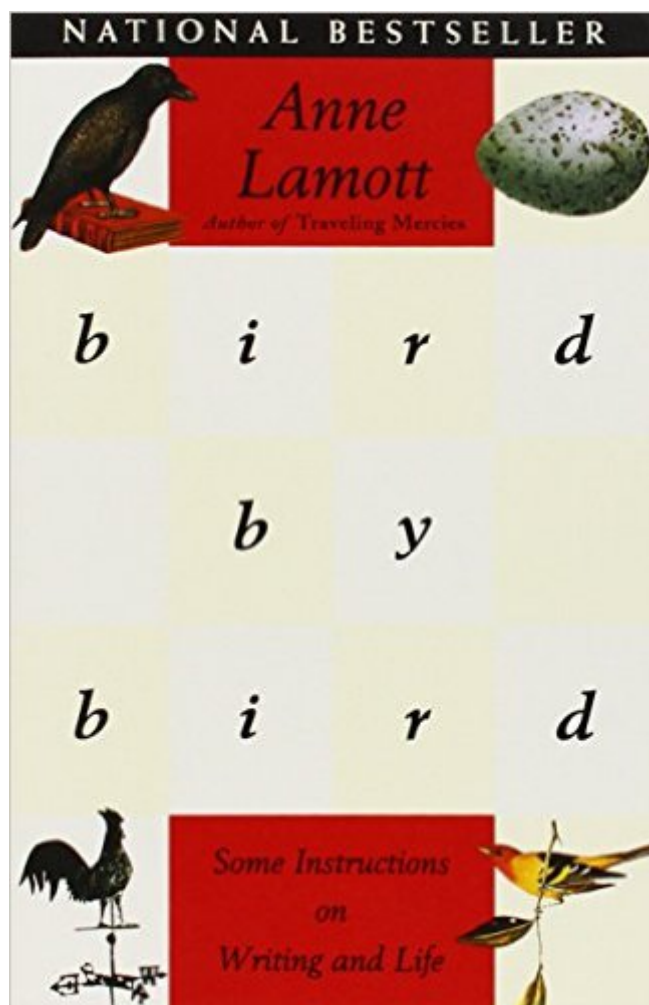


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# Bird By Bird: Some Instructions On Writing And Life



## Synopsis

"Thirty years ago my older brother, who was ten years old at the time, was trying to get a report on birds written that he'd had three months to write. It was due the next day. We were out at our family cabin in Bolinas, and he was at the kitchen table close to tears, surrounded by binder paper and pencils and unopened books on birds, immobilized by the hugeness of the task ahead. Then my father sat down beside him, put his arm around my brother's shoulder, and said, 'Bird by bird, buddy. Just take it bird by bird.'"

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is not a how-to book. This is not a New Age manual for freeing your creativity in ethereal ways. This is Anne Lamott, for heaven's sake...and that means it's funny! As in, laugh-till-you-can't-read-the-words-through-the-tears-in-your-eyes funny. (Some call this therapy, and I'm inclined to agree.) Though aimed at writers, this book is full of sage advice and razor-edged honesty for the average joe. If you're a writer--and I claim to be one--it's more than a few anecdotes and good advice; it's a lifeline in the thrashing seas of rough-draftdom, a foothold on the sands of jealousy and vain ambition. Anne makes it clear that writing must be pursued for something other than mere publication. (Though, to be honest, I know she's just trying to let the majority of us down easy.) Writing is about letting go, growing, facing truths, and holding on. I'm hooked on Lamott. She slaps me in the face with her startling revelations, nudges me in the ribs with her unpredictable humor, and prods my frozen little writer's hands back into action with warm compassion. This book

won't solve the mechanical aspects of my writing, or lead me on the path of structural excellence, but it will spark my creativity, free my characters to be true to themselves, and, ultimately, shake me from my doldrums back into the writing mode. In a society addicted to mindless facts and information, "Bird by Bird" reminds us--writers or otherwise--that it's all about heart. Heart and mind and soul dancing together, even if they step all over each other's feet.

If there's a better book to read when you're doubting yourself and your writing ability, I don't know what it is. IF YOU WANT TO WRITE by Brenda Ueland may be more profound, but it's not as funny... I don't think Lamott copied Ueland at all. Both books are wonders, Ueland's more spiritual or mystical--i.e. how to express your own unique self and write your truth--and Lamott's more worldly--how to get your rear in gear and start producing copy. Lamott's chapter on crumbly first drafts lets you know you must start somewhere and can't do that if you're constantly criticizing and editing yourself. And she is so right--once you have a beginning, you can make it better..and better...and better. She doesn't really tell you how to do that in very specific terms, but for that there's great sourcebooks like SELF EDITING FOR FICTION WRITERS and ON WRITING WELL, which more than cover the job. Bird by Bird may be short on craft, but it's long on motivation, humor, and practical ways to get yourself writing.

BIRD BY BIRD: SOME INSTRUCTIONS ON WRITING AND LIFE by Anne Lamott is a lovely, lovely, lovely book! Of course it is about writing, but it is also about any kind of longterm endeavor that is challenging, that creates self-doubt, and that is a channel for self-expression and self-actualization. Lamott's Christianity and general spirituality, which is expressed in this book as a side note to her writing focus, is warm and friendly, and her personality, humorous and inclusive and confident, is wonderful for the reader to share. I LOVED the process of reading this book, of being with it. This book has a charming and engaging introduction and then is divided into parts on Writing (which includes chapters called "Getting Started," "Short Assignments," "Perfectionism," "False Starts," "Plot Treatment," and "How Do You Know When You're Done?"), The Writing Frame of Mind (with chapters like "The Moral Point of View," "Broccoli," "Radio Station KFKD," and "Jealousy"), Help Along the Way ("Index Cards," "Calling Around," "Writing Groups," and "Someone to Read Your Drafts" and "Writer's Block"), and final sections called "Publication -- and Other Reasons to Write" and "The Last Class." While I actually think the writing lessons of this book are secondary to the wonderful life lessons this book contains, I have found myself using these lessons. I love the idea that first drafts can be BAAAAAAAAAAD with no harm to anyone! It's incredibly

liberating and freeing, and allows one to write whatever one has to write with self-permission to do a bad job the first time round because you know you'll correct it later on. If you write ANYTHING this book will give you practical, helpful advice to advance and improve. I underlined in this book, which is something that as a librarian's daughter, I almost never do, but this book feels like a reference, a guide, in a way that other works do not. I underlined things like, "Hope is a revolutionary patience" on page xxiii and "Because for some of us, books are as important as almost anything on earth" on page 15. Lamott quotes from other wondrous writers, she writes about events in her own life that elevate her and that enervate her. But everything she writes is about taking lots of small steps in one direction. I literally laughed and cried while reading this wonderful and wondrous memoir about the process of writing and how life's pains and joys illustrate this process for Lamott ... I nearly wished I still taught freshman composition so I could use it as a text book. It is the most honest, charming, personable and true description of the painful and rewarding act of writing that I have ever read. I recommend it to anyone, writer or not, who is engaged in a longterm, or even lifelong endeavor. Anne Lamott will simultaneously soothe and inspire any reader of BIRD BY BIRD.

This author is a new find for me, but I will surely read much more of her. She is fabulously funny, incredibly informative, and absolutely generous with her thoughts and feelings and expertise on writing. The book warmed me, and made me feel that I could continue my writing with a stronger and better perspective. For aspiring writer's everywhere, and for writers published and not, this book will take you on a journey and offer invaluable advice for your hard work. It will help you revive that natural urge to write and keep you plugging away at the keyboard during the very worst of slumps. You will also laugh with Anne Lamott, the author, who is hilarious and honest and very witty. The practical and real life advice will stay with you as you struggle to become the writer you already are.

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