

MICHAEL MORPURGO'S 10 RULES FOR WRITING

1. The prerequisite for me is to keep my well of ideas full. This means living as full and varied life as possible, to have my antennae out all the time.
2. Ted Hughes gave me this advice and it works wonders. Record moments, fleeting impressions, overheard dialogue, my own sadnesses and bewilderments and joys.
3. A notion for a story is for me a confluence of real events, historical perhaps, or from my own memory to create an exciting fusion.
4. It is the gestation time, incubation time which counts. I write to no plan, just let it work itself out, trying not to force it.
5. Once the skeleton of the story is ready I can hatch it out. At this stage I begin talking about it, mostly to Clare, my wife, sounding her out.
6. By the time I sit down and face the blank page I am raring to go, longing to tell it. I tell it as if I'm telling to my best friend or one of my grandchildren. I write by hand.
7. Once a chapter is scribbled down rough – I write very small so that I do not have to turn the page and face the next empty one. Clare puts it on the word processor, prints it out and hands it back. Sometimes with her own comments!
8. When I'm writing well and I'm deep inside a story, living it as I write I honestly don't know what will happen. I try not to dictate it, not to play God. I want my characters to develop and work it out in their own voice.
9. Once the book is finished in its first draft, I read it out loud to myself. How it sounds is hugely important.
10. With all editing, no matter how sensitive – and I've been very lucky here – I react sulkily at first, but then I settle down and get on with it, and a year later I have my book in my hand! My new baby. Woe betide then if anyone doesn't like it.