

# Writing Tips from Ellen Cassedy

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## How many readers is enough?



- Virginia Woolf thought 1,500 readers was a lot.
- For a university press, two or three thousand sales may be a bestseller.
- To make Amazon's Top 100 list, you must sell 1,000 books within a few days.
- *The Wall Street Journal's* bestseller list requires 3,000 copies in a week.
- New York Times: 9,000 in a week.

But are those numbers “enough”? For that matter, is *any* number “enough”?

Maybe, for most of us, satisfaction doesn't stem from *numbers* after all. But if not, what *does* keep us going? How *do* we measure success?

For some, what matters is not the quantity but the **quality of our readers**. The readers who sustain us are those who let us know they understand what we've written, show us they're moved by our work, take our ideas to new places of their own. Even if these readers are small in number, they're large in impact.

For some, what matters is feeling **part of a community**. Our connections with readers, regardless of how many, suffuse our writing lives with satisfaction and meaning.

Some of us are sustained by using our work as a **vehicle for social change**. Writer Allison Hedge Coke, for example, testified at a public hearing about the preservation of a Native American historical site. Rather than reading a statement, she recited her poetry. Using her words to further a cause that was holy to her made her work larger – bestseller or no.

For some, of course, it's **the dream of becoming rich and famous** that keeps us happily chained to the desk, striving to do our best. Nothing wrong with that, if it works.

Many of us are sustained simply by knowing we're **part of the chain** of writers who came before. Communicating what it is to live on this planet is a sufficient joy.

Give thanks that we live in a culture that nurtures the literary dreams of so many, and in so many different ways.

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Ellen Cassedy is the author of [\*We Are Here: Memories of the Lithuanian Holocaust\*](#) (Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2012). To see all of her Writing Tips, visit her website at [www.ellencassedy.com](http://www.ellencassedy.com).