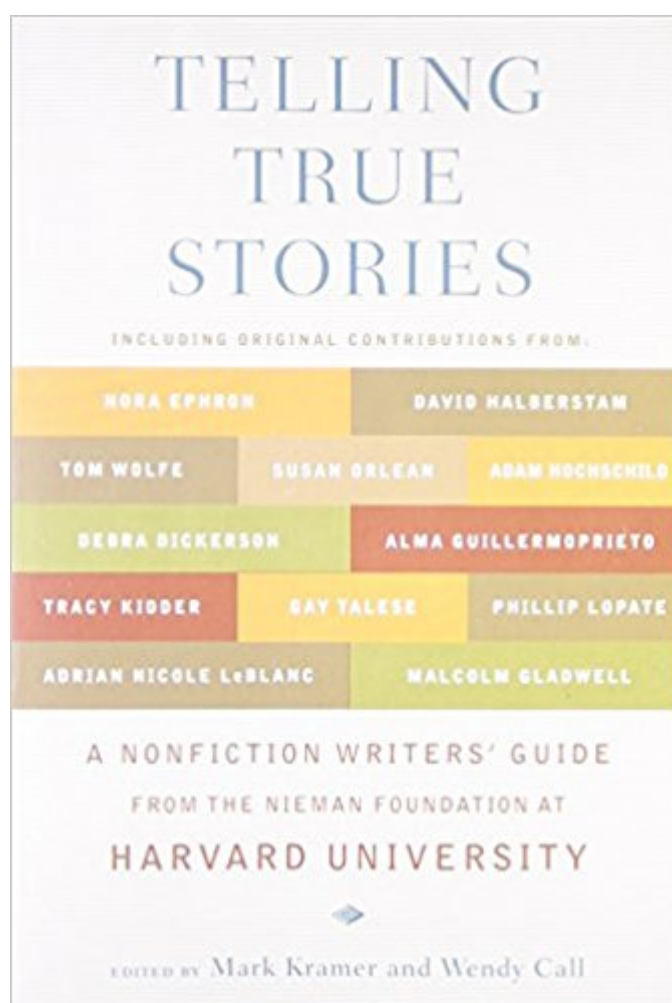


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# Telling True Stories: A Nonfiction Writers' Guide From The Nieman Foundation At Harvard University



## Synopsis

Inspiring stories and practical advice from America's most respected journalists. The country's most prominent journalists and nonfiction authors gather each year at Harvard's Nieman Conference on Narrative Journalism. *Telling True Stories* presents their best advice—covering everything from finding a good topic, to structuring narrative stories, to writing and selling your first book. More than fifty well-known writers offer their most powerful tips, including: • Tom Wolfe on the emotional core of the story • Gay Talese on writing about private lives • Malcolm Gladwell on the limits of profiles • Nora Ephron on narrative writing and screenwriters • Alma Guillermoprieto on telling the story and telling the truth • Dozens of Pulitzer Prize-winning journalists from the *Atlantic Monthly*, *New Yorker*, *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post* and more . . . The essays contain important counsel for new and career journalists, as well as for freelance writers, radio producers, and memoirists. Packed with refreshingly candid and insightful recommendations, *Telling True Stories* will show anyone fascinated by the art of writing nonfiction how to bring people, scenes, and ideas to life on the page.

## Book Information

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“Tantalizing essays” | Ultimately this is a book about why stories matter and how journalists can and should master the craft of storytelling, whether they work in newspapers, magazines, books, radio, television, or film | [B]rims with wisdom on how to get to the emotional core of nonfiction stories. It contains useful advice on everything from how to get people to open up | to how to distill

all the material you have gathered into a polished story that glues readers to the page. This is the kind of book that any aspiring storyteller can dip into and learn from, no matter what the stage of his or her career. "Alison Bass, Harvard Review "Tips spill from every chapter of the book | Every page "and I mean every page "contains important wisdom for every journalist. Telling True Stories is the relatively rare guide that offers value to veteran journalists, to novices, to investigative journalists and to beat reporters. "Steve Weinberg, The IRE Journal "A virtuoso collection of essays by writers on writing non-fiction; these remarkable insights into the craft were collected at Harvard University and includes selections from such notable veteran scribes as Tom Wolfe, Tracy Kidder, Susan Orlean, David Halberstam, Nora Ephron and Malcolm Gladwell. "The Seattle Post-Intelligencer "Practical advice for writers on how to get published, write a memoir, and more. "Boston Magazine "Provides advice from 51 nonfiction writers, including notables Tom Wolfe, Gay Talese, and Nora Ephron | Writers coming to this book should not expect one clear-cut path for producing strong nonfiction; instead, the book provides pointed but wide-ranging advice on writing-a good illustration of the creativity behind nonfiction and the individuality of the writing process. There is enough variety for almost any nonfiction writer to find inspiration and guidance. Topics include interviewing techniques, storytelling, using tape recorders and notebooks, developing characters and scenes, and editing. The section titled "Building a Career in Magazines and Books" will especially help new writers. "Library Journal

Mark Kramer was writer-in-residence in the American Studies Program at Smith College (1980-1990), writer-in-residence and a professor of journalism at Boston University (1990-2001), and writer-in-residence and founding director of the Nieman Program on Narrative Journalism at Harvard University (2001-2007). He's written for the New York Times Magazine, National Geographic, The Atlantic Monthly, and many other periodicals. He's co-author of two leading textbook/readers on narrative nonfiction: Telling True Stories and Literary Journalism. He's written four additional books: Mother Walter and the Pig Tragedy, Three Farms, Invasive Procedures, and Travels with a Hungry Bear. He's currently at work on a book about writing narrative nonfiction. His website is [www.tellingtruestories.com](http://www.tellingtruestories.com). Wendy Call is author of No Word for Welcome: The Mexican Village Faces the Global Economy, winner of the 2011 Grub Street National Book Prize for Nonfiction. She co-edited Telling True Stories: A Nonfiction Writers' Guide. Wendy has served as Writer in Residence at 20 institutions, five national parks, four universities, a public hospital, and a historical archive. She writes and edits nonfiction, translates Mexican poetry and short fiction, and works as a teacher at Richard Hugo House and Goddard College. Before turning to full-time

word-working in 2000, she devoted a decade to work for social change organizations in Boston and Seattle. The daughter of a middle-school math teacher and a career Navy officer from Michigan, Wendy grew up on and around military bases in Florida, Pennsylvania, southern California, and southern Maryland. She lives and works in Seattle.

I ordered this for my nonfiction writing workshop for school, I wouldn't have bought it otherwise on my own. But, now that I have it...and since I am graduating with a degree focus on creative writing, I could probably use this in my collection. So far I have only read the assigned parts and they are full of great tips. I am glad that they have taken all the speeches and compiled everything into this book for quick reference. I have already learned many things, or made aware of things while writing nonfiction pieces. I think many people struggle while writing nonfiction because we tend to focus on the bad, and this helped me realize I do that and how to shift gears and bring more fun into the writing

I read this for a class in creative non-fiction but it really is for journalists. Many of the authors have real insights, particularly about how to fashion a story out of the jumble of facts that life often presents you with. On the other hand, for a book about writing, many of the entries are quite poorly written, probably because they are essentially notes from fairly off-the-cuff talks the authors gave at the Nieman conference at Harvard.

I learned of this book through a "textbook sale" and it's been a continuing education treasure. I ordered it just before vacation and it arrived the day before I left, so I had the great fortune of sinking blissfully into the essays, some humorous, all passionate, about narrative journalism. Don't skip the intro, where the editors define the genre by all its names: literary journalism, narrative/creative non-fiction, etc. They get the labels out of the way so we all know what we're talking about. Then prepare to be inspired, educated, and guided by the pros. Every aspect of "the story" is covered here, from managing relationships with editors and subjects to--above all--getting to the emotional heart of the story. I am not a journalist but something of a memoirist and this book is inspiring me to do more researched, investigative work. I feel like I have a master's course on my bookshelf, but these writers are so good, you sometimes feel as if you sitting and talking shop with them over drinks. Kudos to the editors for pulling the best work out of these former conference presentations, too. It's no mean feat to transpose the oral presentation to a piece that runs well on paper. Just an excellent book any writer can use for years to come.

I don't hand out a lot of five star ratings, but this multi-author book deserves a five-star rating. For the kind of genre of multi-author, it is incredibly consistent and fluid. This comes from the editors introducing each section and detailed editing work that obviously went into the book as well as well-chosen and experienced writers in the field of journalism and narrative non-fiction book writing. I would recommend this book to new journalism students to experienced writers. There's plenty in the the book to use for reference over the years of a writing career. I go back and read articles from the book from time to time when an issue of writing, characters, plot, etc. comes up and I want to refresh my thinking about a certain aspect of writing.

good basics on how to write your stories

I have read only about 15% of this book so far. What I have read impresses me very favorably. The author appears to know his subject and presents his views clearly. I had hoped to find practical guidance to enhance story telling skills, and from what I have read so far, that is exactly what I expect to find from reading the entire book. Nice writing style ... easy to read and clearly presented ...

I wish all textbooks could be written this way. This book is a keeper. I've underlined and tagged pages I will be coming back to. It's already helped shape the book I'm writing now!

For anyone planning to write non-fiction narratives, this book is essential, simply the best instruction available. The best non-fiction writers in the country generously share their knowledge. Read this book if you're interested in that type of writing.

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