

Writing Books Are Like A New Eye Shadow

By Leslie J. Hall

For a woman, the cosmetics aisle at the drugstore is like a long row of possibilities. There are all these products that promise to make us beautiful, radiant, glowing, sultry, sexy, tan, younger.... Don't even get me started on stores like Sephora and Ulta where the entire store is dedicated to beauty items.

I read somewhere that the reason these stores call to us, suck us in, is because they offer hope. We can change our hair color, skin color, make-up, smell, plus over our face anti-aging remedies. We can go from dull to pulsating in moments! Each item we try offers the potential for change.

I feel this way about the aisle of books on writing at the bookstore. Rows and rows of possibilities. They promise to improve our dialogue, strengthen our plot, deepen our story's emotions, make the setting leap off the page, guarantee us an agent or publisher. Maybe if I read the right one, my writing will magically improve. All I need is one new piece of advice and I'll be the next Janet Evanovich. Get real.

Don't get me wrong. I like writing books. I've had an addiction to them for some time, but I'm currently in remission. I rarely read these books all the way through. A chapter here, a chapter there—like a bright blue eye shadow or a sparkly silver eye liner—a little goes a long way. But I'm always looking for that spark of inspiration that feeds me to write another day. I tell my students to try different books to find the words that speak to them and are helpful in their current place in writing.

Writing books can be a way to avoid writing. If I just read one more then I'll have what it takes to get my novel finished. But like the new improved advanced wrinkle cream that comes on the market monthly promising to make us look ten years younger in two weeks, a book about writing doesn't make you a better writer.

I can't imagine not having read and re-read Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird*. I constantly re-read others like Jessica Brody's *Save the Cat Writes a Novel*, Donald Maass' *Writing the Breakout Novel*, and Steven James' *Story Trumps Structure*. These are my bibles of writing wise words to motivate me. But they can't make me write--only I can make me write.

Writing makes you a better writer--practice, practice, practice.