

# **The Average of All Possible Things**

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Dedicated to whomever's hands come upon these pages,  
and that you may remember that the world is conspiring  
for you and to act in a manner as such.

Live the questions now,  
Perhaps then, someday in the future,  
You will gradually, without even noticing it,  
Live your way into the answer.

- Rainer Maria Rilke

Some books are to be tasted,  
Others to be swallowed,  
And some few to be  
Chewed and digested  
– Francis Bacon

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If the reader prefers, this book may be regarded as fiction. But there is always the chance that such a book of fiction may throw some light on what has been written as fact



## .How to Take Criticism Like a Pro.

“Your writing is not thaaaaat good because it is waaaaay to satirical,” someone said to me a while ago. But instead of crying myself to sleep at night because of his statement, I will give you some food for thought in the form of my awesome writing.

Criticism is a tough thing to take, much like how a necklace stored in a Swiss safety deposit box is tough to take. Unlike a necklace stored in a Swiss safety deposit box, criticism is not shiny and won’t make you feel like a million bucks. However, like a necklace stored in a Swiss safety deposit box, criticism usually has an evil past.

If someone starts to criticize you, adopt a defensive stance. If you are familiar with the sport of basketball, you know that a defensive stance involves standing with your legs shoulder length apart, knees bent, and one arm extended towards your Critic. You’re doing this because in life you must protect yourself, like a fierce lioness protects her young. This means that you will play the roles of both lioness and cub. Don’t stress, there’s no need for costume changes. A faux fur rug draped over your head will suffice for both. And, no, if you’re a man, you cannot play a lion. You’re a lioness. Get over it.

Now that you’re in a defensive stance and have a faux fur rug draped over your head, it’s time to go into offensive mode. Because, as we all know, “the best defence is a good offense.” Socrates said that, but in Greek.

The epitome of something that is both defensive and offensive is a bayonet. You can fashion one out of kitchen utensils and a broom handle, or a Swiffer handle if you're fancy. You could also simply use your grandfather's old bayonet, which he used to ward off snooping neighborhood children. If you're feeling extra offensive, you could attach kitchen utensils to the actual bayonet so it's a hybrid Swiss Army bayonet. Ironical, as the Swiss are neither offensive nor defensive.

There is no significance to the fact that the Swiss have been mentioned twice thus far. But it is worth noting. If you are critical of that, you would do well to keep it to yourself, unless you're wearing bayonet-proof armor.

Once the Critic sees you in your defensive stance with a faux fur rug on your head, wielding a bayonet, he will most likely retreat in terror. However, this only works in person. If the criticism is done over the phone or the Internet, your bayonet and lioness costume will prove useless. You could try to take a picture of yourself brandishing the bayonet threateningly and sending it to them, but this might not work. Not least of all because it would be hard to take a self-portrait while holding a bayonet.

"Know your enemy," is what the Huns used to say, but in Hunish. That is why if the Critic says, in his critical accent, "I find your writing to be... what's the phrase... *not good*," you have to know as much as possible about him so as to swiftly counter with a cutting and personal retort. However, as the Critic is also a human being with feelings, you should avoid being overly harsh. It is safe to assume that the Critic has never

known a day of happiness nor laughed in his life, so an example of a mild yet effective retort would be something along the lines of, “You have no sense of humor and will never love or be loved.” If that doesn’t silence the Critic, you could always make fun of his stupid hair, because his hair is most likely stupid.

That being said, people should be able to take criticism from you because you have great hair and you are, of course, just trying to push them to do their best work. Also, your opinion is held in very high regard in many circles, so if you were to tell someone else that their writing was not so much good as terrible, and that they should just quit altogether, you would merely be saving them from a lifetime of pursuing a dream that they will never achieve. And if they can’t take your criticism, they are babies who can’t even brandish a bayonet properly because they have tiny baby hands.

## .Simple Rules To Motherhood.

Welcome to motherhood. It's the hardest job on earth, but also FUN and not hard. It's the longest, shortest time. It's organic but also Doritos. The rules are simple, not contradictory, but also *not* rules, because we are play-based.

1. You must never be boring, but also don't be fun, or else they won't respect you as a parent.
2. You must curate a schedule of sports, academics, and whimsy, but don't curate it so it will be child-led.
3. Infants must learn to swim with you holding them, or they could drown in a bucket, but also not rely on you to swim.
4. Cribs should contain one twenty-thread count sheet and be free of comfort items in a way only monastic monks could understand, but also make it cozy.
5. You must sleep-train your baby before the four-month regression, the six-month regression, and learning leaps. But also don't pressure them, or they will have abandonment issues and form a goth band.
6. You must create a curriculum of brain-stimulating activities—a box of old-timey keys, brick bits from a pueblo in New Mexico, or rain in a jar. But also don't focus on academics.

7. You must make organic meals, but also not be a snob, so let them eat cupcakes made from Blue No. 5 and petroleum at birthday parties.
8. You must pretend-play and create scenes with your child about a no-eyed cat and her toilet-paper-roll friend, Roger, in outer space. But also don't be your child's playmate.
9. You must get them into an Ivy League school, but also send them to public school to help sustain the community.
10. You must support school lunches, but also pack a backup healthy lunch of cucumbers wrapped in seaweed pants.
11. You must be safety-conscious but also not hover or be a helicopter mom.
12. You must teach them to be socially independent, but also curate playdates for them.
13. You must teach them stranger danger, but also to be friendly to strangers.
14. You must allow only the appropriate amount of screen time, which is zero.
15. You must learn how to make a DIY kite out of old newspapers but also buy a store-bought one when the

lumbering piece of sky garbage won't fly in wind that doesn't give a shit about decorative pom-poms.

16. You must get your baby to latch correctly so they get enough milk for a healthy weight, but also not so much that they become an obese baby or a body-conscious baby. A baby who is happy with their weight, not skinny, but also zaftig in the way that still looks sexy in clothes.

17. You must enjoy this time, but also don't enjoy it, because it will be your fault if your child isn't a success and takes naps at McDonald's. But also, that's honest work.

18. You must know how to survive a fire, hurricane, pandemic, or alien invasion. You must be able to make a spreadsheet, fold a fitted sheet, sheet cake, lullaby, and a leprechaun trap. You should be an expert at getting stains out, finding stars, telling jokes, home-cooking, hosting dance parties, playing dead, riding escalators, watching "this," diving for Barbies, finding schools with chickens, and getting good GPAs. You must also be good at teaching how to tie shoelaces, learning stages of development, gentle parenting, not gentle parenting, free-range parenting, parenting without borders, time-outs, consent, talent shows, ghost stories, growing pains, the alphabet, volcanoes, and middle school. But also don't be a know-it-all parent.

If you follow these simple, not contradictory rules, you will be a good mom, but also not a mom, because we are also stardust persons with decision fatigue.

## .News From the GardenGirl.

I have not always been into gardening and plants. But there's nothing quite as satisfying as gardening. Whether growing vegetables or adding color to your backyard, all you need to cultivate healthy plants is sun and water.

Except not that much sun. You don't want to broil your plants. And lighten up on the water. You're growing a garden, not a swamp.

Start with an easy plant. Zinnias. Geranium. Basil. They're impossible to kill. Unless you introduce the wrong amount of water and sun.

Geraniums like full sun. Hostas thrive in partial shade. And arugula needs to be in full sun except when it prefers shade, which is usually Mondays or any day you decide to spend not at home and neglect your garden.

Green beans, peppers, and tomatoes can be planted in pots. To maintain the perfect ecosystem for each, devote your days to rearranging their pots to optimize sun exposure like they're teenagers trying to achieve the perfect tan without burning. Don't forget to remind them every twenty-five minutes to drink water, even if they roll their eyes at you.

Water your plants first thing in the morning when it's cool, unless they prefer to be watered during the hottest part of the day.



If a plant isn't thriving, consider adding less water. You should only water your plants once or twice a week. Or three times a day, depending on how much water your plant decides it needs. Don't let the water touch the plant, only the dirt. If water touches a leaf, the entire ecosystem will crumble.

Never use sink water on your plants. Only use filtered water or bottled water endorsed by a celebrity.

If you go on vacation during the summer, don't. Your plants need to be watered at the same time on the same days while you wear the same outfit. If this ritual isn't followed, they'll revolt by losing all their flower buds on the day you host your in-laws for a barbecue. But again, with the perfect amount of water and sun, you'll have a garden that's worth skipping the trip to the Italian coast.

If it rains, water your plants as normal. Just reduce your water amount by a third for the first watering of the week and by seven-ninths if you're watering on the third Thursday of a month that starts with *J*.

How can you tell if you're overwatering your plants? You'll notice the leaves are browning. A few stems may wilt. One day, you'll walk outside, and your plant will be splayed dead in the dirt with no warning at all.

You should continue to water dead plants for a week, so you feel less guilty throwing them out.

Once you have the watering down, add in fertilizer. You'll also need cages to nurture your cherry tomatoes. All of this will require 763 trips to your local gardening center. But with just a little effort, a 430 euro investment, and hours neglecting all other responsibilities while you coax plants, you can add a few sprigs of slightly browned homegrown basil to any summer salad.

In the winter, you can take a break. All you need to do is plan your garden for next year, clean, sharpen, and replenish your tools, rebuild raised beds, weed, overhaul your drip system, and start seedlings by providing them with the exact amount of sun and water.

Then, all you'll need to do come summer is add sun and water.

Except not that much sun. And definitely less water.

## .The Items I Find in My Son's Schoolbag at the end of one Week are My Path to Inner Peace.

**A Rock:** Feel how solid it is. How smooth. How heavy. Like, really heavy. Good lord. Was your kid lugging it around all week? Is this the burden we all bear—lugging around rocks that we thought, for just a fleeting moment, were special? What rocks in our own backpack can we unload? And will your kid remember this particular rock and have a fit when they discover you threw it in the rockpile outside?

**A Broken Stick:** The stick is broken, barely hanging together. So is the world. You can take comfort in knowing that all things are broken. Your kid will probably not take such comfort. Is it better to conceal the broken stick or confront the reality of its brokenness? A difficult decision in much of life. But not here, since it's just before dinner and your kid is already hangry.

**Wet Bathing Suit:** It is cool and damp. Let the coolness rest on your fingers. Let the vaguely moldy smell waft through your nostrils. Wonder whether this was the suit your kid wore on Monday. How is it still in here? You have emptied the backpack completely twice and partially twice, so you couldn't have missed it? Marvel at the mystery of the suit and the uncertainties of life.

Wonder whether the mildewy smell will come out in the wash.

**Gimp Bracelet (incomplete):** Observe the twisting strands of color. Individually, they are weak and monochrome, but working together, they are strong and vibrant. Ignore the clash of the colors and that one piece that's braided incorrectly, which could be fixed if you could just undo those last two stitches. Your kid would never know, and it would be fixed. But you would know. So you summon your strength to let the imperfection remain. (Probably.)

**A Feather:** Feel the feather's softness between your fingers. Then, feel the hand sanitizer you will need to remove the disgusting germs from them. What kind of bird was it? How high did it fly, and what summits did it soar over? Was it covered in mites? The feather, in repeated motion, has allowed the bird to fly. It also, in repeated motion, has been thrown out by you and retrieved by your kid. You will remember to bury it deeper in the trash next time.

**Half-Eaten Piece of Fruit:** Observe the squishy peach. Or possibly apple. No, it's definitely a peach. Your fingers squished through to the pit. Don't we all have a solid core within our pliable exterior? Shouldn't we all carry the seeds of the next generation within us?