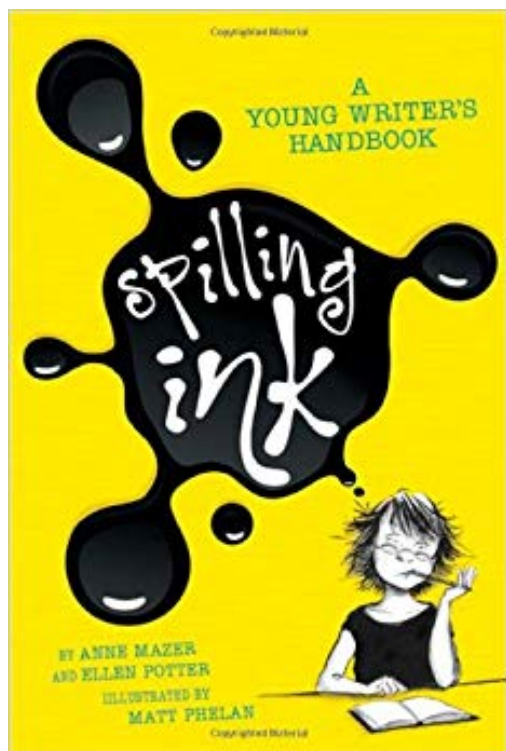


Spilling Ink: A Young Writer's Handbook *by* Matt Phelan, Ellen Potter



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LEARN HOW TO WRITE LIKE THE EXPERTS, FROM THE EXPERTS.

Practical advice in a perfect package for young aspiring writers.

After receiving letters from fans asking for writing advice, accomplished authors Anne Mazer and Ellen Potter joined together to create this guidebook for young writers. The authors mix inspirational anecdotes with practical guidance on how to find a voice, develop characters and plot, make revisions, and overcome writer's block. Fun writing prompts will help young writers jump-start their own projects, and encouragement throughout will keep them at work.



Reviews of the **Spilling Ink: A Young Writer's Handbook** *by*

Matt Phelan, Ellen Potter

The Rollers of Vildar

This book has changed the way I teach writing. The prompts are fun and engaging, and I see a difference in the students' response. I wish I'd had this book when I first started teaching writing. I not only have found it to be a fun way to engage my students, but often, I find myself inspired by the ideas in this book when it comes to my own writing. Students often find writing to be overwhelming and intimidating. And of course, adults do as well. This book suggests getting rid of the blank page right away by just scribbling on it. At first, my students thought I was kidding, but I insisted that they write anything at all. Then I said, "Okay, you're a writer. The page is no longer blank." When the work was turned in, one of my students had written a heart-warming story about his grandfather, but the first line on the page was, "I'm a knucklehead, but...whatever." I smiled. It worked for him, just as it worked for me. This little book has made the writing process fun for my students. It's worth its weight in gold!

Oreavi

I have been looking for something like this for my eleven year old aspiring author and it's exactly what he needed. The advice is fun and practical and very easy for him to understand and follow. He has already done several of the suggestions for furthering character development, like "having milk and cookies with your characters" to interview them and get to know them better. It's also very witty and enjoyable to read. We definitely recommend this book to any young aspiring authors out there!

Vuzahn

I haven't come across a "How to" book for kids about writing that has impressed me--till now. *Spilling Ink* is a chatty, informed, get-real look at writing by two children's book authors, and it doesn't waste time diagramming sentences and listing common spelling errors. Anne Mazer, author of series like *Abby Hayes* and *Sister Magic*, and Ellen Potter, author of books like *Olivia Kidney* and *Slob*, lay out what it means to be a writer and tell kids how to get the job done.

This book is written in a thoroughly reader-friendly style, with the two authors taking turns giving advice in a manner reminiscent of blog posts. Hayes and Potter know their stuff, and it shows: as a writer, I was pleased to see such good ideas expressed so simply, not to mention humorously. For instance, the chapter and section titles are often entertaining: "More Crawling Lizards, Please," "Truth or Dare," "The Robo-Narrator," and "Belly Buttons" are a few of my favorites.

Take a look at the book's tone in this selection from Ellen Potter: "Before I started writing seriously, I was under the delusion that 'real' writers sit down and write out the entire story in one nearly perfect, spectacularly clever draft. Oh, sure, maybe they would change a word or two, or rename one of their characters 'Nathan' because his original name, 'Jake,' reminds them too much of their cousin Jake who belches the theme music to retro TV shows. But that's about it. Wrong! Hugely, profoundly, utterly wrong."

Spilling Ink offers instructive analogies, such as comparing a story's setting to a mood ring, and useful techniques, such as "the chicken-nugget circle." The authors provide short writing samples to illustrate their points here and there, which is so much more helpful than mere explanations. A writing activity at the end of each chapter is called "I Dare You," e.g., "Write a scene about a circus, but make the mood dark and grim." These activities are so spot-on that they're practically a shock--in contrast, I've seen far too many writing practice assignments in literature textbooks and school workbooks that weren't particularly relevant.

Here writing concepts are explained charmingly, and, more important, clearly. The idea of letting your characters do their own thing and not over-managing them is tricky for many grown-up writers to understand, but Potter uses the idea of "Don't Be a Bully" to explain it. And Mazer tells us how she was inspired by those pre-Christmas calendar kiosks at the mall to create fun chapter headers for one of her series--illustrating how writers can transform everyday experiences into fiction.

Mazer and Potter share their writing process with us; for example, showing how they brainstormed to choose the title for this book. They address problems that other books about writing don't always pinpoint, such as "Avoiding the Mad Dash," that tendency to slap on an ending that young writers--and some older ones--are prone to. *Spilling Ink* even covers topics like journaling and working with a writing partner.

Matt Phelan's illustrations further add to the cheerful tone of the book, showing us sturdy young writers in spot art sprinkled throughout the pages.

One of the book's best treats is the Appendix. Just when you think it's over, you find out that Anne and Ellen have interviewed each other in a section called "Spilling Secrets," which is full of fun biographical tidbits and a bonus slant on what it means to be a writer.

I've seen a lot of boring books about how to write interesting books, which naturally struck me as ironic. But *Spilling Ink* takes its own advice: it's funny, specific, fascinating, and useful. I don't just recommend it to its target audience of 4th-6th graders, I recommend it to aspiring (and even published) writers who are in their 20's, 30's, 40's, and beyond.

Maridor

I am just finishing this book (I am reading through it very slowly) and thought I would share. "Spilling Ink: A Young Writer's Handbook" by Ellen Potter and Anne Mazer. My son, age 9, (who hates to write) read it toward the end of spring and he really liked it. After he read it I bought him a little notebook to write his story ideas in and every once in a while I'll see him run and grab it, jot something down, then return to what he was doing. I love it! We are going to read it altogether this school year and then I'm going to have them writing their own stories throughout the year. Reading this book makes me want to run to the computer and start writing something! I will try to refrain from gushing over this book, but if you have a child who loves to read, has a great imagination, loves to write, or (like my children) hate to write and need that extra motivation, then you should take a look into this book. It really takes writing from something someone else does (writers who write amazing books, I could never do that though) and breaks it apart into something very doable and even fun. I know as a homeschool mom I am always looking for good teaching tools and I love it when others share their amazing finds. This book has me excited for school to start so we can start reading it and begin writing their stories!

Eayaroler

Where was this book when I was a kid? I love it! No doubt this book would have inspired torrents of writing from me back then (and may even still). I bought this for my 9 year old, not knowing if he would have to grow into it, but he enjoys reading this as much as I do. What hooked him was the "Official Writer's Permission Slip" on page 7, giving him permission to write anything, repeat, anything, in a way that had him laughing out loud. We'll probably be using this book in our homeschool "Writing Workshop" for years, as the possibilities for creative guidance and inspiration here are endless. I can't wait to see what windows of opportunity, wordly-wise doors, and portals of prose this book will open up for us. Meanwhile, I want to read anything else these authors have written. Bravo!

Marad

Easy to follow outline for writing. Would recommend, even for beginning adult writers.

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