



BREAK THIS RULE: Most writers have drinking problems

By Linda Formichelli
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This is an excerpt from the completely revised and updated edition of Diana Burrell's and my writing-industry classic, *The Renegade Writer: A Totally Unconventional Guide to Freelance Writing Success*. This book, which has helped thousands of writers launch their careers since 2003, will be available in both print and e-book formats on April 4. The e-book version of *The Renegade Writer*, 3rd Edition, is also available to preorder right now on [Amazon](#). And psst...the book comes with a special free gift!

Diana added this new section to the updated edition and I thought it was so compelling, and so different, that my readers would like to get a sneak peek. (If you're new to the book, it's full of "rules" we've heard that are holding writers back, and that we encourage you to bend or break.) Enjoy!

BREAK THIS RULE: MOST WRITERS HAVE DRINKING PROBLEMS.

Ernest Hemingway. Dorothy Parker. Truman Capote. Hunter Thompson. Pete Hamill. The list goes on of journalists/writers who've used alcohol to make their words flow and sparkle. The image of the hard-drinking, cigarette-smoking journalist is a caricature in pop culture, and if you look at the

writing profession as a whole and focus on the writers at the top of the heap, **it seems like an awfully high percentage of novelists, as well as nonfiction writers, have needed alcohol to tap into their genius.**

Diana's gotten a lot of "you're-a-writer-so-you-must-drink-like-a-fish-haa-haa" comments over the years, and they've always made her feel very uncomfortable. First, they imply she drinks heavily because that's what *all* writers do, and second, because she *does* have a family history of alcoholism, when she has the occasional drink, she's led to think, "Am I having this because that story due tomorrow is giving me fits? Is this the drink that will lead me down the road to rehab?"

The longer you walk the earth, the better you'll understand that alcoholism doesn't play favorites. Yes, a lot of writers have alcohol problems, but so do many professors, nurses, stay-at-home parents, politicians, teenagers, and grandparents. Like we said, anyone can become dependent on alcohol. Our theory is that writers get pegged as heavy drinkers because our work puts us in the public eye more often than, say, a chemist's or mid-level salesperson's work, and because we're perceived as reckless thrill-seekers or sensitive, tortured souls susceptible to the idea that alcohol can loosen our tongues, ergo make the words flow a little easier.

We know dozens of successful writers, some of whom eschew alcohol, and others who really, really love a good cocktail or enjoy making (and drinking) homebrewed beer or wine. However, they don't require a glass of wine or a mixed drink to write. **If you're drinking because you crave it, you can't stop drinking once you start, or drinking is starting to impair your relationships—working ones as well as personal ones—then we urge you to talk to your doctor or a trusted friend or family member about your alcohol intake.**

In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare said of alcohol, “It provokes the desire, but it takes away the performance.” **Using alcohol to fuel the creative process is not a good work habit to encourage, even if you have no history of alcoholism.** Writing can be emotionally and even physically demanding, but there are better, healthier ways to work through it than with a habitual glass of wine at your keyboard.

Your Freelance Writing Success Coach,

Linda Formichelli

P.S. Don't forget to check out the [upcoming third edition of *The Renegade Writer: A Totally Unconventional Guide to Freelance Writing Success!*](#)