose memorable. The result is a unique exploration of the act and art of writing that enriches our experience of reading both the classics and the best modern fiction. Evoking the marvelous, the famous, and the irreverent, he reveals the challenges that even the greatest writers faced—and shows us how they surmounted them.

## **Praise for *How to Write Like Tolstoy***

“This book is a wry, critical friend to both writer and reader. It is filled with cogent examples and provoking statements. You will agree or quarrel with each page, and be a sharper writer and reader by the end.”—**Hilary Mantel**

“Insightful . . . [Cohen] escorts his readers to Iris Murdoch for sage counsel on launching a novel, to Salman Rushdie for shrewd guidance on developing an unreliable narrator, to Rudyard Kipling for a cagey hint on creating memorable minor characters, and to Leo Tolstoy for a master's help in transforming personal experience into fictional art. Even readers with no intentions of writing a novel will relish the opportunity to join their favorite authors at the workbench.”—**Booklist**

“An elegant, chatty how-to book on writing well, using the lessons of many of the world's best writers . . . [Cohen] draws on plentiful advice from past and present literary titans. . . . The process of gathering advice from prominent contemporary authors such as Francine Prose, Jonathan Franzen, and Nick Hornby gives

Cohen the opportunity to tell any number of amusing, often discursive stories about great literature and authors, mixed with the writers' own observations.”—*Publishers Weekly*

“Lush and instructive . . . [Cohen] is a generous tour guide through his literary world.”—*Kirkus Reviews*

*From the Hardcover edition.*

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