

Elmore Leonard

10 Rules for Good Writing

Elmore Leonard started out writing westerns, then turned his talents to crime fiction. One of the most popular and prolific writers of our time, he's written about two dozen novels, most of them bestsellers, such as *Glitz*, *Get Shorty*, *Maximum Bob*, and *Rum Punch*. Unlike most genre writers, however, Leonard is taken seriously by the literary crowd.

What's Leonard's secret to being both popular and respectable? Perhaps you'll find some clues in his 10 rules for good writing:

- 1 Never open a book with weather.
- 2 Avoid prologues.
- 3 Never use a verb other than "said" to carry dialogue.
- 4 Never use an adverb to modify the verb "said"...he admonished gravely.
- 5 Keep your exclamation points under control. You are allowed no more than two or three per 100,000 words of prose.
- 6 Never use the words "suddenly" or "all hell broke loose."
- 7 Use regional dialect, patois, sparingly.
- 8 Avoid detailed descriptions of characters.
- 9 Don't go into great detail describing places and things.
- 10 Try to leave out the part that readers tend to skip.

My most important rule is one that sums up the 10.

If it sounds like writing, I rewrite it.