



**INTRODUCTION
TO WRITING**

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1. INTRODUCTION TO WRITING

I strongly believe that anyone can be taught how to write. The only limitations are that of your own imagination. I can give you the elements of what is involved in putting a story together, but it is your imagination and determination to learn and develop the skills is what will help you to become as successful a writer as you want to be. Believe and have confidence in yourself, and your ability to express yourself, as this will be your driving force to succeed.

There is no set point for where you should start writing, only through experience and experimenting with different writing skills that you will learn to develop your own writing styles and find out what works and what doesn't work for you.

Expressing yourself becomes a very personal part of the writing process. YOU are the writer, the creator of your work. Don't let that scare you away from writing, instead, embrace it with both hands and learn to write for yourself, enjoying the processes of how to write, what to say and expressing what you want to say in many different ways. There are books or classes, which will help you to understand the concepts of the structures involved in writing.

So enjoy that creative space... don't think about doing it...JUST GO AHEAD AND DO IT!

If you happen to find yourself struggling about where to go to 'next', (otherwise known as writers block) or procrastination, don't be discouraged, all writers go through these phases. The best solution is to put your writing aside and do something completely different, go for a walk, swim, or even washing the car, and come back to it at another time. Sometimes having 'time out' may help resolve where you are 'stuck'. Answers will be shown to you if you allow yourself time to think through areas that you need help in.

Writers learn to set their own pace, but a good lesson is to write for even half an hour a day, to discipline yourself by doing it this way, you will find your story taking shape in no time at all. Writing is not a race to compete or complete by finishing your story by a certain time (unless some major publishing company has you under contract to complete you manuscript in a certain time period!).

The following may help put you into a more creative space, here are a few hints that may help you establish a writing routine:

- Ensure that you have allowed yourself enough time to do the exercises.
- Make sure you are in a comfortable and relaxed area to do the modules, not where the television or radio is blaring in the background, but I do find that listening to some relaxing music helps me to focus and concentrate. Do what works best for you. Work on it when your mind is clear and relaxed; make sure your surrounds are suitable to do the modules.
- Read through the material first and then set your mind thinking by putting yourself into the piece; ask yourself questions about the exercises. 'How would I handle such and such situation, question, conflict' etc? This should get your creative juices flowing.
- Try setting yourself a routine or timetable for writing. This will help build a more disciplined approach to writing, and the more you write, the better you become at writing

- If you have any questions or if you feel you have hit the proverbial 'brick wall', don't panic, just put it aside, go back to it at a later time, or contact me and we'll work through any dilemma you have with the writing. And remember, there is no right or wrong way- only your way!
- Learn as much as possible about the processes of writing.
- There are some good Internet research websites that can become an invaluable tool once you start the process of discovery, such as Google, Ask Jeeves, and MSN or Bing.etc.

2. HOW TO WRITE A SUCCESSFUL STORY

What is a “successful” story? One, which has been published, or one that has won a prize? Or is it simply a story, which communicates with all the clarity of which its writer is capable, the images and thoughts in their mind?

I suggest the last definition because from clarity the other two attributes of “success” are most likely to follow. The following strategies will help guide your own success at writing: -

a) Read Stories: -

Not only the traditional, with plot and conventional structure (e.g., Lawson, Morrison, Pritchard), and keep an open mind. Also read stories in modern genre and modes (Jolley, Moorhouse, stories in *AUSTRALIAN SHORT STORIES* or other literary magazines) look at different styles – magic realism post-modernism – read thoroughly!

b) Read “How to” Books:-

Preferably Australian. (See resources page on www.auswriters.com website for list of books).

c) Write about what you know:-

Which does not mean, write autobiography or non-fiction. It means use your life-experience, learning, memories and self as the material upon which your imagination works. This applies even to good science fiction, which must be founded on possible science.

d) Write from one point of view only:-

Novels, with their larger perspective, may encompass several points of view, portraying what all the main characters do, see, feel, and think. Short stories demand one person’s viewpoint, whether through a narrator (third person – he/she) or in the first person (I), although in many modern stories, the narrator endeavours to show several characters feelings and thoughts through their actions.

e) Show, Don’t Tell:-

Write with expression, avoid telling the reader, and instead try ‘showing’ the reader, such as:

“She looked nervous” (*Telling*)

“She paled and bit at her lower lip; her voice trembled”. (*Showing*)

f) Write Regularly: -

Better to write one hour a day, than ten hours when you can find the time. Practice in this case does make perfect. The more you write, the more you develop your voice, ‘style’ and also an understanding of how you write which helps to write more prolifically.

g) Don't overwrite: -

Be sparing of adjectives and adverbs. Strong verbs and nouns are more effective and do not need qualifiers, such as "She said angrily" but instead write, "She spat". Avoid "fancy" words and phrases, which have readers running for a dictionary and then lose interest in the story. Avoid using figures of speech and use similes and metaphors with care, use words and phrases, which are clear and effective, holding the readers interest.

h) Help save the language from Barbarians: -

Eliminate tautologies, clichés, incorrect grammar and all the other sins of the 'word'.

i) Pay special attention to: -**i. *Opening and closing paragraphs.***

The beginning must grab the reader's interest and impel them to read on. Avoid scene setting in your opening and the end must leave the reader satisfied it was indeed the close of the tale.

ii. *Dialogue*

Should be natural and serve a purpose in advancing the story, depicting/developing character, dramatising and enlivening. Read dialogue aloud. Better still; have someone else read it to you. Listen to how the speech flows in the story, and is similar to the speech of people in the real world.

j) Re-write assiduously:

Be your own severest critic. Read your work aloud, this is when you know there are words that don't 'move' with the story or doesn't seem to fit. Learn to trust your own judgment and re-write accordingly. Most re-writing involves cutting back on words, which is good as it tightens the storyline as well as preventing overwriting and the tendency to write long winded boring sentences.

k) Using senses for sensible writing: -

You may have heard some say, "Write about your *feelings*." While that is good advice, it may not be an easy task for every individual. A less threatening place to start might be with the senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. Using the senses is an excellent strategy for descriptive writing.

NOTE: DO NOT DO ANY EDITING BEFORE IT IS TIME!

It is important that you get down what you are trying to say, don't worry about content, context or any structure yet, write first, then go back and edit later. Enjoy that creative space. And be warned, you will be editing quite a lot, accept that as part of the process. Also don't become too 'attached' to your work, learn to look at it objectively as well as subjectively. Ask yourself questions about the piece, 'is it conveying what I want to say?' etc. Get feedback, that's the only way to progress.

And here are some words of wisdom from Mark Twain on how to write.

- “A tale shall accomplish something and arrive somewhere.
- The episodes of a tale shall be necessary parts of the tale, and shall help develop it.
- The personages in a tale shall be alive, except in the case of corpses, and always the reader shall be able to tell the corpses from the others.
- The personages in a tale, both dead and alive, shall exhibit a sufficient excuse for being there.
- When the personages of a tale deal in conversation, the talk shall sound like human talk such as human beings would be likely to talk in the given circumstances, and have discoverable meaning, also a discoverable purpose, and a show of relevancy, and remain in the neighbourhood of the subject in hand, and be interesting to the reader, and help out the tale, and stop when the people cannot think of anything more to say.
- When the author describes the character of a personage in his tale, the conduct and conversation of that personage shall justify said description.
- When a personage talks like an illustrated gilt-edged, tree-calf, hand-tooled, seven-dollar Friendship's offering in the beginning of a paragraph, he shall not talk like a Negro minstrel in the end of it.
- Crass stupidities shall not be played upon the reader by either the author or the people in the tale.
- The personages of the tale shall confine themselves to possibilities and let miracles alone; or, if they venture a miracle, the author must so plausibly set it forth as to make it look possible and reasonable.
- The author shall make the reader feel a deep interest in the personages of his tale and their fate; and shall make the reader love the good people of the tale and hate the bad ones.
- The characters in a tale shall be so clearly defined that the reader can tell beforehand what each will do in a given emergency.
- The author shall say what he is proposing to say, not merely come near it.
- He shall use the right word, not its second cousin.
- He shall eschew surplusage.
- He shall not omit necessary details.
- He shall avoid slovenliness of form.
- He shall use good grammar.
- He shall employ a simple, straightforward style”.

3. WRITERS TOOLBOX/RESOURCE KIT

It is important that you have a collection of self-help books to answer any queries that you may come up whilst you are writing. Writing is a lonely occupation and there is a learned discipline required to see a project finished. This can be one of the best feelings a writer can have. Here are some books that should become part of your writers 'toolbox'.

- A Dictionary
- A Thesaurus
- The current Style manual,
- Books on editing
- WWW.DICTIONARY.COM

(See the resources page on www.auswriters.com for books that can help you with your writing, also the message board area is set up for you to leave a note for the specific modules you are working on).

It is also important to stay informed within the writing industry and here are some organisations that can help you with the latest information. (details on these organisations are also on the resources page at auswriters.com).

Writer's organisations

- Join your local Writing organisations
- Join the Society of Editors, Authors and any other association that you feel will keep you in touch with other writers.
- In Australia, we have organisations such as the fellowship of Australian Writers, and The Victorian Writers Centre as well as The Melbourne Writers Festival.
- Writing websites, such as auswriters.com, that provides information for where to look for the different organisations, websites/links.

'Food for thought'

Next time you pick up a book to read, think about the structure of the story, how it starts, how the characters are introduced, how does the story flow. How do the characters interact with one another, do they use a lot of dialogue or movement to move the story along?

How does the writing make you feel? Is it good reading, are you able to keep up with the plot or story? Does it create an emotion, what is that emotion?

Analysing a thought, a sentence, an emotion, is the beginning of understanding how writers write.

Do you find some writers are stronger when they write plots, and some when they write using characters?

Before you start writing, understand that when you write you are subconsciously writing on both sides of the brain.

The best solution to writer's block is to write and the best way is to separate writing from editing. Make sure that you keep the two functions apart.

Check the list below to understand what each side of the brain controls.

LEFT (business side)

Sequential
Step-by-step
Analytical
Rational
Time-centred
Objective
Interested in details

RIGHT (creative side)

Simultaneous
Multiple
Intuitive
Timeless
Subjective
Wants overview
Notice patterns

RAPID WRITING – Letting the words spill out without stopping to correct or rearrange or critique – this is one way to keep the two functions apart.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

Find a medium that you are comfortable with when writing, such as a chair, and a position where there is light to read and write; a quiet 'spot' where you can escape into the realms of writing, letting your heart and hand guide you. Some writers are only able to write with a pen and paper, others with a computer, some people cannot edit from the screen and need hard copies to work from; only by writing will you find out what works and what doesn't work for you, it's like meditative therapy, unless you are comfortable and free from distraction, are you able to free your mind to write.