

Research and Writing

This is a passage written by a friend of Lori's who is a college professor of journalism.

Students often say, "I am told that I need to "feel passionately" about something, and then it will be easy."

That is such emotive bullshit. I have made most of my living writing and teaching other people to write, and passion has nothing to do with it. It's a skill. Admittedly, that is all non-fiction writing, but let's be honest, if you are writing professionally, you are almost certainly writing non-fiction, since the number of people who make a living writing fiction is infinitesimally small compared to the rest of us.

What you need to do to write is research. What scuppers most people's writing is that they don't know what to write, and they don't know what to write because they haven't done the research, or done enough research. You need to research (interview people, background reading, in-depth reading, gathering experimental data, whatever is the right thing for what you want to write), and then do more research. When you are bursting with stuff, start writing it down. If you get stuck, do more research (or go away and let it sit for a while, come back and read it again, and keep going).

Admittedly, this is mostly advice to students, who have a bad habit of seeing the writing as the goal of an assignment. It's not, the goal is the research, the writing is just the evidence that you have met the goal. When you're a journalist, the writing is the goal, but only because it's the mechanism of delivery from your research to your readers' brains. It's important, because it has to be clear and it has to be done, but it's meaningless if you don't have anything to say.

It's like the plates and service in a restaurant. It's bloody hard to deliver the food without the plates, and it helps the experience a lot if the service is good (and appropriate to the meal), but no amount of fancy china or elaborate serving will make a difference if you run out of food, or it's inedible.