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Dear Reader

How long have you wanted to be a writer? Was it an urge to express your fervent imagination as a child that got you started, or a more mature need to channel your experience and wisdom into a creative outlet? Other than curiosity, it doesn’t really matter (all we care about here is that you realised your writing dreams at some point!), but a lot of coaches and tutors do advise you to put in your apprenticeship, learning to write with training wheels before attempting to take your work to a wider audience. For some that’s about learning the basics, from grammar all the way through to narrative structure, for others, it’s more a question of getting into the swing and finding your voice. And make no mistake, the sooner you start, the sooner you can take off those training wheels.

Here at Writing Magazine, we always do our utmost to encourage writers of all abilities and ages but we wanted to help you bring on the next generation of talent this month, with Bright Young Things (p.28). Maybe you have a child or grandchild who would enjoy a push in the write direction? But don’t let it stop there. All of our writing exercises and ideas every month could help writers young and old (and it works just as well for older readers to try those aimed at the young ones). So whatever your age and experience, cast about, try something different – don’t be shy or embarrassed. It’s all for your eyes only unless you want to share.

And hopefully, we can help a creative spark or two grow into a burning passion. So don’t wait for me… get writing!

Jonathan Telfer
Editor

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Esther Chilton is a freelance editor, tutor and writer who lives in Newbury, Berkshire. She has had hundreds of articles and short stories published in all sorts of magazines and newspapers. Esther is a tutor for Writers Bureau and helps other writers through her editing, proofreading and advice service. Her blog is full of writing tips and news for writers: https://esthernewtonblog.wordpress.com

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Britain seems to import ‘vaguely uplifting lifestyle buzzwords in large quantities’, said Theo Tait in The Week, recalling that back in 2016 it was all about hygge, a Danish word.

The Oxford Dictionaries defined this as ‘a quality of cosiness and comfortable conviviality that engenders a feeling of contentment and well-being’.

Then came the turn of lagom, a Swedish word for not too much, not too little, followed by the Japanese term tokimeku, meaning ‘heart aflutter’ and now South Korea’s nunchi, the art of intuiting what other people think, is heading this way.

Theo Tait said the Korean-American journalist Euny Hong’s book, The Power of Nunchi, is going to be bigger than hygge.

But Theo’s money is money on sisu, the Finnish sense of stoic determination, although he also has his eye on ataraxia, the Greek for ‘a state of serene calmness’.

Samantha Leach, writing in Glamour magazine, correctly described writer Danielle Steel as a phenomenon.

‘The author has written 179 books, which have been translated into 43 languages. 22 of them have been adapted for television, and two of those adaptations have received Golden Globe nominations.

Danielle Steel releases seven new novels a year, and her latest is The Dark Side.

Samantha says Danielle, 71, is at work on five to six new titles at all times. ’In 1989 Steel was listed in the Guinness Book of World Records for having a book on the New York Times bestseller list for the most consecutive weeks of any author – 381, to be exact. To pull it off, she works twenty to 22 hours a day. (A couple times a month, when she feels the crunch, she spends a full 24 hours at her desk.)’

Danielle, who has made some $375m from her writing, told Samantha: ‘Sometimes I’ll finish a book in the morning and by the end of the day I’ve started another project. I don’t go to bed until I’m so tired I could sleep on the floor.’
**Early thriller writer John Buchan remembered**

British and Commonwealth Forces on Facebook added a new photo of John Buchan to their album, *Age of Heroes*. John Buchan was known worldwide for *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915), featuring his own favourite hero Richard Hannay. The book was written in the vein of Erskine Childers’ *Riddle of the Sands* (1903) as a warning, but by the time it was published, the 1914-1918 war with Germany had started.

In 100 years the classic thriller has never been out of print. In all, John Buchan wrote more than 100 books and was a scholar, soldier, intelligence officer, antiquarian, barrister, colonial administrator, journal editor, literary critic, publisher, war correspondent, director of wartime propaganda, Member of Parliament and imperial proconsul.

Given a state funeral when he died on 12 February, 1940, he was a deeply admired and loved Governor General of Canada. He was survived by his wife Susan and their four children.

The John Buchan website is [www.johnbuchansociety.co.uk](http://www.johnbuchansociety.co.uk)

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**Poetry’s melting point**

Nobel Prize for Literature winner Seamus Heaney (1939-2013), explaining a ‘Defining Moment’, in the *Bloodaxe Book of Poetry Quotations*, edited by Dennis O’Driscoll:

‘Good poetry reminds you that writing is writing, it’s not just expectation or self-regard or a semaphore for self’s sake. You want it to touch you at the melting point below the breastbone and the beginning of the solar plexus. You want something sweetening and at the same time something unexpected, something that has come through constraint into felicity.’

---

**Tips from a master**

Advice from Frederick Forsyth, 81, for those who wish to follow him into the writing business…

The author of *The Day of The Jackal*, *The Odessa File* and *The Dogs of War* once advised: ‘Stick with the job you’ve got. Don’t jack in a perfectly good job that pays the rent, until, at least, you have your first one out, and in print, and you can judge whether you are going to be a professional novelist who can look after your family with what is earned as a novelist,’ he added.

‘A lot of people are one-novel writers, he said. Second, if you are going to write in your spare time - prepare. ‘Don’t have one smart idea that will actually occupy four sheets of paper; sit down and try and write 400 sheets about that one idea. Work out your story… There’s no way I could sit down at a typewriter when I don’t even know quite what’s going to happen.’

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**AND FINALLY**: ‘Michael Holroyd once told the Guardian: ‘What I really like is rewriting, but you cannot rewrite until you’ve already written, and that is terrible. And then rewriting the rewritten text, and so on, up to ten times, hoping always to get it shorter, more condensed, pack more energy into it. Even if it’s a sad thing, you want to get the essence of the most dolorous phrases and connect them in some way, [and] so in that way try to perfect something. You have the energy from the first draft, the momentum, the “go”, but then you try to shape it more.’
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We want to hear your news and views on the writing world, your advice for fellow writers – and don’t forget to tell us what you would like to see featured in a future issue...

Write to: Letters to the editor, Writing Magazine, Warners Group Publications plc, 5th Floor, 31-32 Park Row, Leeds LS1 5JD; email: letters@writersnews.co.uk. (Include your name and address when emailing letters. Ensure all letters, a maximum of 250 words, are exclusive to Writing Magazine. Letters may be edited.) When referring to previous articles/letters, please state month of publication and page number.

STAR LETTER

The longest wait?

We all know that editors are very busy people, so after sending out an article idea, how soon do we chase it up? Two weeks later? A month? Or should we just send it off and then move on to the next writing project, safe in the knowledge that if the editor wants our work, then they’ll get back in touch with us (hopefully soon)?

I once sent an article to a particular magazine as they accepted unsolicited manuscripts. I didn’t hear back so I sent a polite follow-up letter a short while later. When I didn’t hear back again, I presumed the editor wasn’t interested and so I worked on other pieces of writing for other magazines.

Thirteen years later, I received a letter in the post thanking me for my wonderful article and informing me that it was going to be featured in the magazine. It’s a shame it took him thirteen years to realise how wonderful my article was, but it was an unexpected sale and the pay was rather more than it was thirteen years ago.

I wonder if other readers can top that wait!

ESTHER CHILTON
Newbury, Berks

Screen your submission

I have just read the article Screen Dreams (WM, Oct), and feel I need to make some points with regards to the advice given on screen writing.

I have just returned to script writing after a sabbatical of five years caring for my father, but previously I have been shortlisted in the BBC Writers’ Prize and was a finalist in the Red Planet Prize, both for script writing. I was invited to be a part of a BBC Northern Writers’ Group based at Media City and was a shadow writer on two series of Paul Abbott’s C4 comedy-drama Shameless.

A production company would want to see that a script writer can construct a script showing real character development, great structure and recognisable story arcs. They would not consider, as suggested, a synopsis and sample scenes. If so the BBC Writersroom would not insist on full scripts for their submission windows, and the advice given runs contrary to all my experience with big, successful production companies.

Although I agree with many of the points in the article, including being very careful with regards to taking a long period of time off work, my best advice would be to finish at least three or four rigorous drafts of a full script before approaching any production or television company, or script writing competition.

PAUL ARISS
Prescot, Merseyside

Taking advantage of opportunities

I have subscribed to Writing Magazine for many years. Entering competitions gives me several deadlines to work to, without which I would procrastinate. I am sometimes envious of the new subscriber offers, but if I cancelled my subscription and missed an issue, I would miss an opportunity.

An opportunity like submitting to Gnome on Pig who have recently published my book, Dirthbag Danny. I also became aware of through Writing Magazine that there was an open submission to Silver Bow Publishing. This led to my new book Changelings being published.

So, my new subscriber offer envy has been truly squashed as my writing is becoming increasingly recognised and out there to be read by others, all thanks to Writing Magazine.

APRIL MILLER
Shelfield, Walsall

Stabilising writers

Adrian Magson’s Beginners article comparing riding a bike to writing (WM Sep) was very informative with a lot of good advice but he did forget one thing. However much we may wobble and almost fall off there’s something that’s stopping us. We have stabilisers in the form of the latest edition of the Writing Magazine packed full of good advice to keep us on track.

Now I’ve finished my very short emailed letter, I can safely take my cycling helmet off and press send.

DAVID WILLIAMS
Cwmystwyth, Ceredigion
Idea generation

Paul Perry’s letter, Reality takes bold (WM Oct) resonated with me. I have been an avid Radio 4 listener for years but only recently realised how ideas for stories can be generated from programmes. After hearing Science Stories where Naomi Alderman told the story of Lady Mary Montagu and her quest to bring smallpox inoculation to the west, I wrote a short play based on a fictional confrontation between Lady Montagu and her husband. From that play I developed a story, which gained third place in a competition on the theme ‘Experiment.’ Not stopping there, I realised how ideas for stories can be generated from programmes. I have been an avid Radio 4 listener for years but only recently but that’s where my work has stayed for half-written books, song lyrics and poetry, unnecessary paraphernalia that real writers monitor, books on writing, magazines, surrounded by oak furniture, a 23” TV, a fireplace and a log burner. I am in my spare-room-turned-office way to go but, thanks to Positivity not procrastination. I am taking the first tentative steps to becoming a ‘proper’ writer. I have a long list of competitions. I say, ‘competitions’ because there is no more stopping me! Leaving through my competition guide 2020, I am already circling upcoming competitions and planning my next submission. At last! I am taking the first tentative steps to becoming a ‘proper’ writer. I have a long way to go but, thanks to Writing Magazine, a fire has started deep inside of me.

CLAIREE BUCKLE
Southend-on-Sea, Essex

Family planning

As an amateur genealogist, I applauded Julie Phillips’ article Branching Out (WM Oct). Using this seam of research reveals a rich mine of information and inspiration. In my own research, I was surprised how many people emigrated to Canada in the first decade or so of the 20th century. More than 3 million escaped the pollution and rising unemployment that followed the Industrial Revolution’s boom years. What was more surprising was how many returned to the UK multiple times – visiting family, then returning to their new homes in Canada. These people weren’t necessarily wealthy, so the desire to keep in touch was strong. This of course provides so many opportunities for plot twists – cousins, siblings, even spouses reappearing with new stories to tell. Genealogy definitely provides an excellent resource for writers.

HELEN BAGGOTT
Sturminster Newton, Dorset

Self-set challenge

With the prospect of moving house and still having a thousand things to do, I was concerned that I might not find time to sit down every day and write; that my head would be too full of admin to allow space for flights of fancy, or professional posts, business by-lines and such-like. It has been a fraught experience getting to the point of moving and having got here, I want time out from anything that feels like work, but at the same time I don’t want to lose the discipline of getting to the keyboard every day. So I set myself a challenge: a daily date with my camera in my own garden. The plan is to take just one photograph of whatever I find out there and then to write about it. Because I struggle with succinctness, my other rule is to stay within the Twitter character limit, whether I post the result. The objective is merely to look closely at what is to hand, to see, to put it into words. And to do it day in, day out. For a year.

The objective is to develop the discipline of writing every day. Practice. I’m only a couple of weeks in and I’ve already missed one day, the day of the actual move – I’ll forgive myself that one. I’d be interested to know what writing challenges other readers have set themselves, and whether they’ve managed to live up to them.

LESLEY MASON
Norwich

Correspondence of course

I found Simon Elson’s article on letter writing (WM, Oct) very useful. I had a good spell with letters over past years - TV Quick (a few £5 for letters published and one £10 for the Star Letter!). Once in WM chasing the Writers’ & Artists’ Yearbook. However my ‘claim to fame’ – even though no ‘prize’ was won – was having my photo and letter on the virtues of the buddleia published in the Daily Mail (quite a few years ago). They had run an article on the effects of the plant to buildings. My letter was about the benefit of this plant to nature and how to look after it. So I think it’s time to start letter writing again – starting with this one.

MISS S M JONES
Crewe, Cheshire

Thank you, Simon Elson, for Gadgetise your writing (WM, Oct). Like you, I had caught the letter bug and had won numerous prizes over the years. I decided to give it a miss this year... until I read your piece. It has given me an incentive to continue with writing magazine fillers. Good luck with winning that Porsche.

JULIE DAY
London
School Visitor

Jo McCrum, head of Groups at the Society of Authors, coordinates the SoA Children’s Writers and Illustrators Group, and offers a guide to school visits.

Society of Authors President Philip Pullman said recently: ‘Very few authors write books in order to provide examples of “fronted adverbials”: we write in order to delight, to move, to entertain, to console. To give pleasure.’ He was commenting on the presentation of more than one hundred Reading for Pleasure Awards by SoA members to the schools they visit, to celebrate those schools’ commitment to children’s reading.

Visiting your young readers can be an incredibly rewarding experience and a great opportunity for direct contact with your audience. But before you brush up your performance and dust down your PowerPoint presentation, make sure you’ve thought through all the boring practicalities.

Schools are often inexperienced at arranging events and they’re under a great deal of financial pressure. Many of the problems we advise our members on stem from easily avoided confusion around expectations and expenses.

So, before you commit to a booking, don’t forget to think through the following:

Can you do it?

It’s easy to say yes to a gig – but is the visit feasible or financially viable given that you may lose more than a working day in travel and preparation? Have you signed an exclusivity clause with a literature festival that would prevent a school talk in the same area (we don’t recommend this, but it happens regularly)?

How far away is the school, what time do you have to arrive, and how much will it cost to get there? For example, will a hotel be offered if you need to stay overnight to arrive in time for a morning assembly? Can you charge for a taxi from the train station if the school is too far from any bus route? Who needs to approve your expenses and are there any limitations?

If travelling by car we suggest that you specify that you charge the HMRC-recommended mileage rate of 45p a mile well as any additional parking costs (don’t expect that you will be given designated parking). If a school baulks at costs, or it’s not worth your travelling for a single session, discuss whether there are other schools in the area that may want to share a visit along with related costs.

What are you required to do?

Does the school know your work? This might seem too obvious a question to ask, but don’t assume anything. Check that schools know what age you write or illustrate for and whether the pupils are likely to be familiar with your titles.

Talking YA to a mixed age assembly is not easy – nor is addressing year 7s who have never heard of you.

Discuss, ideally by phone, what the school is looking for in an event: for example, is it to tie-in with the curriculum or to energise reluctant readers? What number of talks will you do in a day to what age-group and what size of audience? Confirm what art or technical equipment you (and pupils) are going to need.

Ask whether any pupils have any special needs or problems of which you should be aware. Work out whether you are going to need lunch or breaks away from staff and pupils to prepare for your next session. If so, make those requirements clear to your hosts.

Fees and payment

If there’s a fee involved, after agreeing your rate confirm whether VAT applies if you’re VAT registered, your payment terms, and where to send your invoice (this might not be the teacher or librarian booking you). Stipulate how and when you are to be paid – ensure you are to be paid as a freelancer and not off-the-roll as salaried staff, as it can be extremely difficult to recover tax once it has been deducted.

The ‘beast from the east’ snowed off many World Book Day visits in March 2018, so it is wise for your terms and conditions to address cancellation fees and timings. With unavoidable circumstances we’d suggest rearranging the date and being reimbursed for pre-paid expenses; but for cancellations within the school’s control you ought to be reimbursed any incurred expenses and paid in full if the event is cancelled within six weeks (50% if the event is cancelled earlier).

And if it’s you who needs to cancel, we would recommend that a fee is not charged and that you reimburse the school if they have pre-paid expenses.

Paperwork

Take a mobile number for your contact so that you can call them if there are any problems, but make sure you’ve worked out exactly what you should bring before you set off. Waving your book jacket photo to prove who you are at reception won’t suffice if staff expect to see your passport and Disclosure Bar ming Service (DBS) certificate.

Many schools erroneously think DBS clearance is essential, but it’s not required for one-off supervised visits; only for regular and frequent visits to schools. However, public liability insurance is usually required by schools/local education authorities. Individual policies can be expensive, but group policies – like the one offered to Society of Authors members – should give you everything you need.

Book sales

Not all schools will allow books to be sold and this can be a deal-breaker for some authors.

Check that your visit will not clash with a school book fair and confirm whether you or an independent bookseller will sell books.

If it’s you, it’s worth asking whether a member of staff can help with sales, to free you up to sign the books. Some schools will be happy to circulate promotional material in advance or book order forms post-event.

Media

If you do not want to be photographed or recorded during a talk then stipulate this at the outset as well as before your session(s). Many children get distracted if they know they are being recorded or photographed, so this is not unreasonable. You may also want to check if local press are going to be present. Hopefully, the school will be courteous enough to tell you this anyway.

Most visits run smoothly, but it is wise to issue some terms and conditions or a letter of agreement in advance.

You can find a range of more detailed relevant advice (including advice on setting fees and guidance for schools) in the Guides section of the SoA website.
An American editor friend of mine, in the process of describing some particularly labyrinthine processes of corporate publishing life sighed and said: ‘It’s a publishing meeting: no one gets to leave until everyone’s unhappy.

It’s hard not to feel, whichever outcome you’d prefer, that Brexit is decidedly similar.

But while publishing as a whole is about as remain as you could possibly imagine – I only know of one ‘out’ Brexiteer in the business – there is remarkably little anxiety industry wide.

However that may be because no one has really looked at the small print. Sam Jordison, MD of Norwich-based indie Galley Beggar Press raised some serious concerns about the potential bureaucratic burden placed on publishers by a new regulatory regime but it’s hard to say how well founded those fears are, or of course how far they will relate to what eventually actually transpires.

Certainly, no publisher I know of is battening down the hatches because of Brexit. There seems as good a chance as any that people will read more in these uncertain times than otherwise.

Indeed, serious non-fiction is having a good period at the moment because people are looking for a counterbalance to the fake news and conspiracies they find so much of on the internet, part of which is of course fuelled by Brexit.

And as far as our own foreign rights team at Sheil Land, while they are somewhat mortified by the politics of Brexit and also worried about the new regulatory climate they will have to operate in, the nuts and bolts of European publishers buying rights in books published in the UK remains broadly unaffected.

One of the things it will be fascinating to see is whether there will be any market for post-Brexit books. Whatever the actual outcome, there will be a significant number of politicians and commentators eager to tell the story of what actually happened.

Undoubtedly one of these will do quite well, but I really do wonder how interested anyone will be to pick over the bones of the most exhausting and divisive political process in living memory.

But then I tend to think that about political memoirs in general. Unless they are genuinely entertaining – which is almost unheard of – or genuinely important figures: almost as rare, does anyone really think that politicians are going to say anything of any real worth in a book?

The David Cameron memoir is a case in point – he’s an important figure, for pretty negative reasons largely – but the chances of him saying anything really insightful or even all that truthful, let alone, god help us, anything entertaining or funny in his book are very slim and, outside of Conservative party activists and political journalists, is there anyone who actually cares what his version of events was beyond a few of the choicest soundbites?

Mind you, for the £800,000 he is rumoured to have been paid, I doubt he cares all that much either. 🍀
How often have you read a book and thought there was too much ‘telling’? Or perhaps it lacked pace? Maybe the characters weren’t convincing enough? We can often see a problem with others’ stories and writing, but when it’s our own, precious story that we’ve spent months, or years, lovingly creating and cultivating, it’s hard to step back and to be objective.

As a freelance editor, that’s where I step in and help. I work with authors on books in all sorts of genres and it’s surprising how the same issues come up again and again. Here the common problems are explained, together with some tips on how to tackle them.

An overloaded opening
You know what it’s like – your head’s full of ideas (yes, you may be a planner and have written a thorough chapter-by-chapter outline, but you’re still keen to type those first few words) and you just want to get started. So it’s easy to let the writing and characters run away with you. Before you know it, you’ve told the reader all about your main protagonist, including how many GCSEs they got, their recurring tonsillitis problems and how their Aunt Ethel is a medium.

So, by the end of the first chapter, your reader is left thinking – where on earth’s the story? They might persevere with your book and find out that there is a story, and a good one, but many won’t. You don’t want them to put your book down and switch to another after the first few chapters.

Yes, backstory is important. But it can come later. It’s far more effective to add in snippets of background detail as you develop the story. Your novel opening should be all about hooking your reader’s interest. Shock them, intrigue them, make them want to find out what happens next.

Lack-lustre characters
As the author, you may very well know exactly what your characters look like, together with what makes them tick, and what influences they’ve had upon their lives. But does that come across in your book? If the reader feels the author doesn’t even know their own characters intimately, how will the reader invest in them and come to care enough about them to read the book?

I’ve known several of my author friends to cry when they finish a book as they don’t want their relationship with their characters to end. They see their characters as friends and live and breathe them the whole time they’re writing their books. You need to know your characters inside out and to feel them.

Write in-depth character biographies for all your characters, even the minor ones. What motivates them? What are their goals? Think about their physical characteristics, as well as their personalities. What about their mannerisms? We all have them, from the way we might chew a lip if we’re thinking, to tapping our fingers if we’re feeling impatient, to pacing back and forth if we’re talking on the phone. Don’t forget dialogue. Do your characters have certain ways they say things? Names they call people, like ‘mate’? Have they got a deep voice? An accent? Paying attention to the little details brings your characters to life.

No sense of place
As a reader, you want to be taken right to the scene so you see the story and the characters unfold before you. You may have an image of the scene in your mind, as you write your book, but if the reader can’t see it too, then the book and the characters in them won’t come to life. You don’t need passages and passages of purple prose.
and it doesn’t need to read like a travelogue, but you do need to create a vivid picture in the mind.

Think about using the different senses – sight, sound, smell, taste and touch. I always find it helps to put myself in the character’s shoes and to imagine what my character is seeing, or hearing, or smelling and so on. If I was describing a scene where my character is at the beach, for example, I might write about the crash of the waves rolling in to shore and the sharp screech of seagulls squabbling over a half-eaten sandwich as well as the salty tang of the seaweed. If my character is in a rundown café, I could describe the smell as being a mixture of sweaty training shoes and over-fried chips. The menu may be caked in sticky sauce and clammy mashed potato. The tea might taste like stagnant water. Notice how already you feel as if you’re there, with the character, in each scene, experiencing it for yourself.

Overexplaining

There’s a fine balance between not informing the reader enough so that they’re confused as to why something is happening or overdoing it so you’re spelling every little thing out for them and not allowing them to make the connections for themselves.

If you’ve set the scene correctly, you shouldn’t need to explain to your reader why your character then behaves a certain way. For example, if your character has just committed a murder, he may be wearing gloves. You don’t need to explain he was wearing gloves so that his fingerprints wouldn’t be picked up on the murder weapon. Or if your character has just found out the man she loves has been cheating on her, and bags up all his belongings and throws them out in the street, the reader doesn’t need to be told she’s behaving this way because she’s hurt and angry and thought they were going to be together forever.

Overexplaining interrupts the flow of the story. Let the story and characters unfold for themselves. Readers are intelligent and can keep up.

Too much tell and not enough show

This leads us into ‘show not tell’, where you can find yourself telling the reader what happened to a character, or what went on in a scene or what someone said, rather than showing it.

Here’s an example: Sally turned away from him. Kevin was outraged and struggled to keep his anger under control. He couldn’t believe she was doing this to him. Sally turned back to him and gave him a mouthful. It was over.

A way to show this scene unfolding is to add in some dialogue, character thoughts and to let the characters reveal the scene:

‘Don’t you dare turn away from me!’ Kevin forced his clenched fists to remain at his side. She’ll change her mind in a minute. She has to.

Sally swung round. “I’ll do what I damn well like. You don’t own me. In fact, you’re nothing to me. I never want to see you again.”

Leaving your reader satisfied

Finishing a novel and typing ‘The End’ is a wonderful feeling. Not everyone can write a book, so it’s a fantastic achievement on its own. But what about the ending itself? After your reader has gone on the roller coaster ride of a journey along with the characters, and read that final word, you want them to sit back and think, “what a great book, I must tell my friends about it.” Hopefully they’ll have felt entertained by your story the whole way through, so the ending shouldn’t be the be-all and end-all, but you don’t want to leave your reader feeling disappointed. You want to leave them feeling good and eager to get hold of your next book.

A book doesn’t need to end happily. An ending that shocks or is poignant ensures your story stays with your reader for some time. Neither does your book need to be tied up in a neat little bow. With an open ending, the reader can unleash their imagination and decide how your story finishes for themselves.

Your book may end with a twist. Make it a credible one, ie the clues must be there in the story. If the twist comes from nowhere your reader will feel cheated and that you’ve been deliberately keeping things hidden.

Mistakes

We all make mistakes, especially when we’re so immersed in our work, even if it’s just the odd missing comma or apostrophe. But sometimes it’s more than that. You may have wrestled over calling one of your lesser characters Linda or Lesley. Linda may have won, but somewhere in your mind, Lesley is still there and finds herself creeping into the book, pushing Linda out the way so before you know it, you’ve changed this character’s name half-way through the book.

Other simple mistakes include using the wrong word, for example, ‘hear’ when you mean ‘here’, or ‘their’ instead of ‘they’re’ or ‘there’. There’s also the tendency to overuse words like ‘then’ and ‘that’.

Tip

As you’re writing your book, always think location, location, location!

Tip

Avoid adverbs – words like ‘really’ ‘very’, ‘quickly’, ‘slowly’ and many more often slip into our writing to ‘tell’ the reader.

Tip

As you’re writing, ask yourself, will the reader still understand what’s going on if I take this explanation out? If the answer is yes, take it out.

Tip

Set your work aside for a few days and then read it through with ‘fresh’ eyes. Tense changes, missing words, etc, are easier to spot this way.

You want your novel to be the best it can be so hopefully you’ve found these tips and advice useful whether you’re developing your novel before sending it out to an editor first, directly to an agent/publisher or self-publishing your work.
After two years of rejected ideas, I have finally settled on an idea for a novel that excites me. I am at the earliest stage – perhaps the most exciting stage, when anything is possible and the idea needs to grow into the essential ingredients that will make a novel possible.

Before I start writing, I need primary characters, research detail, potential scenes, themes and a rough idea of possible storylines. Out of this small handful will grow a plot and chapters. It’s a process I’ve followed for all of my previous books and one that I know works. Let’s look at how it proceeds.

The research
A novel can grow out of anything. A character. A story. A location. A theme. A genre. In my case, the catalyst was a particular historical monument. As soon as I began to think about this place, characters, storylines and themes immediately began to arise and I knew I’d found my next seed even before doing a minute of research.

The research, however, would be essential. It would supply a depth and range of possibilities that my imagination probably couldn’t. The cliché is correct: truth is usually stranger than fiction. Thus, I set about reading anything I could find about my monument in online newspaper archives and in full-text, public-domain books available through Google Books and other free book archives such as Archive.com.

Immediately, the history of my chosen building started generating a catalogue of fascinating facts, interesting occurrences, intriguing characters and thematic avenues. I jotted it all down in a notebook – just disconnected bits and pieces that I knew I would be able to use. When I got to the point where I was finding the same information, I realised I had probably exhausted the available sources. It was enough.

The selection
It’s a common error to try to use everything you’ve found in the research stage. Indeed, I found a 19th-century novel that had tried to do exactly that and ended up a shambolic mess: a melange of encyclopaedic gatherings and a thin plot to hold it together.

The aim, however, is to sort through the research for building materials. Which characters suggest themselves? Some will be historically or factually necessary; others will be critical to story (protagonist, competitor, ally). Which scenes would be most stimulating to read? The research will usually have suggested at least ten scenes, which can be distributed throughout the book as chapters (opening scene, mid-point apogee, climactic action scene).

Most importantly, threads of story will have started to form at the research stage – ways in which apparently unrelated things might be connected. Why did a man fall from the building in 1844? What started the fire in 1873? How can I use the secret passage built in 1812? The aim is not to tell the true story of the monument but to glean all

Author James McCreet reveals the very start of the novel-writing process: the idea and its growth.
of the most exciting information about it and make a new story. I might even forget the actual building altogether and fictionalise the place so I don't get hung up on narrating a real history. Imagine a novel's structure as a bare frame or skeleton. It has a first chapter, a middle chapter and a final chapter. The first twenty per cent or so introduces characters and storylines. The final twenty or thirty per cent accelerates to the climax. It has one or more storylines developing in steps chapter by chapter. Each chapter should be made up of a scene or scenes. It's a case of sorting the research material into the most promising or suitable parts of the notional frame.

I should say that the method works equally well in non-historical novels. The purpose of research is to gather materials for story building and fuel for the imagination. However creative we are, it's hard to conjure an entire world from the imagination. However creative we are, it's hard to conjure an entire world and its characters out of nothing. We need stimuli and catalysts.

The construction

I'm at this stage now. The first step is to roughly allocate scenes. I know I need a really engaging scene in the first chapter – something that will hook the reader into the story and establish both character and tone. I know I need a dramatic conclusion that the story will build towards and which will have the reader turning pages. I know I need a pivotal central scene in which something changes the stakes or flips the story.

Fortunately, I have these scenes from my research and so I pencil them into a sketch of the structure. The first chapter will be a dramatic near-death experience of our protagonist. The middle scene will be the grandiloquent visit of a dignitary. The final scene will be a fire caused by an electrical storm. I have three dots on a dot-to-dot line.

Next, I spend some time thinking about the most promising characters from the research and I begin to fictionalise. What is their background? What is their motivation? What might happen to them and how might they be related? The research has already given me parameters for the kind of lives they lived and what their duties were.

These character notes help me to further allocate scenes, and to slot these scenes into the framework. In turn, various scenes suggest patterns for the characters. For example, a scene in which a young child falls from the monument allows me to put my character with her and suffer greatly from regret when he can't save her. An account of a robbery at the monument allows me to make my character the victim, or the investigator, or the witness.

Essentially, it's a complex but entertaining game. It's literary Lego. I have a number of pieces – different sizes, different colours – and my job is to put them together as something recognisable and functional. Because the whole story is based in fact and in research, it will ring true to the reader and be a bonus (people like to learn new things.)

The fine tuning

Until now it's been a case of building blocks. The next stage is weaving finer strands between blocks. I've used as much of the research material as I can; now imagination and technique take over. It might even be a good idea to start discarding some of the more arcane or pedantic discoveries (does the reader really care whether the façade is made of rusticated Portland stone?)

What's necessary now is a keener understanding of what makes any book tick: how chapters flow into or relate to each other, how pace ebb and flows, how conflict or jeopardy keep the reader reading. Each scene or chapter I've identified must have a purpose. Each character must have a trajectory and a reason. As these things accrue, they generate more questions.

For example, what purpose or significance might the visit of the dignitary have in the middle chapter? By now, I might be ready to conjecture story possibilities when previously it was merely a nice descriptive set-piece scene. If I use the scene of the little girl falling to her death, who was she? Might there be a connection to one of the other characters?

Slowly, the dots begin to appear on the dot-to-dot line that is the narrative. Chapters are fleshed out with notes and suggestions. Character threads extend and connect. It's all still a game of combination and interweaving, though not a word has been written. There's no pressure of time. You can see the plot coming together piece by piece and there's no need to be committed to any of it. If you think of a better idea, just cross out a line or two (rather than tens of thousands of wasted words).

The writing document

At the end of this process, I'll have a simple document in which my projected chapters are laid out in order. Each chapter will contain a few notes about what will happen regards story and the character, as well as any research notes I'll need for description or context. It is the only document I will need until the novel is finished.

More chapters may be added. Chapters may also be cut or joined, but the basic structure of the book is roughly laid out before I start. Such foresight allows me to have greater control over such things as tension, pace, conflict, revelation and character arcs. I know what's going to happen next (or in seven chapters) so I can begin to lay the groundwork for those events.

If at any stage my characters decide to go their own way, or if I think of a better story development, I can just pencil in a note in the chapters I've yet to write.

This is, admittedly, a process that takes some practice and focus. But it has allowed me to write my last ten novels in a single draft and with a consistent daily word count. First you find your seed. Then you nurture it. Then it'll start growing of its own accord.
In December last year, a report from Women’s Aid revealed that a woman is killed by her partner or former partner every four days. This is one of the reasons why Platform Seven, the new novel by Louise Doughty, has such a powerful impact. It’s domestic noir of the finest order: a powerful and haunting contemporary novel tackling domestic abuse with riveting insight.

Platform Seven, with its themes of gaslighting and coercive control, is Louise’s ninth novel. Louise gives each book she writes a unique spin – and the twist in this particular tale is that her psychological thriller is narrated by a ghost. Lisa is Louise’s first ghost narrator. ‘I’d never done a narrative like that before. I was intrigued by the idea of writing a ghost who was pure consciousness – she’s not a poltergeist, she can’t throw things around or walk through walls. She has no physical form but she can read people’s minds. Not only does she tell her own story, but she’s the omniscient narrator of other people’s stories.’

Louise Doughty always brings genre-defying twists to her novels, this time a supernatural take on domestic noir, as Tina Jackson discovers.
“I’m a big fan of the creative writing course – I’m a product of it. It’s bizarre to suggest that you can’t teach any form of technique. Nobody expects to be able to pick up a cello and be able to play Bach. It’s the same with the novel. Of course there’s a question of innate ability but if you’ve got it there’s still an immense amount to learn."

Deciding what Lisa was able to do – and not do – was crucial to determining how Louise would tell her story. ’It was quite hard deciding what powers she would have, because that influenced the narrative,’ she says. ’If she’d been a poltergeist and able to move objects and communicate with people, there wouldn’t have been much of a story.’

Researching Platform Seven meant a return to Peterborough Station for Louise. ’I spent a lot of time at Peterborough Railway Station!’ she laughs. ’I spent some nights there – it’s a very creepy place after dark. I was there on a freezing cold November night with mist sweeping across the tracks and a lone fox trotting along, and a freight train passing through. I’m really interested in the underbelly of all our lives, the night jobs, the secret jobs, the holding places where the infrastructure of our lives takes place.’

Louise has a warm, energetic presence, talks freely and laughs easily. Her books, though, show another side, interrogating various aspects of human darkness from the Romani holocaust (Fires in the Dark) to infidelity and murder in the international bestseller 2013’s Apple Tree Yard and the Indonesian genocide in Black Water (2016).

’All my books have darker sides,’ she says, laughing. ’My accountant says, you write such dark books but you’re so friendly. In novels we can live these alternative existences and darker lives.’

Although each of her books is different, they have themes in common. ’Probably people leading secret lives – lives that are not obvious to those around them. And secret selves, and self deception. How people develop a narrative of their lives. And moral ambiguity – the idea of people not being wholly good, or wholly bad.’

Matthew, Lisa’s boyfriend in Platform Seven, is a case in point: a morally ambiguous character rather than a straightforward bad guy or bully. In his private life he’s controlling and manipulative, but in his working life he’s a busy, conscientious hospital doctor. ’We are much more sophisticated now in the way we perceive relationships and how men who can be so outwardly charming and respectable can be manipulative and controlling,’ Louise says. ’It’s not as simple as good guys and bad guys – it’s a lot more complicated than that.’

She created Matthew in response to where Lisa was in her life at the time she met him. ’I had a very strong sense of Lisa and who she was. I decided she was 36 when she died, and I remembered the pressures on a woman of that age – finding a partner, settling down, having babies. So it was about creating a man who was ostensibly very eligible – a doctor – but who had a darker side.’

Louise is known for nuanced, layered storytelling, and for blurring the boundaries between genres: in the case of Platform Seven, it’s ghost story, domestic noir and contemporary literary fiction.

’I always end up mixing it up a bit,’ she says. ’I don’t think anything I write is a straight anything. The comments that have pleased me most about my work are that it’s different. Nothing I’ve written falls into easily definable categories – I try to put considerations of genre to one side and write the novel I want to write. It’s not really a conscious decision, I’m simply telling the story that’s uppermost in my mind. I’m loving that the domestic noir form is popular at the minute.’

She’s always loved ghost stories. ’I love the traditional ones like Turn of the Screw, and even things like Scooby-Doo. They’re such rich material, ripe for so many possibilities. I wouldn’t have written a country house story – I’m much more likely to write a ghost in a car park.’ Lisa is Louise’s take on what kind of ghost might be relevant to 21st century life. ’She’s different because she has no memory and the main process of discovery is about what happened when she was alive. She’s a corpse and a detective at the same time. It’s gothic in a very modern sense – but Jane Eyre was domestic noir.’

Psychological thrillers are the contemporary manifestation of a genre of women’s literature that goes back to the 19th century, and includes a beloved classic that, on re-reading, is less about doomed romance and more about abusive relationships. ‘Wuthering Heights! I love it but it changes according to what age you
are when you read it,’ says Louise. ‘There’s so much complexity there and you read it so differently when you’re a middle-aged woman – it’s dark and complicated. There’s this perceived romance about it, but the text is very clear how dark and dangerous and violent it is. I think it’s really a book about how violence begets violence and how if you fail to nurture a child they will grow up to do that to other people. It’s a book that you fail to nurture a child they will grow up to do that to other people.

Louise is now well established as a successful writer, cultural commentator and teacher of creative writing – her 2007 book, A Novel in a Year: A Novelist’s Guide to Being a Teacher of Creative Writing, was based on her column in the Telegraph. But she well remembers what it was like being both a creative writing student, and then a struggling unpublished novelist.

‘I do think you can teach creative writing,’ she says. ‘I’m a big fan of the creative writing class, Romani roots has appeared in two recent Unbound anthologies: Common People and Others. ‘There is a real sense

Her next novel, Stone Cradle (2006), was her second Romani novel. It’s the most personal of all her books, and if she had to pick a favourite, it’s that one. ‘I have a secret fondness for Stone Cradle because that’s my family history. It’s driven by what I know of my family history. It’s about people who are long dead and gone by what I know of my family history. It’s driven by what I know of my family history. It’s driven by what I know of my family history.

It was the first of her novels to deal with the history of the Romani people and her own family history. ‘I still think of my first three novels as early work,’ she says. ‘I think I really moved up a gear with Fires in the Dark. That’s when I started to reach beyond my own experience and take a big imaginative leap. That’s the book where I reached beyond what I’d done before. It was important for me to write that book – it was always there, and something I’d get round to once I was mature enough to handle the subject.’

Her first three books, Crazy Paving (1995), Dance With Me (1996) and Honey-Dew (1998) were well received women’s fiction, but her writing shifted in focus and intensity with the publication, in 2003, of Fires in the Dark, which dealt with the Nazi holocaust as it happened to a group of nomadic Roma from Czechoslovakia. It was the first of her novels to deal with the history of the Romani people and her own family history. ‘I still think of my first three novels as early work,’ she says. ‘I think I really moved up a gear with Fires in the Dark. That’s when I started to reach beyond my own experience and take a big imaginative leap. That’s the book where I reached beyond what I’d done before. It was important for me to write that book – it was always there, and something I’d get round to once I was mature enough to handle the subject.’

She’s a big fan of entering writing competitions. ‘My breaks came though a couple of competitions,’ she says. ‘I had a short story that was a runner-up in the Ian St James Award, and a radio play that was also a runner-up. I’m a big fan of entering writing competitions. I got a couple of real breaks and having an enforced deadline is a real motivator. I entered lots – certainly double figures. I entered more or less everything that was going, over a period of several years.’

Her efforts paid off, and she ended up with a publishing contract – and a healthy sense of having served a necessary apprenticeship.

‘The first novel I published was my third novel – there are two that never saw the light of day. There was a lot of bad writing I had to get out of my system before I hit my stride. A doctor or solicitor or accountant takes six, seven years to learn and I needed that time to teach myself as a writer. It takes years and years and years to learn and thousands of words before I started to write the good ones.’

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Louise hasn’t written any more Romani novels but her writing on her working class, Romani roots has appeared in two recent Unbound anthologies: Common People and Others. ‘There is a real sense
that the writing world and publishing world should be doing a lot better on diversity. But the general trend in society is away from understanding other people – different cultures and ethnicities. I've been pleased and proud to contribute to both these anthologies.

After *Stone Cradle*, Louise began to write edgy contemporary stories about the darker aspects of women's lives. 'I'm not sure where the shift came from to contemporary psychological thrillers. With *Whatever You Love* (2010), my older daughter had reached the age where she could leave home on her own, which is nerve-wracking for a parent. So it was the fear of letting go – and I think books come from whatever is possessing you at the time, in a bad or a good way.'

This is a key element to her method, but it's not deliberate. 'My books evolve very organically. I don't sit down and plot and plan in advance. I just throw myself in. I can't draw up a plot in isolation. Ideas will form out of a scene I'm already writing. So I always do whatever pops into my head. I think a lot about characters, and what that character might want to do. It's a very haphazard method.'

Louise may have a free-form approach to creating a first draft, but she's rigorous about the editing process. 'I guess the organisation comes later. It's when I've got 70% of a first draft written in a chaotic mode that I think, you have to sit down and impose a certain order. You have to be ruthless about cutting.'

With Lisa in *Platform Seven*, the hardest part was to write the flashback sequence. 'That's the part where she finds out about her own life,' says Louise. 'It was a question of, should it appear in sections? In the end it made sense for it all to be in one section.'

Bringing her characters to life is the part of writing that's difficult for her to explain. 'I can explain how I can construct a plot or a sentence, but voice is a mystery. It presents itself and you go with it.'

Many of her books feature a female first-person narrator. 'Black Water' is a male, third person perspective but the female first person comes most naturally to me and it would be silly to ignore that. I quite enjoy the sardonic, slightly wry voice that some of my female narrators have. I don't feel that voice is restrictive at all – we're half the population and women's stories can be universal too. The majority of book buyers are women. There are universal truths that apply to different sorts of people.'

Using a first-person narrator is a useful way to control what the reader knows. 'With first person, you can only tell your reader what that person will know. With Lisa, the ability to read minds was useful.'

She says there are ways around every narrative problem. 'In *Apple Tree Yard* Yvonne imagines a scenario that's going on – it's not an objective truth but it's a way of taking your reader into a different world.'

The most important thing for a writer, she believes, is to be true to the story. 'The main thing is to write the story you want to write to the best of your ability, and not worry about things like genre or if it will sell or where you'll fit in. You can't anticipate where you'll fit in because fashions change. Writing comes from what you're passionate about – and what you love reading. If you love reading dystopias, write dystopias. Same with romance. Write where your passions lie.'

And stay focused on the task in hand. 'Try to put aside the white noise – anxiety about getting published, about book sales. All of that can be quite a damaging distraction.'

Louise follows her own advice, feeding her passions and interests into her fiction. 'I'm passionate about women's lives. The way women are often judged to a different set of criteria to men. *Apple Tree Yard* is about how a woman's morality is judged by the yardstick of her sexual morality. I'm passionate about story. I like telling stories. I like creating a whole invented world that wouldn't exist if I hadn't conjured it into being. To take a reader by the hand and lead them into this world.'

‘You can’t anticipate where you’ll fit in because fashions change. Writing comes from what you’re passionate about – and what you love reading.

If you love reading dystopias, write dystopias. Same with romance. Write where your passions lie.’
I have always loved writing and as a child I would spend many a weekend/school holiday plotting characters and scenes. Later on as a young adult I began writing my first full-length novel but never completed it.

‘When I was about 27, I studied for a degree in Psychology and Criminology which took five years to complete in between looking after my first child. By this point I had already begun the outline of, what was then, a family saga. In 2013 once I had what I thought was a completed novel, I began to send it out to agents. The working title caught the attention of Amanda Preston at LBA Books who suggested I change the genre to a psychological thriller with an unreliable narrator – something that was trending at the time due to the popular Gone Girl book.

‘I took her advice and rewrote the book, with the same title and general concept. Since then the title has changed twice more. I always knew that the book needed to be darker than it was in its current state. By this point I’d had my second child and life was getting a little busier. By the time I sent the manuscript back to Amanda, it wasn’t something she was looking to represent at that time. In all honesty, I knew the book just wasn’t ready still. I was and still am forever grateful to her for giving me the push I needed to be brave and to write in a genre I had no experience in.

‘I spent a few more years whilst raising two kids and working, occasionally going back to the book and tweaking bits here and there. But what I really needed was an agent to support me through the next steps of my journey to publication. ’In December 2016 I was working in a terrible job as a marketing manager. It was the epitome of every clichéd office environment including zero flexibility for a mum with two kids, now pregnant with a third! I made a decision there and then I would never go back to a normal job again. I needed to be a writer.

‘I ramped up my work on the book, editing furiously whenever I could and sending it out to agents. I created a vision board. In the centre was a mock-up of my book in print so I could look at it every day. I had a few more interested parties who requested the full manuscript, who then sent it off for further re-reads and so on, only to turn me down.

‘In September 2018 I received another request for my full manuscript from The Kate Nash Literary agency. Next came the “phone call” and then the meeting in London, which I left as a represented author. Together with my agent Lina Langlee, over the next six months, we polished up the manuscript and it was sent out to publishers. Three offers came back and in February 2019 I accepted a book deal with Boldwood. They had such a strong pitch and shared my vision.

‘I am so thrilled to be published by Boldwood and to be working with Nia, my editor. I knew I would get there eventually. I’m already working on books two and three and I can say life as an author is everything I dreamed of and more.’

Website: www.ninamanningauthor.com
As a new fiction publisher accepting both agented and unsolicited manuscripts, at Boldwood Books we have been overwhelmed with support and enthusiasm from the writing community since we launched on 1 February. So it does take something special to stand out from the crowd.

‘On my first day at the new office, I received a submission from Lina Langlee (Kate Nash Literary Agency) – *The Daughter In Law*, a contemporary psychological thriller from debut author Nina Manning. I had already come across Nina on social media (always a good sign!) through her podcast, Sniffing The Pages. The pitch from Lina was compelling, and within a couple of days she already had interest from other publishers – another good sign…

‘It’s worth flagging here how valuable it is to have a commercial hook to your novel. Not only does it help when pitching to a publisher, but it is vitally important when it comes to marketing, especially in such a competitive marketplace. Just from the pitch for *The Daughter In Law* I could visualise a striking package that would get readers talking.

‘At Boldwood we are committed to bringing excellent storytelling to a global audience, so this is a major consideration for me. *The Daughter In Law* is a vivid, gripping page-turner but it also touches on universal themes that will resonate with a wide audience – family, love and grief. This, coupled with a memorable, sinister voice in an eerie, claustrophobic setting meant that Nina’s novel jumped off the page.

‘We want to invest in our authors and build long-term partnerships together. I was delighted to offer a three-book contract to Nina. She is going to be a future star of this genre and we’re thrilled to have her as part of our Boldwood launch list.’

Nia Beynon
Publisher at Boldwood Books
Learning to think visually is a valuable skill for a writer, says Adrian Magson

We have become, by evolution or accident, a more visual society. Or maybe we’re returning to the time before print, when people had to rely on what they saw before their eyes. Either way, increasingly over the years, we’ve become reliant more on seeing images in place of words. (Can’t think why but the first example that sprang to mind was the once courteous and tell-all signs of ‘Ladies’ and ‘Gents’ on public conveniences, now replaced by utilitarian stick figures). However, I can’t deny that it plays to the eye more effectively than a stream of words and, if one’s need is desperate, saves a bit of time, effort – and maybe embarrassment – reading.

Film is a prime example. As viewers we soak up what we’re being shown, often without the need for a commentary or dialogue. These images are easy to absorb, streaming past us in a recognisable fashion.

Conversely, as writers we use our skills with the written word to convey scenes and actions. Since most books are usually text-heavy and image-light, it’s up to us to conjure up what we want the reader to ‘see’. But this often requires a little attention to get right.

We each of us, from the moment we start to read, develop the ability to turn words on the page to images in our brains. Read about a horse running and we see the familiar image… even if we don’t consciously think about it. And the wonder is, anyone reading the same text will see a different horse. It’s there, like a wonder is, anyone reading the same text don’t consciously think about it. And the wonder is, anyone reading the same text.

As writers, it’s a useful function to be able to look at the text we’ve written down and, allied to the images we also see, check to make sure we’ve done a complete job. The reason? Because while we see a vast array of fast-moving images and scenes, with accompanying dialogue or action, the reader might not see any if we’ve left something out in the description.

Actions have consequences. For every action there’s a reaction. If we describe a character screaming at someone, there’s no context, it’s an empty event. In real life, the screamer would show something – usually physical, by way of expression or movement – and the screamee (the one on the receiving end) would show a reaction. If there are others nearby, they might also react, even if it’s muted. If it’s something funny, the reactions are ones of laughter or amused observation. It’s there, a natural response we all have in us.

But do we always think to include these signals? Well, hands up, I know I don’t – at least, not always on the first run. But that’s where my personal editing function kicks in – or should do – to go over the scene on the page and see what might add a touch more colour or depth.

If writing about someone falling over in a crowded street, we might portray someone reacting by rushing to help, while the faller struggles to get up. But real life isn’t limited to those two simple acts. In reality you get others stopping to help or commiserate, with others walking by, either unaware, uncaring or chatting on their phones.

But what about the faller, who’s dying of embarrassment and just wants to run away and hide? Each of these, albeit mentioned briefly, add to the scene and give it a greater reality.

Action and reaction

On film, actors’ facial expressions convey thoughts, responses and intentions. Frowns, smiles, grimaces – even a total blankness (this not always deliberate on the part of some thespians, I find) – tell us what the character on the screen is thinking – or thinking of doing. We know this because these human indicators surround us every day. They can give added colour to the scene, while taking the place of unnecessary dialogue. For example, you can write about a character disagreeing strongly with someone – maybe even violently – and telling them so. But there might be greater colour in the scene if you describe the offended character’s jaw clenching and the eyes hardening – and then have them turning to leave without a word, but slamming the door after them.

There’s an advert around at the moment where a young man is trying to explain to an older man how to use an electronic voice-activated gadget to play music. The old man hides behind his newspaper, perhaps disinterested or cynical, and the younger man exits, singing some lyrics. When he next enters, that tune is playing and the old man merely looks at him and, with a twinkle in his eye, nods at the gadget, effectively saying, ‘See – I got it.’

It doesn’t need words, but conveys a strong message.

Events don’t happen in a vacuum. There’s always a reaction, great or small – but leaving it out might take away some of the reality we’re striving for.

Don’t forget the small stuff: people reacting, background sounds.

Not all scenes require dialogue; sometimes description and reaction is all you need.

Think about your scenes in a visual way. What could be added to make it more real?

Take examples from film. What little events have added to a scene and made it stand out for you?
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I’m writing this month’s article while in New York and it’s too good an opportunity not to share with you what agents are telling me: what’s hot and what’s not right now in the US. As I make my way to agent meetings, skyscrapers glint and glitter, rising up to the bluest of skies, and steam rises from the vents on the street as chic New Yorkers weave their way through the crowds against the backdrop of the steady thrum of yellow cabs and car horns.

I’m here to check in with some leading agents alongside my US managing editor, Michele Rubin, and what strikes me most is how warm and friendly the agents are – so full of zest and enthusiasm for a fresh story and, luckily for us, the debut writer. The agents ooze industry experience and their literary successes coat the office walls – it really is a feast for the eyes – and I begin to dream of seeing one of our authors lined up next to the greats.

Most of the novels I’m presenting are historical: one about a gay Jewish painter in Nazi Germany, A Girl with a Pearl Earring-esque novel set in Holland in 1620, one children’s fantasy set in the Viking times in Scotland, and a British satire that makes me chuckle a lot. Michele, however, has one high middle-grade novel with a thread of magic realism and a wildlife memoir about living off the grid in the West. Michele was a senior agent at Writers House for 25 years so she has a fair idea of what will sell and we’ve had some authors who’ve hit the bestseller lists recently so I feel like we’re on a strong footing, or at least I hope so.

One might ask, what are the author benefits for one of our EU authors (not all live in the UK) being placed with a US agent? Of course, I’m also presenting to our lovely, brilliant UK agents but for me, it’s all about finding the right fit. If an agent falls upon a book with a passion and the author clicks with that agent and neither of them mind being on separate continents then it can work well. The US is still the largest market so a book can get a significant US primary deal and then be sold to the UK. Being able to bridge the markets is one of the main reasons I opened up an arm in the US, and frankly any excuse to be in New York.

What I’m hearing on the ground is this: for the majority, it’s the same as the UK in that they want upmarket, book club, escapist fiction. For non-fiction, writers need a platform and a following – that is the first question any agent and publisher will ask. Genres that remain strong are wellness, food and dieting, and any kind of exposé of inner establishment sanctums. For children’s, New Adult is defunct and has moved back into YA. Sex and romance still sell, along with issue-driven OwnVoices writing. For younger children’s MG: social issues that explore with heart one’s uniqueness and are all about empathy building, and funny books that will appeal to boys – girls will read books for boys but rarely do boys read books for girls. Still selling well is historical, women’s crime novels, OwnVoices fiction, and voice-driven off-beat narrative non-fiction. As always, agents are looking for high concept thrillers – although less The Girl on the Train and female protagonists with baggage. Instead, stories with empowered female leads, beautiful writing and distinctive settings (think: Where the Crawdads Sing) are on the uptick.

How did we fare with our slate? The British satire and the Viking children’s fantasy had a couple of agents very interested but most felt it’s probably more for the UK market. The woman in the cabin and my two historical novels pretty much had 100% interest. Now, I just need to send them the material and wait and see. If more than one agent is interested in one book it will be down to the author and agent to decide if the fit is right. In terms of timing it’s good in that Frankfurt’s just around the corner but then again all the agents’ schedules are rammed. While autumn is a good time to submit your work – everyone’s back at their desks – it’s also possibly the busiest. We shall see and I hope you see your genre in my above list.
After decades of going nowhere, educationist Raphael Wilkins stumbled into life-changing opportunities for global travel. This book tells the story: walking in the Lodi Gardens in Delhi, on the Great Wall of China, the shore of the Red Sea, around the palaces of Bangkok and Singapore’s waterfront; meeting a Crown Prince in Riyadh, scary Yemeni leaders in Aden, Sana’a and Taiz, the sunset call to prayer on a rooftop in Jeddah’s old city, flying up-country in a light plane in war-torn South Sudan; exploring Denver, Nairobi, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Fuzhou and Kuala Lumpur.

In a light and entertaining style, the author shares the amazements and discomforts of becoming a global traveller in middle age.

Before turning to travel memoirs, Raphael Wilkins wrote two academic books on education, and over sixty articles, chapters and reports. He lives in Barnard Castle, County Durham.

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★★★★★

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★★★★★

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‘(This) is hands down one of the most riveting and well-crafted books I’ve read in a long time! I was completely drawn in from the opening pages, and absolutely loved the author’s description of the different places…a wonderful and eye-opening escape from my boring week-end.’
★★★★★

‘An excellent book that captured my attention from the beginning, pulled me in and never once let go. Each scene … was engaging, authentic, and flowed smoothly… The descriptions were very strong, powerful and literary…’
★★★★★

‘The writing is beautiful, very clean narrative…”
★★★★★

‘Holey moley, this book was terrific! Once I started I didn’t want to stop…”
★★★★★
Tony Rossiter looks at the fantasy writer and the world of her wizard apprentice

Best-known for her bestselling Septimus Heap series, fantasy writer Angie Sage is also author of the Todhunter Moon trilogy and the Araminta Spook series. *Magyk*, her first Septimus Heap book, was very well reviewed both in the UK and the US, where the New York Post recommended it for fans of Harry Potter.

**How she began**

As a child Angie used to enjoy getting lost in a book. She loved drawing and reading about history – ‘as good as time travel,’ was how she has described it. He father worked in publishing and would bring home dummy books with blank pages, which she used to fill with her drawings. From an early age she knew that she wanted to be part of making books. After leaving school she first studied medicine, but changed her mind and went to Art School in Leicester, where she studied graphic design and illustration. After college she began as an illustrator of picture books before moving on to write and illustrate books for toddlers and then chapter books – books for intermediate readers, generally aged 7 to 10, which tell the story primarily through prose but include plentiful illustrations.

However, she found it easier to make pictures with words rather than with a paint brush, and her aim was always to concentrate on writing. The first book which she both wrote and illustrated was *Monkeys in the Jungle* (1989), a simple 28-page picture book for the very young. It features different animals in their natural environments: parrots in the trees, penguins on their ice floes, tigers in the grass, and so on. Many of the animals are hiding, and children must discover their whereabouts before they jump out and say ‘Boo’. She went on to write several board books for young children, moving away from illustrating other people’s books to write her own. This was a slow process which took many years to complete. It culminated in 2005 with her first fantasy novel *Magyk*. ‘It was the first book that really made me feel something,’ she said in a recent interview, and its publication gave her an enormous thrill.

**Magyk**

*Magyk* (2005) is a fantasy novel for readers aged 9+. The book’s blurb sets the scene: *The seventh son of the seventh son, aptly named Septimus Heap, is stolen the night he is born by a midwife who pronounces him dead. That same night, the baby’s father, Silas Heap, comes across a bundle in the snow containing a new born girl with violet eyes. The Heaps take this helpless newborn into their home, name her Jenna, and raise her as their own. But who is this mysterious baby girl, and what really happened to their beloved son Septimus?*

Magyk and its six sequels follow the Magykal Heap family – parents and seven children – through the trials and tribulations of their life in The Castle. As the series progresses, Septimus becomes the apprentice of the Extraordinary Wizard Marcia Overstrand, who is head of all the wizards and lives in the Wizard Tower. She has a pair of Special Purple Python-skinned shoes – and a short temper. *Magyk’s* opening paragraph draws us enticingly into the story: *Silas Heap pulled his cloak tightly around him against the snow. It had been a long walk through the Forest, and he was chilled to the bone. But in his pockets he had the herbs that Galen, the Physik woman, had given him for his new baby boy, Septimus, who had been born earlier that day. Angie had the character of Septimus in her head for a long time before she began to write. She knew that he was in a strange, hostile world and that he did not understand who he really was; but it was the sudden introduction of the bossy Marcia that kick-started the story. She has said that the feeling of the strange, futuristic world she invented – with its Castle, Port, Forest, Marshes – came to her from living in Cornwall. That world is described in delicious, humorous detail in *Septimus Heap – The Magykal Papers* (2009). Here you can take a tour of The Ramblings, where the Heap family live alongside other wizards and all kinds of riffraff, and cast an eye over the menu of...
the newly opened Café La Gringe
(Proprietor: Mrs Theodore Gringe.
Location: Small, draughty lean-to at
the side of the North Gate gatehouse.
Service: Serve yourself. Three pots of
stew kept warm (just) over a small fire.
Specialties: Stew. Menu: Brown stew,
dark brown stew and very dark brown
stew. We ate: stew. Comments: Sharp
knives are provided to cut up the stew.
You will need them.)

The inventive humour is one of the
keys to the success of the Septimus
Heap series; another is the warmth
and strength of the Heap family. ‘I like
their chaotic acceptance of life,’ Sage
said in one interview, ‘and the fact
that they don’t do what they are told
by authority if they think it is wrong.
Stuff happens to them that makes
their life difficult at times but they
don’t moan about things, they just get
on and sort it out as best they can.’

How she writes
Angie can write anywhere, but she
needs silence. She has to be very
quiet, with nothing else going on
around her. She sees her laptop, on
which she does all her writing, as
her home; she takes it everywhere.
When creating a new story, she
always begins by thinking of the
place where it is to be set. Places, and
the different atmospheres they can
have, stimulate her imagination and
give her ideas. Often a small scene
or an image will come to mind; if
this interests and inspires her, she lets
her imagination take over and puts
herself into that scene, wandering
around and meeting the people, and
working out what is happening to
them. Then she begins to write – and
the actual process of writing helps to
keep the ideas coming.

She admits that a lot of what
happens in her books is ‘just wish
fulfillment, written for
the eleven-year-old me.
I’ve always wanted to be
able to fly… even now,
I still fly in my dreams.
It’s wonderful, soaring
through the sky; I never
crash, but I do have to
work hard to stay aloft.’

Writing tips
She believes that writing
begins with reading, and advises
any aspiring writer to ‘read lots
and lots and lots… and to write
about something that you are really
interested in.’ Her number one tip
is to be adventurous. As she says,
when you write you can create any
world you want to and be anyone
you want to be. ‘Go for it!’ is her
advice. She believes that the key is
to find your own world – which can
take a lot of time and involve a lot
of daydreaming.

She says that beginning is often
the hardest part of any story; her
own method is to begin with the
place where it is set. You can then
put characters into that landscape.
These need not be human, but they
do need to have sufficient human
characteristics for the reader to be
able to identify with them. Getting
to know these characters is the next
– very important – step, and Angie
suggests treating them as friends who
will guide you through your story.

Writing a few sentences every day,
and reading these out to yourself, is
a good discipline that Angie believes
helps to keep the story fresh in your
mind. Once you’re comfortable with
what you’re writing and excited by
it, she advises sharing what you have
written, perhaps with a friend whose
judgement you trust or, better still,
with a writing group. You should
listen carefully to the feedback you
receive, and if changes are suggested
that would improve the story, make
those changes; but at the end of the
day, only you can decide if you have
something you believe is working.

Treat your story as a living thing that
must be allowed to grow and develop.
From time to time all writers,
whether new or experienced, get
stuck. Angie believes that the best
way of dealing with this is to put
your story away for a few days or
even weeks. You can then go back
to it with a clearer head and breathe
new life into it. You might decide
to shake things up and take the
story in a new direction. One way
of doing this is to send in a new
and unexpected character, perhaps
one who arrives in a dramatic way
and challenges the existing set-up.
Another is the sudden introduction
of bad weather – thunderstorms,
flooding, snow – that totally changes
the atmosphere of the story. Another
technique is to move away from the
existing landscape and into a new
setting which has a different feel
– and presents different problems.
Or, if you’re getting really fed up
with one (or more) of your existing
characters, you could simply decide
to get rid of them. There are plenty
of ways you could do that.

www.writers-online.co.uk
Joanne Harris (famous for genres started writing in childhood. popular authors from a variety of in their fingers for the want of a pen later in life, there are others who, from a young age, have felt the ache from a young age, have felt the ache. While some authors come to writing While neither of these authors found fame and stardom until much later, there are certainly authors who have. Jayne Fisher was the youngest author that fledgling love of writing. Some people know from an early age that they want to be a writer. I certainly did. Creative writing classes in school can leave much to be desired, and budding young authors will certainly benefit from a bit of extra support. Whether you’re a young writer yourself or have children and grandchildren with writerly aspirations, this young person’s guide to writing might come in handy for nurturing that fledgling love of writing.

When do you become an author?

While some authors come to writing later in life, there are others who, from a young age, have felt the ache in their fingers for the want of a pen or a keyboard. They just know. Many popular authors from a variety of genres started writing in childhood. Joanne Harris (famous for Chocolat) wrote her first book at nine, as did Jacqueline Wilson (Tracy Beaker). While neither of these authors found fame and stardom until much later, there are certainly authors who have. Mary Shelley wrote Frankenstein before she turned twenty. In the 1970s, Gordon Korman published his debut book (the first in his Macdonald Hall series) with Scholastic. He was fourteen at the time, having written the novel aged twelve – he hadn’t wanted to write his school book report on anything he could find in the library, so penned his own novel and then wrote a review of it. Jayne Fisher was the youngest author to ever write for Ladybird Books – her Garden Gang series was created when she was only nine. So while it’s rare for budding authors to shoot to stardom while they’re still in school, it does happen from time to time.

The question of when you become an author isn’t easy to answer. Some might say that you can call yourself an author when you’ve started making money from writing – though making decent money from it, these days, is no easy thing. For me, the answer is simple: if you write, you are a writer. You feel it in your core. Once you know, all you have to do is practice. A lot. In Grit, Angela Duckworth’s book exploring the power of passion and perseverance, she says that to become really, truly good at something, you have to invest 10,000 hours of purposeful practice in doing that thing. That’s a lot of writing to get under your belt.

The author’s journey: Top tips on becoming an author

Read. Read everything. Read things you like and things you don’t like so much. Read classics and new releases and things that are recommended to you. Stephen King said that ‘If you don’t have time to read, you don’t have the time (or the tools) to write. Simple as that.’ Pretty much everyone agrees on this point – if you want to write, you have to read. Try out different types of writing. You might already know that you want to write romantic novels, or sci-fi for middle grade, or free-form poetry. But while you’re young is a great time to try things out and experience new things, in life and in writing. Discover different forms from nano and flash fiction to novellas, novels and sagas. Try your hand at a story in under 100 words. Experiment with haiku, senryu, sonnet, canzone, cinquain, idyll, rondeau, pantoum and villanelle. Don’t limit yourself by what you haven’t yet discovered.

Write what you love, not what’s popular. Nobel prize-winning author Toni Morrison said, ‘If there’s a book that you want to read, but it hasn’t been written yet, then you must write it.’ If you try to jump on a trending bandwagon, the masses might have moved on to something else by the time you’ve written it. Write what you want to read, what you see a gap for in the market.

Find your own style. Some authors will swear by their personal promises to write 1,000 words a day – every day – or to finish a novel in a year. Others will wait for inspiration to hit, or choose not to limit themselves with impressive goals they can’t achieve. You might be an early morning creative or a total night owl, or you might be nothing in particular. Try things out, see what works, and remember that these things can change, too. As a student, I often stayed up writing late into the night. These days I’m often more productive in the morning!

Go out and live an interesting life. Benjamin Franklin said, ‘Either write something worth reading or do something worth writing.’ While Emily Dickinson, JD Salinger, Harper Lee, and Samuel Beckett managed to produce literary canons in their reclusive lives, most of us need to get
out into the world and experience things to write about. The cliché of a writer as a solitary, tortured genius might have something vaguely romantic about it, but inspiration strikes from a life well lived. Have hobbies other than writing, make a wide circle of friends, and let yourself be inspired.

Learn to love editing. It’s hard work, but its necessary. Editing is perfecting, it’s polishing something with potential into its true and gleaming form. Don’t see editing as a chore – look forward to the process of making your craft as good as it can be.

Meet other writers. These days its easier than ever to connect with likeminded people. Is there a writing group at your school or university? If not, perhaps you can start one? Look out for writing groups and classes where you can meet people of different ages and who write different genres. If your local searches fail, seek writing friends online. Connect to other writers using the #writingcommunity hashtag. Join critiquing forums like Scribophile to share your work and seek opinions.

Improve your craft. Nobody was born a brilliant writer, and success as an author comes not only from raw talent, but from hard work and a bit of good luck. Identify your weaknesses and work on them. Read grammar guides if you find that a struggle, or read widely of fiction if you want to improve your vocabulary. If you find dialogue hard, don’t avoid it – brush up on it. Don’t steer away from descriptive scenes because your adjectives sound wooden and worn – learn to do it better.

Enjoy it. Writing is a marvellous thing. Knowing from a young age that you want to be a writer gives you the chance to learn as much as you can while you’ve got the time and means to do it. Really relish in your local library, enjoy free time to read and write without the pressures of paying the bills or raising a family. These are the golden years for your mind to explore the craft of writing – don’t waste a moment of it.

Writing exercises
One of the best things you can do to improve is trying out writing tasks on a regular basis. What you produce might not be material for a novel or even a complete short story, but all writing is good writing and can inspire other things. Lists of exercises can be found online, as well as in writing textbooks, but here are two to get you started.

• The first line exercise
Pick up a book from your bookshelf and read the first line. Everyone knows that the first line has to be excellent, to grab the attention of the reader. Analyse what makes this first sentence so good. Is it description or dialogue? Does it evoke an emotion that makes you want to read on? Does it drop a bombshell you want to explore? Note down what makes this first line so brilliant, or if it doesn’t strike you, what you find boring about it. Do this with several books and then attempt your own brilliant first line. Here’s one you can start with, the opening to Harper Lee’s To Kill a Mockingbird. After reading, what questions do you ask yourself? What do you want to know? When he was nearly thirteen my brother Jem got his arm badly broken at the elbow.

• Link three things exercise
What do a bassoon, a slice of toast and an armadillo have in common? It sounds like the start of a bad joke, but it could actually be the start of an intriguing short story. Perhaps the story is about a professional bassoon player who, on dropping his toast at breakfast, discovers an armadillo stowed away under his kitchen sink? What about linking a plane ticket, a broken necklace and a song? You might write about a teenage girl who, spending her savings on a one-way ticket to track down her long-lost mother, has nothing to remember her by but the broken necklace she left behind and the lullabies she sung her in childhood. If you’re stuck for inspiration, pick three unrelated things (they don’t have to be nouns) and link them together, or ask someone else to pick for you.

Remember
You can change your mind – writing isn’t for everyone. When you’re young is the time to try things out and to change your mind, so don’t worry if, actually, writing isn’t for you.

There are lots of different types of writing, not just fiction. Try out as much as you can and read widely. There’s no better time to start than now, and no such thing as too much writing experience.

COMPETITIONS FOR YOUNG WRITERS

Try out your skills by entering these competitions for young writers.

Competition: BBC 500 Words
Age Groups: 5-9 and 10-13
Write: 500 words
Website: https://writ.rs/bbc500words

Competition: The Young Walter Scott Prize
Age Groups: 11-15 and 16-19
Write: 800-2,000 words
Theme: Set in a time before you were born
(Deadline, 31 October)
Website: www.walterscottprize.co.uk/young-walter-scott-prize/

Competition: What’s Your Story, Scottish Book Trust Age Groups: 13-19
Write: Twice-yearly submission window for writers and illustrators
Website: www.scottishbooktrust.com/writing-and-authors/whats-your-story
national Non-Fiction

November is a celebration of all things factual, set up by the wonderful Federation of Children’s Book Groups to try to balance things out in a publishing world where virtually all the publicity and prizes go to fiction.

Join the celebration with this month’s free-range writing, focusing on facts across the different genres. There’s only one rule – stick to the timings. Short, timed pieces are perfect practice for the great writing rule: don’t get it right, get it written!

Memoir
Two different elements make up our understanding of the past: objective facts and subjective memories. Other people may disagree with the way you remember things – that’s one of the challenges of writing memoir, and one of the things that give it value – but no one can contest the objective facts.

Thinking about the facts of your life, write a timeline of dates and places for the history of your body. Include accidents, illnesses and anything else that springs to mind, such as menarche, pregnancy or first sexual experience.

Take about twenty minutes. If you have time to spare, do the same thing on a different theme, for example, the history of your Christmases, the places you have lived or the jobs you have done.

• Memoir tip: Focusing on a theme that runs through your life is a great way of approaching memoir writing. Themed memoirs can have double the reader appeal, attracting both those who love a true life story and those who are interested in the theme.

Fiction
In this story, someone has been wrongly accused of something. For example, a shopper accused of shoplifting, a partner accused of cheating or a neighbour of antisocial behaviour. Who has been accused? What have they been accused of, and by whom? Jot down some ideas.

Choose one scenario and make some character sketches for the people involved, starting with their names, ages and something about their appearance. What really matters to them? What doesn’t matter at all? Take ten minutes.

Write a letter or email from the accused person, explaining what really happened. The form and language will depend on who they are writing to – a letter to the paper won’t adopt the same tone as an email to a friend. Include a phrase such as, ‘The fact is…’

A lot of people nowadays wouldn’t think of writing letters or long emails, so if it feels more appropriate to the protagonist and their situation, you could write this as a dialogue, either face-to-face or on the phone, or an exchange of text messages. Take ten minutes.

• Fiction tip: Writing a letter or email from your protagonist, as part of your character notes, can really help you to find their voice.

Non-fiction
One of the joys of writing non-fiction is that it makes you aware of all the amazing things you know and encourages you to build on that knowledge. For example, my next children’s book is about looking after the planet and, as well as deepening my understanding of the science of climate change, I’ve been discovering fascinating facts about all sorts of things, from hippos and hedgehogs to nature clubs and nurdles.

Choose an animal, a place and a person (either famous, or someone you know). Write a list for each one of interesting things you know about them. Take the one you already know most about and do some research. Build up your knowledge with at least three new fascinating facts. Take twenty minutes.

If you were writing an article or book on this topic, who would your target reader be? What kind of publication or publisher might be interested in publishing it?

• Non-fiction tip: As non-fiction can include visual features such as bullet points, lists, boxes, charts, maps and illustrations, it can be really helpful to imagine what your work will look like in a book or magazine.

Poetry
We learn from our mistakes. What life lessons have you learnt from bitter experience? Include some big important lessons such as learning, through losing someone close to you, that love never dies, and some trivial ones such as not to try and argue with your wife about how to load the dishwasher. Jot down some ideas.

Think about who you would like to address your poem to, and what tone you might adopt – for example, philosophical, bemused, angry, ironic, teacherly.

Especially if you are going for humour or outrage, consider giving your poem a regular pattern of rhythm and rhyme. Otherwise, follow your instincts; rhyme it or keep it free, whatever feels more natural. Give it a title that expresses the tone and content.

Take twenty minutes.
WIN! £500 IN CASH PRIZES & PUBLICATION

Epistolary Short Story Competition

£250 TO BE WON

Letter, email, PostIt, blog post, Twitter feed, diary, shopping list... there are endless possibilities for using different documentary methods to tell your story, opening up intriguing plotting possibilities. The only restriction is a 1,500-1,700 word count. The winner will receive £200 and publication in Writing Magazine, with £50 and publication online for the runner-up.

The closing date is 15 December

£250 TO BE WON

STILL TIME TO ENTER

With its closing date of 15 November, there’s still time to enter last month’s open competition for flash fiction of up to 500 words. See p95 for entry details.

SEE P95 FOR ENTRY DETAILS, FULL RULES AND ENTRY FORMS
We sit on the settee, his pyjamas covered in crumbs; Spiderman obscured by something sticky. Jam, maybe. We’re watching TV, lounging together. The jam, if that’s what it is, is on his hands too, clinging in patches on his palm and the backs of his knuckles, catching on the skin of my own hand, in which his smaller one nestles, hot and alive.

Sunday morning.

He should probably be doing something else. Something creative, instead of staring at the telly. He should be outside in the mud, poking sticks in the dirt; picking gravel out of his father’s tyres, his boy’s mind meandering. But here we are full of buttered toast watching last night’s X Factor; watching two boys – brothers – singing with acoustic guitars and rapping. Badly, I think.

I can never anticipate what might interest him, this boy of mine. I look down at our tangled fingers. His nails need cutting. They are dirty, and he really ought to have a bath, get that baby smell back that I love so much. But I love his real smell, even without the talc and the no-tears shampoo. The smell of his head in the morning, it lasts until lunchtime. I tilt my head down, feel his hair on my lips, breathe him in. He lays his head on my chest a moment, two moments, in semiconscious response.

‘Love you, little boy.’

‘Love you too. Are they winning Mum?’

‘No. This is just the auditions.’

‘What’s an auditions?’ He twists his hand out of mine and looks up at me. I can see dark flecks of blue in the lighter ocean of his eyes.

‘An audition is where someone sings for the judges and the judges decide if they’re good enough to be in the competition.’

‘Oh.’ He turns back to the television, relaxing against me. His hand finds mine.

His fingernails, his hands. The smell of his head; sweat and pheromones, a deep dusty smell made from a billion cells held together by who knows what; created from somewhere, some act of love, a smell that fills me up and makes me feel more like a mother than a hundred school pick-ups, a million t-shirts ironed and put away. Motherhood is this smell; connecting something deep inside me back to myself, to origins. I want to hold him to me forever.

I know I can’t.

His sister – my eldest – is curled up in the chair beside us, reading. My little bookworm. Their father is upstairs, it being his turn for a lie-in. We’re good at that, sometimes. We take care of each other in these small ways. Even though we fight over cutlery in the sink and time spent in the bathroom and lack of desire and how long are you going to be on the phone and when are you going to fill the hole in that wall and is this even working anymore? But today he is lying-in, dreaming, maybe of being somewhere else not quite so noisy, not quite so demanding-consuming-draining.

But my baby’s hand is still in mine and I can feel his sweat cooling on my palm, where the creases mirror his. On the screen there’s an emotional backstory playing out. The brothers have had it rough: busking the streets, neglect and loss and death already behind them, packed tightly into their short lives and then into ten minutes of television. I know what the producers are doing. I shrug inside.

‘What do you think, baby?,’ I say to him. ‘Do you think the judges will like them?’

‘I don’t know’ he says. A new tightness has crept into his voice. ‘Are they going to win Mum?’ He
grips my hand.

‘Well, I don’t know. Let’s watch and see.’

‘I want them to,’ he says, turning his face up at me again, a frown appearing over his blue eyes, wrinkling his smooth brow. My heart fractures a little. A fine line of pain.

‘Who’s this?’ his big sister says, looking up from her book, one hand holding her page down.

‘Oh, just these brothers,’ I say, ‘They’ll make it through. They’ve had loads of screen time.’

‘Is that how you know?’ she says.

‘Yeah, course,’ I say, thinking about formulae and advertising and how it all tessellates. My free hand goes to the nape of my boy’s head, slides through the ends of his hair where it is still baby soft. I resist the urge to lean forward and breathe in his face up at me again, a frown of amusement. ‘They’re going to do it acoustic. Stripped back version, Jesus. They love that.’ I smile, knowing that they means us, means the audience. I suspect a set-up.

‘Ah. They’re going to do it now.’

‘Shh,’ I reply, ‘let’s just watch and see.’

They begin to sing. The bottom lips have settled and there’s a shine to their eyes. Their mother is in the audience; her hands clasped to her chest in a prayer for her boys up there. I understand. I understand the tears standing in her eyes, those waters of desperate, unbearable, bottomless love. They are singing like angels; the judges’ eyes are smiling, their annoyance melting, deftly shot close-ups focusing in on emotions quivering in eyelash and nostril. The judges are starting to look at each other, to nod and smile. The singers finish, and wait.

A moment of stillness. And then, ‘It made me feel sad.’ He is broken voice and frowning, trying to understand himself.

‘Well, it’s ok to feel sad. It made me cry too. Why do you think we feel sad when something is happy?’ I ask.

‘I don’t know,’ he says, rubbing his eyes. My daughter pulls her best face of amused disdain and sinks back into her book.

‘Sometimes, we just feel things because we’re feeling them, mate?’ I ask, kissing her page down. ‘Are they crap?’ my daughter says.

‘No. Last night,’ I frown.

‘Is this happening now?’ he says.

‘Aw?’ says my son, a question of disappointment and refutation, a resistance. The brothers on screen are near tears.

‘Are they crap?’ my daughter says, looking up from her book again.

‘Not crap, no. Wrong song.’ I say, knowing as I do I am just anticipating what the judges will say, nothing more. ‘They need to sing something different. Do you think they’ll get another chance, mate?’ I ask, kissing the top of my son’s head. He shrugs, still fixed on the faces of these singing brothers. Their guitars hang idle, shameful across their thighs. A bottom lip wobbles in pixels.

‘Is this happening now?’ he says.

‘No. Last night.’ I frown.

Something ticks over. ‘In fact, no. This was recorded months ago.’

I wonder how the emotion is transmitted with these images. Is it, even? Or do we put it there ourselves, filling in the spaces? My free hand goes to the nape of my boy’s head. He shrugs, his shoulder, pull him an inch closer.

The judges are about to make a pronouncement. They are serious, even angry-looking. How dare these rapping brothers waste their time! The boys are pleading for another chance, declaring they really want this, promising hard work, promising they will make the judges proud. Everyone is uncomfortable. The judges too. Or pretending to be. The one in the middle sighs, looks theatrically doubtful. The audience is restless. He waves a hand with weary irritation, before crossing his arms and narrowing his eyes. Make it count, he says.

‘What does that mean?’ he says, his eyes still on the screen.

‘Shh,’ I reply, ‘let’s just watch and see.’

The audience stands as one body with their arms around each other and jump in celebration and relief and the maternal tear finally rolls and the audience stands as one body with their arms in the air, my boy turns into me with a cry and weeps, his hot head thrust into my chest, his body wracked and sobbing with something he doesn’t understand. And my own tears rush up through me like something is overflowing and I know I am reacting to his overwrought six-year-old body that cannot take it cannot be so full of it cannot bear to feel this emotion from so many people from so far away.

We are not built for this.

I’m annoyed.

We’ve all been manipulated, like machines. Press this button, get that output. I want to carry it for him, tell him you don’t have to feel what everyone else feels, here, give it to me. But instead I hold him and let him cry until his hitching chest has settled.

A moment of stillness. And then, ‘It made me feel sad.’ He is broken voice and frowning, trying to understand himself.

‘Well, it’s ok to feel sad. It made me cry too. Why do you think we feel sad when something is happy?’ I ask.

‘I don’t know,’ he says, rubbing his eyes. My daughter pulls her best face of amused disdain and sinks back into her book.

‘Sometimes, we just feel things son,’ I say, ‘and that’s ok.’

He nods and slides off the settee to turn his page but suspended along with us while we wait; the audience waits, the mother waits and I can see a tear trembling in the rim of her eyelid, longing to run down her face but needing the signal, the reason to roll. In pain, or in ecstasy. And then the main judge smiles and says you’re through to the next round and as the soundtrack crashes into drums and swelling violins and the brothers throw their arms around each other and jump in celebration and relief and the audience stands as one body with their arms in the air, my boy turns into me with a cry and weeps, his hot head thrust into my chest, his body wracked and sobbing with something he doesn’t understand. And my own tears rush up through me like something is overflowing and I know I am reacting to his overwrought six-year-old body that cannot take it cannot be so full of it cannot bear to feel this emotion from so many people from so far away.

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‘Sometimes, we just feel things son,’ I say, ‘and that’s ok.’

He nods and slides off the settee to play with his Lego, leaving me empty-handed.

Runner-up in the creative non-fiction competition was Malcolm Welshman, Crewkerne, Somerset, whose story is published on www.writers-online.co.uk. Also shortlisted were: Dominic Bell, Hull, Humberside; Jeni Bell, Winchester, Hampshire; Virginia Betts, Ipswich, Suffolk; Andrew Boulton, Nottingham; Sian McDermott, Newport, Gwent; CL Raven, Llanishen, Cardiff; Jane Robinson, Skendleby, Lincolnshire; RW Simpson, Thrapston, Northamptonshire; Julia Thorley, Kettering, Northamptonshire; Deborah Tomlin, Bath.
Huge congratulations on publishing your first novel, Rebecca. It is indeed an exciting time – and of course you are thrilled to bits. I think we all have dreams of the launch when we are slogging away at a manuscript and you certainly deserve a glass or two of champagne. So while your author friend is probably right about the hard sums, she does sound somewhat lacking in joie de vivre!

Even if you never do it again, I definitely think you should celebrate your first book in the very best way you can manage! And only you know what that is.

I held my first launch in a wine bar and invited everyone I’d ever met. I got the local bookshop to bring along a shedload of books, sported hair extensions the colour of the book jacket and took out a second mortgage on a dress. Most of the evening is now a blur but lots of people came, we did sell lots of copies, and I finished the evening on a table, treating the assembled gathering to a rendition of Madonna’s ‘Like a Virgin’. Happy Days!

However, this was a long time ago – when publishing a novel was such a novelty in my small seaside town that I made the front page of the local paper. There are so many books coming out these days that it is harder to make a splash. But it can still be done. With a bit of planning, you can have a jolly good time and reap the rewards of a bit of publicity too, without totally breaking the bank. I have had some sort of launch bash – however modest – for eight of my nine books.
and I have always felt it was worth it.

First, you should talk to your publishers. It is true that publishers generally do not get quite as excited about launch parties as authors do, but they may still be willing to make a small contribution or help with invitations or publicity material.

Then they, or you, should approach your local bookshop, if you are lucky enough to have one. You won’t know unless you ask, and if they agree, this can be a cheap, cheerful but very effective way of holding a launch.

Arrive with a big smile, a copy of the book cover, and your publicity plan, schmooze the manager and see what you can arrange. He or she will often be pleased to have all those extra bodies in the shop. Sometimes they’ll provide the wine and crisps too or you can bring this along. The bookshop staff are likely to want to keep it fairly short but you can always repair to the nearest bar afterwards.

Invite all your family and friends, but also ask if each of them can bring a friend or work colleague – a quick way of doubling the numbers. Your publisher will probably be pleased to make a ‘showcard’ advertising the evening, that the bookshop can display. You can get flyers printed cheaply these days that you can leave around town, and you can set up a Facebook event.

These are all excellent vehicles by which to get the title of your book known to potential readers. And who knows which of them might be moved to buy a copy and then tell someone else about it.

Inform the local paper and local radio – you never know they may well have a corner to fill – and get photos on the night that you can send out afterwards.

If there isn’t a handy bookshop nearby or they are not keen for whatever reason, then yes, find a venue. Bookshops are unlikely to set up a book stall for you unless they can be very confident of significant sales but you can get stock from the publishers and maybe they would like to attend and man the table? Or you could enlist a friend to help out?

The advantage of a venue is that you can make a night of it – perhaps providing everyone with a glass or wine or fizz when they arrive and then directing them towards a cash bar. If the venue has one. I have been to launch parties in village halls, private houses, hotels, pubs, cafes, and even – when Desmond Ffordre, husband of the bestselling Katie, edited a book of nautical tales for charity – on a Thames barge. Depending on your budget, you can choose whether to self-cater or out-source, provide peanuts only or a full buffet, serve champagne or coffee and cake. The author Elaine Everest put on a wonderful 1940s-themed afternoon tea in Ramsgate’s Home Front Tea Room to launch her novel The Teashop Girls. A topical theme is always good.

However, to avoid disappointment, do take the view that the main purpose of the evening is to spread the word about your new book and celebrate your wonderful achievement. As your friend has pointed out, even if you sell a hundred books, the royalties won’t cover many bottles of prosecco. So, I would suggest you spend only what you are comfortable with and see any books sales as an added bonus. I hope you have a ball!
Heather Morris was born in Te Awamutu, New Zealand and in 1971 moved to Melbourne, Australia. She was a social worker there until 2017 but in 1996 she decided to follow her dream and enrolled in a professional scriptwriting course. This was followed by screenwriting courses, seminars and workshops in both Australia and America. In 2003 she was introduced to Lale Sokolov and, in due course, wrote *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* as a screenplay. At first it was optioned by Instinct Entertainment (Melbourne) but when the option lapsed, Heather entered it into several international screenwriting competitions, winning the International Independent Film Awards competition in 2016 and being highly placed in several others, including the ISA (International Screenwriters’ Association) and Final Draft competitions. Positive comments persuaded her to self-publish it as a novel. This, in turn, interested Bonnier Books in Australia. The sequel, *Cilka’s Journey*, is published this month.

**HEATHER MORRIS**

The author of runaway bestseller *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* shares her top five reads with Judith Spelman

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**MADAM CURIE: A BIOGRAPHY**

by Eve Curie

‘Eve writes about her famous mother who along with her husband discovered radioactivity. Born in Poland to academic parents, Marie excelled at school but despite being a top student at her secondary school, she was not allowed to attend the men-only University of Warsaw. She was forced to continue her education in what was known as a ‘floating university’ underground, informal classes held in secret. Marrying a physicist who put aside his own research to help his wife, surely marks Pierre Curie as an extraordinary man to sacrifice his career for his brilliant wife.

‘I have chosen this book because I remember it so well. It was the first book I read about a successful woman living in the early 20th century who was not only academically brilliant but broke new ground for her gender in the sciences and socially. Following the tragic death of her husband Marie not only took over his teaching role at the Sorbonne, becoming the institution’s first female professor, but she also had an open, public affair with one of her husband’s former students.’

**THE ADVENTURES OF MADELINE**

by Ludwig Bemelmans

‘Growing up in rural New Zealand with no television until I was twelve years of age, reading was my only source of ‘escape’. My earliest memory of books that excited and interested me were The Adventures of Madeline series. Written by Ludwig Bemelmans, they are the adventures of a group of girls in a Catholic boarding school in Paris. Madeline is the smallest of the girls, just seven years old and the only redhead. She is the bravest and most adventurous of the girls and constantly getting into trouble. Even finding herself sick and hospitalised, Madeline made an adventure out of the experience. These adventures opened my eyes to a country, a language and a religion so foreign to me. I learned of the geography and landmarks of Paris that I would many decades later visit and marvel at. I also found myself aligned with Madeline as getting into trouble was something I seemed to do all too often. I read Madeline’s stories to my daughter, and now I read them to my three-year-old granddaughter. They are timeless.’

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**THE BEEKEEPER OF ALEPPO**
by Christy Lefteri

|This is the story of Nuri, a beekeeper in Aleppo, Syria, and his wife Afra, an artist. They lived a simple, happy life with family and friends, they knew the importance of love. When tragedy strikes, they must flee their home, becoming one of many thousands of asylum seekers making the perilous, dangerous journey to a different life in a strange land. Traumatised, grief-stricken, they encounter hatred and prejudice, make friends, lose friends. As a couple they cling to each other, at times they strain and part, Nuri often feeling helpless in bringing Afra out of the fog of grief and trauma she has witnessed. |

‘The Beekeeper of Aleppo, to me, was the telling of a story not unlike The Tattooist of Auschwitz, set in contemporary times. It speaks of love, of hope. Thanks to writers like Christy we can read between the news headlines that flash before us and learn of the horror playing out through the eyes of Nuri and Afra.’

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**ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA**

‘With four brothers, friends I could only see at school, two dogs and several hundred cows being my circle, I was grateful that my parents went to the expense of buying, in instalments, Encyclopaedia Britannica. I devoured the information and stories of cultures and countries which seemed so exotic, so tantalisingly wonderful to the life I lived. I recall being drawn to the many countries of Africa and Egypt. They had history, a way of life, food I’d never heard of, communities I could only dream about. I did dream, daydreamed mostly, and put myself into their world and wondered how I would cope in the time of the Pharaohs, in the wild of Africa with its animals that were so much more interesting than my dogs and cows.’

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‘Writing The Tattooist of Auschwitz and Cilka’s Journey had two very different impacts on me. Because I knew Lale, The Tattooist of Auschwitz, we became friends, spending countless hours together both getting his story and socially. Writing it became emotionally gut-wrenching. It was one thing to hear of the horror and evil he had witnessed and experienced, to hold his hand as it trembled and his eyes moistened, watching him remembering and being back in one of the darkest periods of history. The pain of hearing his story was then intensified as the research carried out by myself and professional researchers confirmed what he had been telling me. I drew no comfort from this confirmation. I was on the journey with Lale as he told me his story of love, hope, courage and survival. |

‘Writing, Cilka’s Journey was an entirely different process. Cilka had died and I obviously did not have access to her memory. I was able to travel to her home country of Slovakia and meet friends who had known her for decades. Cilka chose not to share the details of her past with friends so I relied on professional researchers in Russia as well as material, reports and testimonies of other female survivors to imagine and create Cilka’s life in the Gulag. The outstanding emotion for me researching and writing was one of anger. Anger that a young girl / woman was subjected to years of unbelievable evil and abuse. I harnessed that anger in writing to honour the bravery and courage of Cilka who made the choiceless choice, to survive. To call out the abuse she suffered for what it was – rape. |

‘How I wish I could say yes, I am a disciplined writer! For the most part I prefer to write at night, when it is dark and quiet with minimal stimulation to distract me. I did a lot of my research during the day, along with reading testimonies and other books about the Gulag system. I am a firm believer in the saying – research, research, research, now throw away the research and write. When it came to focus on the writing, I had no books, no research documents in front of me, relying on it being clear in my head if it was going to end up on the page. |

‘One of the challenges I had writing Cilka’s Journey was creating names for the characters who lived and worked with Cilka. To get correct Russian names complete with the patronymic had me consulting Google frequently. |

‘I tell people, the stories are out there, look for them. It may just be a small article in a local paper about a person who has an extraordinary aspect to their life. I tell people to trawl through old newspapers and magazines looking for a quote or a paragraph that captures your imagination and which you want to explore further. Historical fiction is just that – fiction based on a snippet, a vignette or something that happened, or a person who lived through an event which had an impact on them or others. Write a short story if it helps to bring the event or person to the page. Write several. You’ll know when you have researched and created the bigger picture to form it into a novel. It just takes commitment and a passion for telling stories. Just do it.’

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**THE WONKY DONKEY**
by Craig Smith

‘This book tells the story of a bird walking down a road when he sees a donkey with only three legs. It is a Wonky Donkey. It has been the most read book by me for the past five to six years – I am the grandmother of small children. It is a wonderful story about a donkey with “issues” both physical and emotional – yes, he is also a cranky Wonky Donkey. Reading it to little ones is a pleasure for the reader as much as the delight it is for the listeners. It’s a tongue-twister and getting it wrong in the reading gives the little ones the chance to tell you, you made a mistake, and don’t they love telling an adult that! The importance of this book to me is of course the treasured moments I have with a small child sitting on my lap, laughing and sharing this cleverly told children’s story.’

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www.writers-online.co.uk
The cold winter wind swirled around the single swinging bell in St Mary’s church tower. It’s mournful, lonely toll a call to the family and friends of Frank Cartland.

It was November 5th in 1965. The date for the funeral of Frank. There would be no fireworks in the village of Burlham this year.

A shiver went through the body of Lady Mary Marshall. Always causes regrets for those still living, she thought, as she sat in the hard-old black oak, Cartland family, pew. Here to bury her father Frank Cartland. All the; I will, I can... and maybe next week, have suddenly become, I should have, I could have and...never.

Her father had always been the most important part of her life, until William Marshall had entered it and stolen her heart. The longstanding Cartland and Marshall family conflicts had constantly saddened her.

Now, without her father, she felt an important part of her had also died.

Sitting in the pew directly behind Mary eighty-eight-year-old Doctor Howard Jones shifted his large body trying to find some comfort on the unyielding wooden surface.

Shaking his bald head slightly and thinking, how could this elegant, beautiful woman be the scruffy oily handed little girl I used to know?

He had sat in this place many times for the weddings and funerals of the Cartland family. Sadly, far more funerals than weddings. The last time the bells had rung for Frank Cartland it had been a joyful peal to celebrate his wedding in 1920.

Howard was the only one, of more than one hundred people crowded into the church, who had known Frank as a boy. What a life, he thought. I never expected all those years ago that, skinny, battered, and bruised little boy would have packed so much into his.
'hard-old' is entirely convincing. It could even cause confusion. It would work better as two separate adjectives. Indeed, the repeating 'K' of 'black oak' very nicely suggests the unyielding hardness of the wood. The commas around 'Cartland family' seem unnecessary. Worse, they complicate a phrase that needs to flow in order to realise its full descriptive gusto.

Another hard-boiled, grammar-flouting sentence. Such twitches in tone cause us to ask who is telling (and who is in control of) the story. We should be more concerned with the scene being described than with who is describing it.

Much as I respect the jazz stylings of this narrative, it's important to have a rock-solid grasp of craft to pull it off. A semi-colon doesn't work here. Nor would a colon. A comma might work, but I'd suggest using nothing and instead italicising the relevant phrases separated by ellipses. Rules tend to blur when you go 'off-menu' with adventurous style, but the rules of punctuation must remain the same if we're to find sense in what we read.

If the story is being told in simple present tense, this should be past simple: '...had suddenly become'.

Italics again as per 13.

'Always' and 'until' contradict each other. More seriously, there's a danger of lapsing into a telling form of narrative in which the characters are revealed only through the author's comments. This makes them less real. 'Heart stealing' is a cliché, unless William had literally stolen her heart in some manner of vampiric rite... in which case I have no complaint.

The summarising tone threatens to become mildly irritating. It's as if the people in the church are immobile in 'freeze-frame' as the author's voiceover informs us of the context. No doubt it's important information, but it means nothing without some flesh and pulse. The scene risks becoming sterile: an artful showcase of description, but without involving the reader in a fictional world. And call me cynical, but when I read the phrase 'an important part of her had died' I can't help wondering. Her pancreas? Her eyelids?

Again, there's no need for the double colon. The sentence itself seems overlong for its function. Why not write, 'uncomfortably shifted his large body.' We've already been told about the rock-hard pews.

Another non-grammatical sentence like 7 and 12. I'm not sure why it's not in the same paragraph as the previous sentence because it continues the description. Take care not to begin successive sentences with subordinate clauses ('Sitting... Shaking...'). It can begin to look like a tic.

Italics not necessary as in 10. Again, the rules of punctuation are required to fine-tune the description: 'scruffy, oily-handed.'

Why is this sentence in italics? It looks as if Dr Howard is in a dialogue with the author. The adverb 'sadly' is enough to subtly hint that this could be Howard's thought, so omit the italics.

Comma after Cartland. What precedes it is a subordinate time clause. Commas are customarily used to separate initial subordinate clauses from the following main clause (but not the other way round: 'It had been a joyful peal the last time the bells had rung...').

Not sure why there are commas in this sentence. They are not necessary and complicate the flow. It's true that a non-defining relative clause uses commas to denote that the extra information is not essential to meaning, but if this is the case, why mention it?

Italics again. And we're missing something between 'that' and 'skinny'.

Why the comma after 'battered'? An Oxford comma?

In summary

It's an interesting piece of writing, not least in its willingness to experiment with narrative form and description. There are some nice touches and some quite complex storytelling techniques. I always admire the impulse to innovate and seek distinctive forms of expression.

However, it can be like controlling an eight-horse chariot. There's a lot to keep in mind and power must be served by control. Many of my observations here are small but critical improvements that make the difference between success and failure.

Sure, you can go inside characters' heads, but you don't need italics to do it. Not, for that matter, do you need to use 'she thought'. Plus, narrating the genuine inner voice of a mind with its disjointed or colloquial register requires the controlling hand of assured punctuation.

Consistency of tone is important, too. A non-grammatical sentence can be a powerful thing, but it just looks wrong and out of place if used without discernible reason or contrary to the sentences around it. I've noted a tendency in this extract to prize stylistic fireworks over focus on, and engagement with, the scene or characters. The reader will quickly lose interest if the narrative doesn't come alive and if things don't happen, especially at the start.

What happens in these 300 words? People are sitting in a church and bells are ringing. It's evocative, but how long do we wait before something happens?
When I was a callow, unpublished author with my new MA in Creative Writing clutched in my hand, I rapidly realised that to become a published author I would have to do some publicity for myself. Whatever I was going to write would benefit by having a list of people interested in what I did and what I wrote. What seemed to fit was an email-based newsletter. It went well, slowly growing to 200 or so subscribers, but then in 2018 GDPR arrived and by the beginning of 2019 it was clear that the best chance of a replacement was for me to move to a podcast.

What is a podcast?
A podcast channel is like having your own radio station, except that it goes out via the internet and is listened to on smart phones. From my point of view one advantage of a podcast was that the sort of article I had been writing for the newsletter, such as book reviews, news about publishing, showcasing student work, could be fitted easily into a podcast. But material did not need to be limited to what was written. It could include outside broadcasts, interviews, and features a serious radio channel such as BBC Radio 4 would broadcast.

Worldwide, it is estimated that there are 700,000 active podcasts. Most of these are in the US where they attract about 18 million listeners in total. That is a massive number, but it is small when compared to the 500 million Facebook sites and a similar number of blogs worldwide.

Figures suggest that the individual podcast listener regularly uses seven podcasts. Of these listeners 52% are male and 48% female. Most of them are in the mid-twenties to the mid-forties, graduates, millennials active on social media. It appears that even in the US the podcast market has not yet reached saturation.

Recording your podcast
Podcast equals radio show, so you’ll need equipment to record it, but not just any old equipment. It’s worth remembering that bad quality sound on a podcast can make the difference between having a listener or not, especially if your listeners are commuting to work in a noisy bus or railway carriage.

A microphone and a pair of headphones is the minimum. There’s plenty of advice on the web on how to choose and there are several off-the-shelf packages for sale. A microphone that connects through the USB port of a computer can be an advantage, especially if the microphone can be easily configured in different ways, but conventional microphones are viable.

I have assumed you have a computer on which to record, store and process your recording. You will need a computer with Windows 10 or current Apple iOS. You will also need recording software.

There are excellent free software recording packages around, but some are more complex to operate than others. One of the most comprehensive is Audacity which comes in Windows and Apple compatible versions. There is virtually no technical reason to pay for anything else. The real choice will be which of the free software packages you find easiest to use for your purposes and level of technical knowledge.

What will your podcast be like?
There are lots of different styles of podcast available. The best way to find the different styles out there is to browse the podasphere: the range is enormous. I listened to more than forty before I got a feel for the types.

At one end of the spectrum there are radio plays, sometimes with multiple...
actors and high production values. These may have started life as public service broadcasting output. This will certainly be true if they are featured on the BBC Sounds App. Other dramatic podcasts will have much more limited production values. The Within the Wires podcast is presented as a monologue, where the listener hears the play through the dictation by an executive of a global public civil service about the world she lives in.

As one might expect there is an array of political, self-help, mindfulness and other forms of interest-specific podcasts. Podcasts of interest to writers are less common. The Creative Writer's Toolbelt, hosted by Andrew J Chamberlain, is a straightforward discussion podcast of the sort that dominates podcasting in general. There's No Such Thing as a Fish is hosted by four people who make up the research team of the UK celebrity quiz programme QI. Each member of the team brings a fact they have found in the week leading up to the podcast recording. The regular episodes are done in a simple studio, but the team does do outside broadcasts where an audience is present; even here the technique is kept simple.

Outside broadcasts are a very big leap which brings with it an extra range of challenges. I decided that an interview in a book shop would be a good idea. I wanted the ambience of the place: the chinking of coffee cups, the background burble of the bookish. Unfortunately, ambience easily becomes annoying background noise, which even the best software processing can't eliminate. If you listen to Viaduct edition No. 3, you'll hear exactly the problem I had.

You don't have to do interviews in public spaces or even the same place. Software such as Zencaster allows interviews to be recorded remotely across the web. My own podcast is called Viaduct. It is available through my website www.paulcwbeattyauthorbooks.co.uk or at Apple Podcasts. It is targeted at the sort of people who read my newsletter but extends to commuters as well as specialist listeners.

It includes book reviews, such as one for The Shipping News by Annie Proulx as well as pieces on important historical books such as George Orwell's breakthrough book Down and Out in Paris and London.

There are also more chatty articles such as my version of a Devil's Dictionary of literary terms.

I'm still working on my outside broadcast skills, and an interview across the web is being planned. My podcast host, Buzzsprout, is a fairly typical host. It acts as a place to put my finished podcast in a similar way to a personal website host, but there are restrictions on how much of your recorded back catalogue will be archived. To ensure my back catalogue is available for new listeners to catch up with, I pay Buzzsprout to keep it going as well as raising the upper limit of casts I can make per month.

The big difference between a web host and a podcast host is that the host does not make your creation available to the great outside world. For that you need to make your podcast available on a site such as Apple Podcasts or Google Play. That sort of site will ask if you want to put up a logo. I made my own logo using Photoshop Elements though I could have had a royalty free logo from a website such as DesignEvo.

Similarly, I could have got a royalty free signature tune for Viaduct from Pond 5, but chose to construct my own tune, using Garageband.

As writers we are used to having to publicise our writing. Podcasting, as was my newsletter, is an efficient and eye-catching way of doing that. I would expect podcasting to reach similar coverage to other forms of media. Viaduct has now replaced my newsletter. Only time will tell how satisfactory a substitute it will prove.

### PODCASTING: THE MATHS

Here is a table for costs of setting up the recording system. These are guide figures for a basic system including on costs and the extra capital costs for the OB equipment.

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<th>Product Used</th>
<th>Cost</th>
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<td>Sound editing software</td>
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<td>Zencaster Hobbyist</td>
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<td><strong>Setup OB option</strong></td>
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Many novel writers see traditional publishing as their end game, but Margaret James argues that it’s not always the best option for fiction authors.

The Fiction Focus pages of the July 2019 issue of Writing Magazine featured four writers who are all successfully published, three commercially and one as a self-publishing sensation.

But how do you decide which path to publication would be right for you and your own novel (or even novels) to take? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each approach?

Commercial publication by a large and famous publishing house, rather than a small independent one, is likely to be the aim of many debut novelists, who will have seen reports in the press of the six or seven figure advances against royalties paid to celebrity novelists, and to some previously unknown debut authors, too.

These huge advances are real money which most authors will receive in instalments – on signing the contract, on delivery of the completed first draft, on signing off the professionally edited version, and on publication of the book.

But receiving a huge advance against royalties for a first novel is somewhat akin to winning the National Lottery, and it’s certainly not the norm for most novelists today, especially those who are as yet unknown.

The high-powered literary agents who negotiate these widely-reported megabuck deals will also do their best to retain and sell a range of subsidiary rights in addition to the usual digital, hardback and paperback ones.

Subsidiary rights could include large print, audio, foreign language, serial, dramatisation, film and television, and selling these is something self-publishing authors will often struggle to do. But it’s not unknown for determined self-publishers to sell subsidiary rights, and a novel that does really well will probably attract the attention of audio publishers and other interested parties anyway.

Once an author has signed a contract with a traditional commercial house, the publisher will cover the entire cost of the production of the book, which will include commissioning a design...
for the cover, editing, proofing and marketing. But commercial publishers are not charities, and most authors of print novels earn just 10% of the price received by the publisher – the amount the publisher is paid by bookshops, online sales outlets and wholesalers, not the cover price of the book – although this percentage might increase in the author's favour if the book does well. As for digital downloads, most commercially-published novelists are paid 25% of the amount received by the publisher, although these days some digital-first publishers are rather more generous.

You might feel that having a publisher retain 90% of the receipts for your printed novels and 75% of the receipts for your digital downloads is outrageous, and a great many commercially-published novelists would agree with you. This is probably why many go-getting novelists aren’t even trying to get commercial publishing deals today. They see other self-publishers storming the heights of the Amazon bestseller charts and ask themselves: why shouldn’t my books storm them, too?

Aspiring novelists who have done some research know that if they should be offered and accept a traditional publishing contract, they will probably have to wait months or even years to see their book on sale. Then, depending on when the publisher’s accounting period ends, and when an individual book is actually sold, they’ll have to wait up to a year or even more to be paid their own share of the resultant royalties.

Obviously, self-publishers don’t get advances against royalties. But nor do some commercially-published novelists, especially those writing for smaller, independent houses. Self-publishers get to keep a much higher percentage of their earnings, and they are usually paid at monthly intervals, rather than at six-monthly or even annual ones.

As a teacher of creative writing, I always advise any students considering self-publishing to have their work professionally edited, to make it look good on the printed or digital page, and – unless the author is also a talented designer, artist and/or photographer – to pay a professional to come up with a striking and appropriate cover image.

I’m sure most readers don’t care who publishes a book – a major publishing house or the author – but these readers do care about quality. Over the past decade it’s been my pleasure to read many beautifully-written self-published novels whose production values have been as high as those of any commercially published books. But I’ve also come across some terrible examples full of spelling, grammar and formatting glitches, with embarrassingly amateurish cover art, too.

These days, plenty of people grumble about the predominance of Amazon in the literary marketplace, and it’s a fact that online retailers are partly responsible for the ongoing demise of high street booksellers. But some of these booksellers, both chains and independents, are fighting back. They are often willing to engage with self-published novelists, and to organise book signings and other events for them, which would have been unthinkable even ten years ago.

So, as a novelist who wants to get your work out there, it’s your call. When my first novel was commercially published back in 1988, the choice for novelists was to chase literary agents until one finally agreed to take a risk on an unknown author, and then to wait for months or even years while the agent tried to interest a commercial publisher in the book. The alternative was vanity publishing, which saw authors being ripped off by unscrupulous charlatans, and left with garages or spare bedrooms full of badly-produced, unsaleable books.

Nowadays, no one need complain that they can’t get their work published because, if no commercial publisher is willing to give you a chance, you can publish your work yourself for free via Amazon in both digital format and print.

One day, you might become a self-publishing superstar. It’s not an impossible dream. You don’t have to look far within Writing Magazine to find a self-publisher who has beaten the commercial giants at their own game. RH

NOW TRY THIS

If you’re still confused and undecided about what to do with your novel, let novelist Helena Fairfax tell you about her experiences of both commercial and self-publishing. RH

I wish I’d known...

with Helena Fairfax

‘M’y first novel was published in 2013 by a small independent commercial publisher in North America. This publisher went on to publish the next, and my third novel was published by another small independent commercial publisher in the UK.

‘I was lucky enough to have an excellent editor in my first publisher. She taught me a great deal. I also made some genuine friends across the pond, later meeting up with them in real life. So there were many benefits to being commercially published. However, although it was exciting to have my books accepted for publication, my income was minimal and, with my third commercial publisher, I also signed away all my rights, something I’ve lived to regret.

‘I wish that back then I’d had the confidence and knowledge to self-publish. Since getting my rights back from my first publisher, I’ve re-released my first two books and self-published two more. I’ve sold the large print rights myself and my books are being considered for audio. At the time of writing, two of my books are Amazon UK bestsellers. I earn more from self-publishing than I did when I was commercially published, and I’m hoping my income will increase as I write more books. When my novels were being commercially published I found the whole process extremely stressful. But now I’m really enjoying reaching readers. I actually enjoy the business side of self-publishing, and these days my only problem is finding enough time to do everything I’d like to do.

‘Writing is a business, and today even commercially-published authors are often expected to be present on social media and to do a lot of the work of marketing their books. I wish I’d had confidence in my own writing much earlier than I did, that I’d understood the possibilities offered by self-publishing, and that I believed in my own ability to find a readership.’

www.writers-online.co.uk
Writing can be a visual experience, and writers often have vivid imaginations, immersing themselves in the made-up worlds of their characters, settings and situations they have created. Some writers talk to their characters and for the duration of the creation of the piece they are writing, their characters become real to them and can often take over scenes.

It’s the greatest feeling when the writing is going well, the characters are behaving and the words are flowing, but what happens when there’s a sudden spoke in the wheel of your writing chariot? Your character has got to a certain stage in proceedings but they become stuck, unable to move forward and unsure of what happens next. It’s one of the most frustrating aspects of the writing process and something your writing group can help you with.

Ask the group, before the next scheduled meeting, to bring in examples of writing they are struggling with – something where their character or characters find themselves backed into a corner and their creator cannot move them on. Then, at the meeting, ask the group to read out a couple of the scenes they’re struggling with, alongside a synopsis of what they are writing about and what the character’s problem/conflict is.

Next, ask the group to close their eyes and ask the writer to read out the troublesome scene again. Ask the group to play through the scene in their mind, taking note of what they see in their mind’s eye and what their other senses are telling them. Then, ask them to think about what could have happened in the scenes prior to this, playing the scene causing the issues backwards in their mind.

After this ask them to replay the scene in their head and try to play it forward going beyond the current sticking point – rather like you can on pay to view channels or a dvd. Ask the group to write down any possible solutions they come up with and discuss them within the group. They can ask questions of the writer to gain a better understanding of the characters and their goals and to push the writer to think more about what it is they are writing and what they hope to achieve. Sometimes it’s the questioning that will nudge them out of their writing hole and make them rethink what they are writing – an ‘oh yes!’ moment.

Very often, actors are interviewed and asked about their characters and what the writer is trying to portray? Just as the actor becomes the character on screen, the writer can become the character they are writing. By ‘hot seating’ the writer in the same way, you can unlock the barrier that is stopping the writing from progressing onto the next scene.

Make the writer think about their writing and ask questions such as, are the characters in the right setting for that scene? Could moving the scene from a lounge to a café make the difference? Does something else need to happen after the scene where the character loses his job and before they end up in a car chase? What will bridge the gap to get them from point A to point B? This will stretch them and come at the problem from different angles in order to find a solution.

By closing your eyes and playing the scenes backwards and forwards, pausing at troublesome points and thinking about alternatives you can really focus on the scenes, without distraction, taking in finer detail and paying attention to your characters. The answers are in the writing somewhere.

Sometimes visualising the writing in a cinematic way can help to bring the words to life on the page. You ‘see’ the colours, ‘feel’ the textures, ‘smell’ the aromas, ‘hear’ your characters’ voices and ‘taste’ the coffee they’re drinking in the café, for example. Imagine your writing as a film, and it will help you to see the bigger picture.

If the writer is able to, ask them to go to the setting or a similar setting to that in which their scene takes place, for example, a café, a busy street, a secluded wood, a beach, or an office block. By immersing themselves in that environment, walking their character’s shoes, and ‘seeing’ their characters there, it can help bump the scene on to the next one, give the characters a direction to move in.

Unable to figure out what happens next in your story? Get your imaginary camera out and rewind or fast forward to the next scene – can you see a way you get from the scene you’re stuck on and the following scene? Thinking like a film maker, it will soon be lights, camera action for your writing too.
Do you work in, or have you retired from, one of the many healthcare professions? writes Neil Wilson.

If so, would you enjoy joining the Society of Medical Writers (SOMW)? Our 150 members include not only doctors, nurses and health visitors but also those from the many allied professions, such as social workers, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and medical journalists – as well as students in all these fields. Although what we write is often based on our experiences at work we share a passion for writing fact or fiction, prose or poetry, in any genre and on any subject.

That’s why the 60+ pages of The Writer – our glossy in-house journal which is sent out to members twice a year – is packed with startling, droll or humorous short stories, biographies, reviews of books and poetry pamphlets (many written by our members), accounts of memorable patients and experiences, opinions, informative factual articles, curious and intriguing titbits from the literary and wider world, and poems to make you think, rejoice, weep, laugh or even make your heart sing.

The SOMW was formed (originally as the GP Writers’ Association) in 1986 and continues each year to host a one-day meeting in London in the spring, and a weekend symposium in the autumn at different venues across the UK. These meetings provide members with a wide variety of talks and workshops by authors, editors, publishers and others on the many fascinating aspects of the literary world.

We hold competitions too, with prizes awarded twice a year in each category of fiction, non-fiction and poetry, together with publication of selected entries in The Writer.

Our members range from much-published authors to outright beginners so all are welcome to join our friendly and supportive society. You can find out more on our website – www.somw.org.uk – or by contacting our secretary Dr Julian Randall at acrerise01@gmail.com.

The Halesworth Write Types group of writers meets every Tuesday in the upstairs room of a quaint 16th century property known as the Ancient House in the attractive market town of Halesworth in Suffolk, writes Wally Smith.

Formed only two years ago, the group get together to discuss individual works in progress and to give each other constructive feedback on drafts. We feel it is important to have our work put before as wide an audience as possible, and submissions to competitions, publications and online magazines are encouraged. To this end members have published novels, short stories, poetry and academic works, and stories on www.short-story.me, www.sirenscallpublications.com and AntipodeanSF (www.antisf.com) amongst other e-zines, as well as having plays performed at the annual local INK Festival: which takes place at The New Cut Arts Centre in Halesworth.

The Ancient House is now the de Argenteins cafe, named after an historic family from the area, a ghost of which is said to still haunt the establishment. It might have been fun to call ourselves ghost writers but that would have given the wrong idea. We meet in the morning, but who knows what stories might be inspired by a little late night writing in the company of a ghost?

Website: www.writetypeshalesworth.wordpress.com
'I am a writer living with bipolar, psychosis and a not-too-delightful myriad of other mental health conditions,' writes subscriber Katie Metcalfe.

‘If I don’t write, I can’t function. I shut down and become less than a shadow of myself. It must have been that I was born with a pen in my hand because I can’t remember a time I didn’t write. My mum always reminds me that the clackity clack of my typewriter keys used to drive her mad.

‘I was in my seventh month of being a mother in Sweden, a country where to be myself – a vibrant, passionate creative with big dreams – was frowned upon by most, and I was suffering. ‘My intake of live poetry and interaction with writers had been pretty much nonexistent for three years. So I visited home, Teesside, to nurture and strengthen my soul. It was while I was home, I encountered poet Julie Easley at an event at Middlesbrough Library.

‘The power, the honesty, the witchcraft in her words was illuminating and empowering. I felt compelled to make a beeline for her, to say I wanted to publish her crone-honouring poem The Beautiful Emancipation. And that’s where the idea for the illustrated poetry anthology Maiden Mother Crone was conceived.

‘Consisting of work crafted by new and established writers, all of whom have uniquely interpreted the Maiden, Mother, and Crone, and illustrated by Logan Smith-Salmon, it’s a book for the witches that have been, that are and that will be.

‘To describe my work, I’d say it’s very northerly focused and wyrd. My new book My Heart Is A Forest is a collection of poetry written between 2009 and 2019. It’s a vast territory of poems, with subjects ranging from climate change in the Arctic to a woman watching her autopsy.

‘I’m also releasing my first novel in verse, Song Of The Wendigo in September, a book that’s meant to haunt your days. For those interested in an insight into my life as a wyrd writer, I blog at Wyrd Words & Effigies wyrdwordsandeffigies.wordpress.com and you can find my website at katiemetcalfewriting.com’

‘I’ve always enjoyed writing but treated it as a hobby until joining Skelmersdale Writers group and subscribing to Writing Magazine over five years ago,’ writes subscriber David Jenkins.

‘Since then I’ve learnt a great deal about the industry, the craft and developed the confidence to write in various genres and formats. Unfortunately, I’ve had limited luck with many of my short stories but after several positive rejections, I decided to collect some of the stories into an anthology.

‘Gardens, Galaxies and Goosebumps spans all speculative fiction genres and features a variety of unique creatures including the most vicious pest in your garden the Ground Goblin. It also has some unusual answers to common questions like why don’t we eat more vegetables.

‘From writing the stories to marketing I’ve enjoyed the whole process as it’s a process of different skills and gave me the opportunity to show my appreciation for the genres. Gardens, Galaxies and Goosebumps is available on Amazon, Kobo and Barnes and Noble.’
‘Since I was small, I have always been fascinated with words,’ writes subscriber Virginia Betts.

‘I used to write letters before I really knew what they were, and, pre-school, I announced myself, arms outstretched, as “coming from the Evening Star!” I had no clue that this was the name of our local newspaper; no idea why it caused such mirth from the adults. It was apt enough, though, for someone who continually wrote stories. I could read way before I went to school and my vocabulary was far beyond my years. My first “book” (aged 6) was about a fairground horse who jumped onto the sand and galloped off to have adventures. All of this sometimes made school a bit tricky to negotiate, as I must have sounded a bit pretentious.

‘Fast forward to adulthood. I kept writing on and off, but I was busy as a teacher and mother. However, five years ago, I put my brain to a new venture and started my own tuition company. This soared to success and although always busy, it meant that I had some free days. My husband bought me a subscription to Writing Magazine and before long, I took the plunge and submitted some work to competitions and magazines. This paid off, as the first short story I submitted was accepted. It is about to be published in a magazine called The weird and the whatnot, which I saw in Writing Magazine. This magazine seemed to fit my occasionally dark imagination, and that’s why I sent it a ghost story! Christmas 2018 was a watershed moment all round, as I was also diagnosed with Irlens’ syndrome (which means I have to wear blue glasses to read print – oh what a difference!) and also Aspergers’ syndrome. Well, that explains the computer-like memory for words and the weird and wacky imagination then!

‘I have written some more stories, articles and a great deal of poetry since last Christmas, and I have had a blog article published online for my old university, an article in the National Autistic Society magazine, and I have just heard that a poem has been shortlisted for publication in a poetry journal. I still tutor, raising students’ GCSE and A level results, sometimes by three grades. Words are more than a hobby, a job, or even a passion – they save my brain from overload and stagnation. Writing literally calms me and makes me a happier and healthier person.

‘Thinks: Am I the oldest writer to get his first novel published?’ writes subscriber Graham Mole.

‘It’s called Paper Chain.

‘As a freelance journalist I write features for Forestry Journal magazine among others but that came way after a full time career as a TV documentary maker and a director on programmes like BBC’s Countryfile.

‘Paper Chain basically is about what happens when a bug from space destroys America’s forests and turns it into a third world country. It even got backing from Robert Redford who called it “An important environmental concept.” Terrifyingly in the real world a bug called the emerald ash borer is currently destroying forests in the US.

‘I’ve also written a fishing book which has a wincing title: A Multitude of Fins.

‘Thanks to being a subscriber to Writing Magazine I spotted the publisher for Paper Chain… SilverBow in Canada.

‘And my age? You’ll just have to guess… but being a pensioner you have time to write.’

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Alternative reality

‘The last couple of years have been an exhilarating series of firsts for me, with four books accepted for publication by two different publishers,’ writes subscriber Andrew J Harvey.

‘My first book, Nightfall (Book 1 in the Clemhorn Trilogy) was released by Zmok Books in February 2019, while the first of the three Portal Adventures is due to be released by Peasantry Press in January 2020.

‘These successes have followed a long apprenticeship over the past thirty years during which I completed and submitted over twelve, separate full-length manuscripts to a number of publishers. Frustratingly, my only success over this period was the acceptance of a single short story by an Australian SF&F magazine. So, it was with considerably lowered expectations that, after reading an article in Writing Magazine about a new Canadian based publisher, Peasantry Press, I submitted a series of three young-adult/middle-grade science fiction stories. You can understand my excitement when, following a requested redraft of the stories into “American English” (I am Australian), I was offered a three-book contract a year later. This was not only my first contract, but a three book contract at that! Trouble on Tenal, the first book in The Portal Adventures, is due for release in January 2020. The second, Crisis at Calista Station, will be released in March, with the third, Vortex on Vertu Prime, in May.

‘Shortly after having the Portal Adventures accepted, I received a further boost to my confidence when Nightfall, the first in my adult, alternate history trilogy was accepted by USA-based publisher Zmok Books. Balancing the needs of the two publishers to progress editing on four books, as well as my continuing responsibilities as principal of Hague Publishing (an independent Australian publisher of science fiction and fantasy), while temporarily heading up a small government department at the same time was an interesting, and at times, exhausting challenge. But having that first book in my hand certainly made it all worthwhile. I am incredibly proud of Nightfall, which tells the story of an Earth which has been taken over from another dimension.’

Website: www.andrewjharvey.com

Stars aligned for success

‘At the age of sixty I found myself redundant, coming out of an office job with very little redundancy money,’ writes subscriber Leslie Jenkins.

‘I decided to enrol in acting classes at Sylvia Young Theatre school and then RADA but writing was always my first love. I was determined to get my little astrology book Astral Cats, astrology for cats published but nobody was interested. After thirty rejections I felt so low. I always worked from home as a part-time clairvoyant and decided to train as an English TEFL teacher and work from home as well. I had to reinvent myself.

‘I kept going, polishing my work then a call came from The Wolfenhowle Press and said they loved it and wanted to publish. I cried with happiness. The wonderful Tyluia Penry, publisher, said it would make a lovely little book. It came at the time that my sister has passed away so what with this and losing my job I felt happy humble and blessed with this good news.

‘I had previously worked on my children’s picture book Mrs Jacaranda Stories but nobody wanted to know. After 32 rejections and endless literary agents I put it to one side then reworked it again. Two years after Astral Cats, on my 65th birthday, Blossom Spring Publishing that did children’s picture books accepted Mrs Jacaranda. They said it needs polishing but the ideas are there and would make a beautiful book. This book is dedicated to my three children.

‘With Astral Cats the idea came when I was in the garden one day and one of my cats chased a butterfly and I felt that cats like humans have a birthday and a character of their own so to write about their zodiac signs seemed a perfect idea. With Mrs Jacaranda I was in Portugal on holiday years ago when I was on a coach trip delayed in traffic. I glanced at jacaranda trees so Mrs Jacaranda came alive.

‘I’m now working on another Mrs Jacaranda book. There is also a follow up to Astral Cats due to be published, Astral Dogs, so the future is positive. Never give up on yourself. Nobody wanted me and at the age of 65, now published, it can be done.’

Worth another look

‘About six months ago I temporarily set aside the half finished novel that I had been wrestling with, and decided to revisit the short stories that I had written over the last few decades instead,’ writes subscriber Alan Orchard.

‘This is an interesting exercise for any author to undertake, as study of the texts will reveal how your writing style has evolved over the years.

‘I selected what I considered to be the best ones, making revisions to them where I deemed it to be necessary, and assembled them into an anthology, Things Behind The Sun, which is now available on Amazon Kindle.

‘This was my first venture into e-publishing, and I viewed this unknown territory with some trepidation, but – provided you commission a good producer to do the necessary file conversion and help you set up your KDP account – it proves to be a relatively painless exercise. I would certainly recommend other short story writers to review their back catalogue of material and consider this option.

‘Then you need to think about how you are going to promote the resulting book – but that’s another story, and you could say that this article is the first paragraph!’
‘For nearly twenty years I was up to my neck in mud and bullets,’ writes subscriber David Lawrence-Young.

‘Not literally, but metaphorically. I had spent a few years completing my MA dissertation which had analysed the poetry of the First World War. I had concentrated on Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Isaac Rosenberg and Charles Sorley and knew that I definitely had enough material to write a war novel or two.

‘But what was I going to write? A novel about a sensitive young man writing poems as he survived the muddy, bloody trenches of Flanders? A gung-ho story about a valiant junior officer smashing his way across No-Man’s Land to bring glory to his regiment and thus advance his own future promotion? A battlefield love story? What?

‘And then it came to me. I would write a WW1 spy novel. It would feature a motor-cycle dispatch rider who, because of his background and education, speaks French and German. On a mission to deliver some secret dispatches, he is injured and hospitalised. Following his recovery, he returns to the Front but this time as a spy in order to carry out several undercover missions.

‘But where was this to happen? After all, the Western Front extended for hundreds of miles from the English Channel to the Swiss border. In the end I chose the area around Ypres (“Wipers” to the troops then serving there) since I had studied this particular battlefield and had toured the area as part of my academic research.

‘Of the twenty historical novels that I have had published, Go Spy Out the Land was to be one of the most exciting to write. It included much of the background material I had studied and actually seen as well as including my love of old British motorbikes. What more could I want? The book was published a few months ago by Ravenswood Publishing NC, USA and, as I was still on this First World War “high” I followed it up almost immediately with Entrenched. This second war novel which included a love story concentrated more on the fighting in the trenches in north-east France as well as on the Palestine and the Middle East battlefields in 1917. It was published recently by Sharpe Books – a publisher I had learned about through reading WM.’

‘The feedback from my tutor was excellent. It was expertly considered, thorough and honest. She has given me lots of ideas on how I can improve my writing technique, the plot and the story itself. It has helped me to reflect on the characters more, analysing their motivations and behaviour. Most of all it has given me the confidence to pursue writing my romance novel as now I can clearly see its potential.’

Dawn R, Liverpool

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Dawn R, Liverpool

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Quote

WM/NOV19
The subconscious is a powerful tool for every writer but it’s difficult to know how to harness its potential to work for you when you want it to. Think of your mind as a ship, with the captain steering and looking out to the horizon, and the crew working away below decks, out of sight. From a writing point of view, the crew does a lot of the work without the captain even being aware of it and it’s very useful to be able to communicate with them in order to tap into what they’re doing.

Hypnotherapist and children’s author, Steve Bowkett, agrees that there’s a valuable resource waiting deep in your mind for you to access it: ‘The subconscious is a treasure house of potential ideas, based as it is on the accumulated experiences of a lifetime. It is the ground of those two astonishing resources – memory and imagination.’

The crew are eager to help if you let them. But how do you make contact with the parts of your mind that aren’t directly connected to your conscious thoughts?

Steve’s answer is to treat your subconscious crew like friends you can send messages to. In the workshops he runs at writing events, he teaches techniques of self-hypnosis to help writers tap into their subconscious and provide a structure for it transmit ideas to the conscious mind.

Have you ever experienced that wondrous moment when you’re focusing on a manual task, like doing the washing up or taking a shower, and an amazing idea comes to you as if from nowhere? Wouldn’t you like to be able to control when this happens and what the idea is about?

Well, according to Steve’s technique, you can.

Say you have a prompt for a competition entry and you’re having trouble coming up with an idea. What Steve suggests is that you ask the subconscious crew a question and set a specific time and date for them to give you an answer.

Take a moment to think about the prompt. Then say very definitely to yourself, preferably aloud, ‘When I sit down to write tomorrow, I will gain some insight into my competition entry.’ This technique can easily be framed more specifically - eg ‘When I wake up tomorrow, I will know how the story I’m working on will end,’ or ‘At 6pm tomorrow, I will find out why my character is doing [a particular thing].’

The answers are always there in your head. It’s just a case of giving the crew the time and space to dig them out, and then prompting them to hand those answers over to you at a convenient moment.

Sometimes, the answer to the question will just turn up in your head at the appointed time, without you even having to think about it. Other times, it won’t. However, it’s important to know that your crew doesn’t mean to let you down, and sometimes they just need a little support from their captain to get the job done. On the occasions when the answer doesn’t magically appear, if you sit down later in the day and present yourself with a blank screen and half an hour of dedicated time, the words will likely start to flow and everything about the story will resolve itself as you go. The crew were just holding back until you gave them an outlet to present you with their work.

Writers often fall into the trap of thinking you need to wait until the mood strikes to start writing, or that you need to be in the right frame of mind for the creativity to flow. But, if you train your crew and schedule your writing time, you can create that ‘right frame of mind’ for yourself. If you give your crew a set time for coming up with ideas, you can use this to structure your writing day and the result will be much more productivity than just leaving it to a whim.

Successfully training your subconscious crew is all about the presupposition of success. If you assume the crew will come up with the requested answer at the set time, it’s much more likely that they will. And there’s another way you can use this concept to your advantage in achieving your writing goals. When you sit down for a writing session, start off by writing an account of what you intend to complete that day – as if you have already done it. This is exactly like posing a question to the crew and expecting them to answer it. If you set in your mind that you have already achieved everything you set out to do, then your mindset will lean towards motivating you towards fulfilling those goals. You will find it’s much easier to get started on each task and that its progression will flow much more smoothly.

So, next time you’re stuck on a tricky bit in your story, or you’re not feeling enthused about getting on with your latest project, get your subconscious working harder on your behalf.

As Steve Bowkett says: ‘Whatever we think we consciously know, subconsciously we know a huge amount more.’

Your crew can help and they will respond with better ideas the more you ask them to do. But don’t neglect them. Always remember to thank them for their help. You won’t regret it.
FOOD SHORT STORY COMPETITION

Leave us salivating with your stories for this month, which should involve food in some capacity. Capture the importance of family dinner, leave us begging for more with its absence, or whisk us back with a sensory madeleine? The final recipe is up to you.

Your entry should be 1,500-1,700 words.

The closing date is 15 December. The winner will receive £100 and publication in Writing Magazine, with £25 and publication on www.writers-online.co.uk for the runner-up.

STILL TIME TO ENTER

With its closing date of 15 November, there’s still time to enter last month’s open competition for Christmas poems. See p95 for entry details.
Denial
I’m waiting for you to come home. I’ve been waiting for a week.
I am upstairs when I hear someone in the kitchen and almost fall in my haste to confirm you are here.
But I find only your dirty plate and the dregs of your coffee. I pick up your mug and cradle it in my hands, touching my lips to where yours were.
I jump as the phone screams for attention. My heart races and my hands shake. I run to the hallway and pick up the phone. It could be you.
‘Hello.’
‘Mrs Jackson?’
‘Yes.’ I slip down the wall onto the beige carpet you were so sure was the best colour for our hallway, although I thought it was insipid. My fingers explore the roughness of the natural fibres, reminding me of the rare moments your face was covered in stubble. The voice in my ear falters at my lack of response.
‘Mrs Jackson! Are you there?’
‘Yes.’ I whisper.
‘Are you alright?’
‘I don’t know.’ I brush away useless tears. ‘Yes, of course. I’m sorry.’
‘No need to be sorry Mrs Jackson. It’s understandable. But may I ring back later? Or could you come here? There are decisions to be made.’
‘Yes.’ I put the phone down.

Later. Another day. Not now, not yet. You will come home soon and tell me it was all a mistake.
I stare at the phone. Why don’t you call and tell me you’re coming home?
My mobile buzzes on the kitchen table. It’s not your ringtone.
‘Go away,’ I shout to no-one.
My mobile chirps to let me know I have a message. Another message I don’t want to read. I go back to bed and wait for the sound of your keys in the front door.

Anger
I pull back the curtains allowing the weak light from heavy skies to fill the house. Your jacket hangs in its transparent wrap on the back of the door. I yank off the plastic, hold the jacket to my nose. It smells clean.
You haven’t worn it since I had it dry cleaned and yet you insisted it was done straight away. I wasted a lunch hour for you. Why did you not wear it? I hold it up, inspect the pocket. There is no trace of the red wine I spilt, and yet you said it was ruined. I carry it up to our room and open your wardrobe.
Your trousers ironed correctly, hanging at the exact length you specified. Your jumpers and T-shirts folded just so on shelves. Never to be worn by you again.

My stomach boils, and the heat rises into my throat. I am not going to be sick.
I grab your trousers, tearing them from their hangers, scrunching them into tight balls and I throw them across the room. The creases are in the wrong place now. How angry you would be.
Is that a small smile tugging my face?
I pull your jumpers and T-shirts from their tidy shelves, throw them on the floor and stomp them into a mountain of grey and black. What dull colours you wore. They’d suit you now.

My knees buckle and my hands become fists. I pummel your clothes. You are not coming back. My tears scold my cheeks.
I use the bed we shared to pull myself up. The room is a mess, but I don’t care. You are not coming home.

I sleep on the sofa.

Bargaining
A thump awakens me. More envelopes piling inside the door. I don’t want to open them. I don’t want to read words of sympathy. I go upstairs.
‘I’m sorry.’ I stare at the bedroom floor, gathering your clothes in my arms and sorting them into piles on the bed.
‘I’ll put them back, just how you like.’ I handle them gently, cradling

Jenni Clarke was born in the UK but now lives in a quiet corner of France where she writes whenever life gives her the time and space. Her non-fiction writing has been published over the last twelve years, and she has recently published her first fiction book of short stories. This is her first competition win after being a runner-up several times.
With the correct creases and smile. I hang them so the waist band is two centimetres higher than the bottom seam. Perfect.

If you come home, you’ll be happy.

By the time I finish restoring your wardrobe my back aches and the burn scar on my wrist pulls tight. I sit on the bed and rub in some cream before smoothing the sheets and positioning the pillows. I won’t spoil it. I’ll sleep on the sofa again, then if you come home we can go to bed together, if you want.

**Depression**

It’s dark in the house. I’m keeping the curtains closed hoping everyone will take the hint and leave me alone. I don’t need them, and I don’t need sunlight. The table lamps give me sufficient light to wander from room to room, searching for a trace of you.

I stare at the interior of our fridge, then close the door. It’s too much effort to cook. I order a pizza and wait, resting my head on the kitchen table.

Your mug still sits there. It’s a garden of green and black. I poke it with my finger and filaments of white float to the table. I turn my face away as my nose twitches and I see the kitchen sink.

It is overflowing with dirty plates and half full mugs. Your plate has done to me. What I have let you in for, you never coming home.

I throw the damaged clothes in the bin and the rest into the washing machine. I choose the correct temperature and measure the powder. Just as you taught me.

If you come home now, all will be as you like it. Wait.

I run back upstairs and collect your trousers. It will take me hours to remove the creases, but I can. The task of ironing with the correct speed, with the right number of puffs of steam is soothing.

See how much I learnt from you?

I hold up a pair of stone-grey chinos with the correct creases and smile. I hang them so the waist band is two centimetres higher than the bottom seam. Perfect.

If you come home, you’ll be happy.

By the time I finish restoring your wardrobe my back aches and the burn scar on my wrist pulls tight. I sit on the bed and rub in some cream before smoothing the sheets and positioning the pillows. I won’t spoil it. I’ll sleep on the sofa again, then if you come home, we can go to bed together, if you want.

**Acceptance**

The house is quiet, you are no longer here to shout, throw things, slam doors. And you never will be. You are never coming home.

I savour the words in my head and finally understand what your leaving has done to me. What I have let you do to me.

I am alone and I smell. The house smells.

This is not how I want to live without you.

I walk into the lounge. The shelves are empty. Your collection of model cars is in a bag hanging off the fence waiting for the two boys who live next door to come home from school. Those noisy children you hated, those children whose ball you punctured when it dared to land on your pristine grass.

The ugly china dogs you inherited from your mother. They too are in a box. Tomorrow I’ll take them, your music collection, your magazines and books to the charity shop in the high street. Everything else is going to the dump.

Apart from your mug and the plate from which you ate your last meal. They are on the kitchen table.

I pick them up and roll them in a towel. The wooden rolling pin, which my ribs know too well, smashes the evidence to dust. I dump the towel in the last bin bag.

Without you I can live.

---

Runner-up in the ‘Without’ competition was Lolita Parekh, Harrow, Middlesex, whose story is published on www.writers-online.co.uk. Also shortlisted were: Dominic Bell, Hull, Humberside; Gillian Brown, Peyriac de Mer, France; Celia Jenkins, Trowbridge, Somerset; Spencer Lawrence, Rudloe, Wiltshire; Jennifer Moore, Ivybridge, Devon; Jenny Morris, Crowborough, East Sussex; Karen Rodgers, Chard, Somerset; DJ Tyrer, Southend-on-Sea, Essex; Hazel Whitehead, Bishop’s Waltham, Hampshire.
Away from your desk
Get out of your garret for some upcoming activities and places to visit

Tim Clare’s podcast is all about helping writers be happier and more productive. In a live appearance at the National Centre for Writing on 1 November, Death of 1,000 Cuts Live, he’ll be breaking down audience members’ first pages to help them make them better.
Website: https://writ.rs/timclarelive

Celebrate 35 years of Wasafiri magazine at An Island Full of Voices, a festival at The British Library on 9 November that includes writing workshops with Anthony Joseph, Nick Makoha and Maggie Gee.
Website: https://writ.rs/islandfullofvoices

A Spread the Word evening workshop in Whitechapel, London E1, on 26 November, Openings with Jarred McGinnis puts the focus on first pages that really draw readers in.
Website: https://writ.rs/openings

Join creative writing tutor Anne Aylor in Rye between 18 and 21 November for two and a half or three and a half days of Writers’ Surgery Retreat to get critiquing and advice on work you’re either blocked on or that you’ve lost control of.
Website: www.anneaylor.co.uk

WM’s own free-range writer Jenny Alexander leads a one-day writing for children workshop to boost your creativity on 17 November in Upton Cross, East Cornwall.
Website: https://jennyalexander.co.uk/writing-workshops/

Pitch article idea!

Screenwriting guru Robert McKee’s one day London workshop on 24 November is an intensive one-day seminar dedicated to the love story genre. Website: www.mckeesstory.com

A creative writing weekend inspired by Buddhist principles and practice, Wolf at the Door Writing Weekend takes place on 26 and 27 October at Manchester Buddhist Centre.
Website: https://writ.rs/wolfatthedoor

Back soon!

Some good ideas here!!
Catherine Steadman, Kate Rhodes and WM’s own crime columnist Lisa Cutts get together for a Female Voices in Crime Fiction panel event as part of Havering Literary Festival on 14 November.

Website: https://writ.rs/femalevoicesincrimefiction

Stratlitfest’s Winter Weekend features Max Hastings, Jenny Eclair, Jess Phillips and John Humphrys, and takes place between 1 and 3 November.

Website: www.stratfordliteraryfestival.co.uk

The three-day Louder Than Words festival at the Principal Hotel in Manchester celebrates words and books linked to music and popular culture between 8 and 10 November, including appearances from the ‘face of punk’ Jordan, Carhi Unsworth, Thurston Moore, Marianne Dissard and Steve Lamacq.

Website: https://louderthanwordsfest.com/

The Pre-Raphaelite Sisters exhibition at London’s National Portrait Gallery, running from 17 October until 26 January, tells the story of twelve women influential in the Pre-Raphaelite movement through paintings, photographs and manuscripts, many of which are previously unseen.

Website: https://writ.rs/preraphaelitesisters

The Observer’s food critic discusses My Last Supper, his new book about final meals and his eating adventures at the Assembly Rooms in Edinburgh on 22 November.

Website: https://writ.rs/mylastsupper

Interested in imagining future worlds? Visit The Future is Now, the Tate’s major retrospective of the work of visionary artist Nam June Paik, who pioneered the use of video and TV in art.

Website: https://writ.rs/namjunepaik

Catch the poet, spoken performer and recording artist Kate Tempest on the UK dates of her tour, starting on 14 October in Oxford and ending on 17 November in Newcastle.

Website: www.katetempest.co.uk/tour

Interested in imagining future worlds? Visit The Future is Now, the Tate’s major retrospective of the work of visionary artist Nam June Paik, who pioneered the use of video and TV in art.

Website: https://writ.rs/namjunepaik

This looks great!
IN THE GARDEN

I dig, and strike a small stone with my spade,
Slate grey, striated with a lighter shade.
Informed by education I’m aware
Of random reasons for its presence there.
In ancient seas slow sediments of lime
Were crushed to solid rock by passing time,
Violent eruptions overturned the earth,
Piled up the plates and gave the mountains birth,
In a long age of ice the glaciers’ glide
Scattered the shattered shingle far and wide,
Then it was ripple rounded in the flow
Of some forgotten stream, lost long ago.
Not useful flint, no good for axe or knife
It’s played, so far, no part in human life.
That time has come; I lift it from the floor
And fling it at that yapping dog next door.

Sometimes an apparently insignificant event can give rise to a delicious poem. It all depends on the mindset of the observer. Fortunately, when the spade hit a stone in the garden, there was a poet on the other end of it, and a new poem was born.

Mike Rathbone, of Southport, Merseyside, demonstrates how a simple incident gave rise to a flight of fancy that involves both information and imagination.

A number of this poet’s works are inspired by a single moment or small event, but he says that they don’t always produce a poem immediately. It can be a long process – not in the geological timeframe of In the Garden, fortunately, but it can be weeks, months or even years before the trigger event results in the completed poem.

For Mike Rathbone, the process begins in the head, thinking about and around the subject. The next stage involves making notes, often just brief phrases and observations, which can be put away and then retrieved later, added to, expanded upon, and developed further until the poem emerges.

When it comes to the actual production of the poem, he likes to work alone, in a study-cum-spare-bedroom. For so many poets, the act of writing can be physically exhausting, and Mike describes a mingling of satisfaction at the end of the process with tiredness and the sensation of being brain-dead. The emotional toll can make you just as tired as heavy physical effort. As the results could be around for generations, it’s worth the work.

The pebble’s progress

Alison Chisholm explores a layered poem triggered by a mundane happening

There is ordinariness at the beginning and end of this poem, although the poet hastens to point out that ‘No animals were harmed during the production of this verse!’

The small, simple description of catching the stone with the spade, and the fictitious flinging of it, are mundane. Between them we have a historical/geological account of the formation of the planet’s surface, followed by the assertion that the stone in question has played, so far, no part in human life.

The central section, amounting to half the length of the poem, is told in a single sentence. This, broken up only by commas to help with the phrasing, gives the impression of a flood of information tumbling with scarcely a moment’s pause. It’s as if the words are racing downhill and almost tripping themselves up in their haste. The tempo calms as we reach the damning comment to the effect that the stone has been neither use nor ornament – until now.

The poem uses rhyming couplets throughout, a difficult form to work effectively. The form is ideally suited to a flippant, jokey piece, but although there’s a light punchline here, much of the content involves more serious information. It’s easy to make rhymed couplets sound trite, but careful selection of vocabulary has ensured that the rhymes here are exact and unforced.

The familiar iambic pentameter supports the rhyme scheme, but again this reads naturally and sounds unforced. The poet has made good use of initial trochaic

Sometimes an apparently insignificant event can give rise to a delicious poem. It all depends on the mindset of the observer. Fortunately, when the spade hit a stone in the garden, there was a poet on the other end of it, and a new poem was born.

Mike Rathbone, of Southport, Merseyside, demonstrates how a simple incident gave rise to a flight of fancy that involves both information and imagination.

A number of this poet’s works are inspired by a single moment or small event, but he says that they don’t always produce a poem immediately. It can be a long process – not in the geological timeframe of In the Garden, fortunately, but it can be weeks, months or even years before the trigger event results in the completed poem.

For Mike Rathbone, the process begins in the head, thinking about and around the subject. The next stage involves making notes, often just brief phrases and observations, which can be put away and then retrieved later, added to, expanded upon, and developed further until the poem emerges.

When it comes to the actual production of the poem, he likes to work alone, in a study-cum-spare-bedroom. For so many poets, the act of writing can be physically exhausting, and Mike describes a mingling of satisfaction at the end of the process with tiredness and the sensation of being brain-dead. The emotional toll can make you just as tired as heavy physical effort. As the results could be around for generations, it’s worth the work.

The pebble’s progress

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The familiar iambic pentameter supports the rhyme scheme, but again this reads naturally and sounds unforced. The poet has made good use of initial trochaic
substitution, where the first foot of a line is reversed to give a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed one, and then an immediate return to the iambic pattern of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one. This hint of syncopation lends itself to a more conversational delivery than you get with strict iambic pentameters.

Mike Rathbone points out that he has a preference for writing in rhyme and metre, using more traditional patterns, but that he’s happy to use free verse when the emerging poem would fit more naturally into that style. His ease with both styles is demonstrated by the way he uses slant rhyme internally, in addition to the full rhyme at line ends.

The poem’s opening line has neat alliteration in strike a small stone with my spade, and the random reasons, glaciers’ glide, shattered shingle and ripple rounded continue the technique through the piece. Slate and striated bring in assonance with the poem’s first rhyme, and assonance also appears in solid rock, plates / gave, ice / glide, it / ripple / in and so forth. There is consonance in crushed / solid and fling / yapping, and full consonance in sea / sediments and some / stream.

All of these combine to add to the poetic effect of the writing – and of course where a single example of such sound similarity could be mere coincidence, multiple examples show design.

The precision of vocabulary is another of the joys of this poem. The slate grey may be a familiar image, but striated with a lighter shade has precision while sounding much more interesting than ‘with lighter stripes’. The long age of ice has more appeal than ‘ice age’ would. Scattered the shattered shingle is a phrase you have to keep saying over to yourself – it’s exact, specific, and sounds amazing.

There’s a pleasing touch in some of the expressions, too. The idea of being Informed by education is far more interesting than being informed by a teacher, and makes a dry little sideswipe at the whole concept of education. The image piled up the plates describing the action of the eruption is just what we say about collecting dishes together, in a mock-debasing glance at the force of the volcano.

The touch of black humour at the end of the poem is another irresistible factor. There’s a fraction of a second of suspense when the reader is told That time has come. The lifting is slow and solemn… and then the pace zips along as the final line elicits a guilty laugh.

There is just one small suggestion that the poet might consider when completing this piece. The use of upper case letters to start each line – at one time an essential factor when writing a poem – is no longer seen as necessary. While it is not incorrect to start every line with a capital, using upper and lower case letters as you would in a prose passage, just to start a new sentence, seems to give the poem better flow and creates an easier read.

Before its appearance on this page, In the Garden was aired in a poetry workshop situation. This is an excellent opportunity to get feedback on a work in progress, and elicit suggestions for improvement. It paid off. The completed version is a fun, fascinating and delightful poem, of which the poet should be proud.

Give your poem a winning edge by paying attention to pace, says Doris Corti

It’s all too easy to be disconsolate if you have entered for a few poetry competitions and have not won a place. Always remember that a great many people enter these so your poem has to have some element that attracts it into the winners’ category.

Check that you followed the stated rules for submitting to a particular competition. Okay, so you followed these exactly and you are sure your theme is an original one, as is the title and opening line. All of this can help you achieve your goal of becoming a winner.

So, what might have prevented your poem from being amongst the winners? Your poem merits careful scrutiny. Be totally honest with yourself. Was it a good enough poem to submit in the first place? Are you sure that the punctuation was correctly applied? Were the images you used strong enough? If a rhyme pattern or traditional pattern used was it followed regularly in lines throughout your poem?

Read the poem aloud. Yes I know you have done this several times, but this time listen to the lines slowly and carefully. Is it meant to be read with a sense of rhythm in the lines? Even a small juxtaposition of sounds can carry a rhythm. Repetition of short, sharp words in a line can create a fast pace, as in

Cloud heaped on cloud, black cloud and rain, rain, rain continues into the dark, black night.

These three lines achieve a fast, rhythmic pace. This is all good if it achieves the required effect in a poem you may be intending to send to a competition. However, the theme of your poem may not be helped by the creating of a fast pace. Maybe slowing lines with the use of double syllable words may be the effect you want for that competition poem? For example, the theme of a particular poem may be sombre, as in the following lines about a particular place in a dull spring.

Water, like pewter, silver dull, blackthorn’s Easter blossoming and rain slants needle-wise into our faces, so that we gasp toiling up Prawle Point...

Double syllable words in these lines create a slower pace which creates a slower rhythm. Check the theme of your poem to establish whether a fast or slow pace is necessary. It’s something to remember when entering a poetry competition.

Exercises

• Write 10 lines to the theme of happiness. Fast pace each line by using short sharp words.
• Using double syllable words, write a poem that has a more sombre theme.
This month’s story is richly layered with well-observed characterisation and a good ear for dialogue. Kevin Barry’s *Fjord of Killary* is set in a hotel located in the West of Ireland and, as we’ll see, the building itself is of crucial importance to the story in a number of ways. As always you’ll gain most from the masterclass if you read the story for yourself, and this one comes with a bit of a strong language and content warning: https://writ.rs/fjordofkillary.

Notice first how Kevin Barry has subverted norms in his description of the surroundings of the hotel. In a tourist location such as Killary, the fjord and mountains beyond might normally be referred to as beautiful or majestic, but instead he talks of ‘disgracefully grey skies’ and ‘the most depressing’ mountain ever. The narrator, Caoimhin, makes it clear early on that he is not entirely happy here.

The chatter of the locals places the hotel in a wider geographical setting. Their endless talk of how long it would take to get to this place with this amount of traffic on this day of the week infuriates Caoimhin, but gives the reader a good feel for the place, the people and the way they live their lives. However, it is the hotel itself that is the most significant thing in terms of setting, both as a physical structure and in terms of what it means symbolically to Caoimhin.

The hotel as a building is important to the plot of the story, from the listing floors that you can roll a tin of peas down, the bar with its mahogany and zinc and a small window that gives a view of the rising waters, the dreary viewless rooms at the back that are used by the Belarusian summer staff, and the function room where they all end up marooned by the rising water. There aren’t screeds of description, but the details we are given allow us to clearly visualise the events of the story.

But the hotel is also important as a symbol of Caoimhin’s state of mind. He bought it off the back of a mid-life crisis and in the hope that it would help him break his writer’s block and get back to writing poetry. In a sense it replaces the gap left by his former life, although it hasn’t yet worked the magic on his state of mind that he was hoping for. It also represents the money that he spent on it. He reflects that if he sold it, or claimed on the insurance, he could buy half of Cambodia, he reckons. In that sense it also represents a potential alternative future.

One of the interesting things about the story is the way in which the author creates a sense of tension and
foreboding about the possibility of a flood. You can track the water rising throughout the course of the story, bringing with it a creeping sense of menace. Note first the name of the hotel. It is called Water’s Edge and that name will turn out to be very prescient.

At one point there is talk between Caoimhin and the locals about the unlikelihood of the place actually flooding. Apparently it hasn’t in sixteen years and, of course, Caoimhin was told by the estate agent that it wouldn’t.

But in the midst of a ‘hysterical downpour’ all the neighbourhood dogs start howling. Then the water laps at, and later breaches, the harbour wall. The water creeps up the steps at the front of the hotel and sweeps over the porch. Incrementally the level of jeopardy is cranked up until finally the doors pop and the water floods into the hotel. At the very end we hear that the water has started to go down again, but of course by then the damage is done and the lower floors of the hotel are full of floating bar stools and place mats.

There are some dark moments in the story, such as the gull pulling its partner’s head off and the local woman biting her husband’s neck and drawing blood after he admits to an affair with her sister. This is balanced by some comic moments such as the otter eating the carrot and coriander soup and gently humorous images such as the seven sheep floating past in a rowing boat.

In a nice moment at the end we see Caoimhin reaching for his notebook. It seems that the rising and falling of the flood water have lifted his mood and that he might finally be able to write again.

By making full use of the building of the hotel as a pivotal part of the story and letting the reader really feel the tension of the encroaching water and impending disaster, Kevin Barry has written a story with a vividly visual quality which helps it to linger in the reader’s mind long after it is finished.

Come over to my place
We’ve looked at the importance of settings in short stories before, but this month I want to look specifically at the role of actual buildings.

What buildings are important to your character and might feature in your story? One obvious thing might be their house. Another could be their workplace. But you could also think about other buildings your character might find themselves having a significant experience in. Maybe a church, a hospital or a railway waiting room.

Certain types of buildings suggest particular types and genres of story. For example you might expect a story set in a police station to be a crime story and a story set on a spaceship to be science fiction. But why not mix and match things a bit? What about a romance set in a police station? Or a crime story set on a spaceship? What unusual elements would that bring to your story?

I want to think about a story set in your character’s home a bit more closely. Here’s a writing exercise to try out.

Firstly imagine yourself standing at the front door of their house. What does it look like? What colour is it? Is it shiny with fresh paint or does it look a bit shabby and worse for wear? Is there a number on it? Is there a big metal doorknocker? Or a state of the art doorbell? Is there a doormat? Does your character keep a spare key hidden in a flower pot or under a brick or would they not dream of doing something so irresponsible?

Look up at the house. What sort of house is it? How many floors does it have? Is it detached or semi-detached, or part of a terrace or block. How old is it? Does it fit a distinct architectural style or period? Maybe it’s Victorian, or Tudor or art deco. What external features stand out?

Then imagine opening the door and going through. What can you see in the hallway? Is there a near shoe rack or is footwear higgledy piggledy in a pile on the floor? Is mail placed neatly on the hall table or is there a pile of junk mail in a corner that’s threatening to take over the whole room?

Now peek into the living room. Is it pristine and minimalist? Or is it cosy and messy? Are there bookshelves lining the walls and groaning with books or just a couple of well-chosen tomes on the coffee table? Are there children’s toys scattered all over the floor? Or maybe dog chews and a cat’s scratching post? Is everything beautifully co-ordinated or just a hodge-podge of different colours and design?

What about the kitchen? Is it spotlessly clean or are their dirty dishes in the sink and rubbish overflowing from the bin? Are the work surfaces covered in state of the art kitchen equipment and the cupboards well stocked with gourmet ingredients and top notch pots and pans? Or is the only sign of meal provision the corkboard with all the local takeaway menus pinned to it? Is the fridge door covered in children’s drawings or just dotted tastefully with fridge magnets carrying inspirational quotes?

Try doing this for every room in the house and really build up a rich picture of how your character lives.

You could do a similar exercise for your character’s place of work. Do they have a tidy desk? What do they have on their desk? Family photos or just purely professional paraphernalia? Do they have a line of empty, dirty mugs or are they the person in the office who always remembers to make everyone else a fresh cup of tea and make sure the washing up is done? What’s in their top drawer? Snacks? A spare pair of socks and an umbrella? Hand cream and a cosmetic bag?

What other aspects of the building you’ve put your character in might influence your story?

Is it, like Caoimhín’s hotel, at risk of flooding? How does that make your character feel? Is it warm and cosy, or does it have a temperamental heating system that keeps plunging it into icy coldness? Is it well sound-proofed, or can you hear everything the people in the neighbouring house or office are doing? Is it all on one level or do you have to spend all your time going up and down stairs?

Of course, you won’t need to use all these details in full in your story. But by exploring them and just dropping in little telling details for your reader you can make your character and your story come to life as Kevin Barry did with Fjord Of Killary.
It's hard to believe there are just a few months of 2019 left. The early morning air is turning crisp, the dark mornings and evenings creep upon us, and Christmas is lurking on the horizon. However, this time of year is very important for writers. After the busyness of summer, where things can understandably grind to a bit of a halt, the autumn is the perfect chance to refocus and take stock. It can take a little while to get back into routine, but it's important to do so. Make the most of autumn and ask yourself what goals you want to achieve by the end of 2019.

WHY SET GOALS?
Never underestimate the importance of setting goals. In the publishing world, there are deadlines. Often tight. Often scary. Often absolutely brilliant for getting work done in a short space of time. Set yourself goals, write them down and give yourself a realistic deadline; it's great practice.

The world of children's fiction is booming – it's possibly never been stronger. Sales are good and publishers are keen. There are brilliant writing competitions to enter, which can help launch careers. There are great opportunities to meet agents, attend conferences, and connect with others on social media. In a world which can seem increasingly dark and ridiculous, the beautiful innocence and truth in children's fiction is more important than ever and has the potential to help change the readers of today and the grown-ups of tomorrow.

All this opportunity means that there are a lot of aspiring children's authors writing, editing, submitting and entering competitions. The world needs new stories, so this is wonderful, however, it does mean that all the time you're not writing, someone else is. And it is a strange and lamentable fact that sometimes writers – completely independently – have similar ideas. Several years ago, I worked on a picture book which I loved, and my agent loved, and we sent it out to publishers. They loved it too and gave wonderful feedback. However, unbeknown to us, there had been an inexplicable flurry of submissions with a similar theme, and publishers were already committed to other texts. So my story never found a home.

It happens. No-one knows why. Perhaps something in the current state of affairs makes creative people think along certain lines. Or perhaps The Muse is up in the clouds bellowing at us all with a megaphone. Who knows? The point is, there isn't time to waste. Not only will publishers be unwilling to take on titles which are too similar to books that they are already committed to, but also there is only a certain amount of room on their lists dedicated to certain genres. For example, if they have already taken on their quota of toilet humour junior fiction titles for publishing in 2021, they will not take on more, however much they love the story.

Publishers don't want their own titles to compete with each other. It's all too easy to miss the boat, which is why you have to ensure that you don't: make the most of the time that you have by writing more effectively. Set those goals.

HOW TO SET GOALS
You have three months left: October, November, December.

Everybody's situation is different. Most people fit writing around their other commitments, such as caring for family or employment. Time is a precious commodity for all of us. To help focus and make the most of your time, try asking yourself these questions and actually writing down your answers (we're writers, it's what we do):

• What work or project could I finish off by the end of the year?
• Could I enter any competitions with deadlines during this period?
• Would I achieve more by focusing...
on one piece of writing, or juggling several?
• What is a reasonable goal to set, which may stretch me, but not stress me?
• What do I need to have or do to achieve these goals?
• How can I carve out time to achieve these goals?
• Which goals should I set?

Ultimately, only you can decide your goals as obviously your writing time availability and writing interests will be specific to you. However, if you’re serious about writing, and carving out time to write, here are some suggestions about what you might be able to achieve:

**BY THE END OF OCTOBER:**
1) Getting your name out there. If you haven’t already, join in the social media party. Create an account on Twitter, Instagram or your platform of choice. Create an author page on Facebook. Follow children’s fiction agents and publishers on Twitter.

There is a wealth of information here, including:#askagent. #pbchat (for picture books), #mgchat (fiction for ages 8-12), #WednesdayWritingTips, #FunnyBookChat, #pbparty (for picture books), #YAchat (for young adult), #aspiringauthors and #kidlit.

2) Look at other children’s authors’ websites and look into creating your own, if you haven’t done so already. You can do this for free through content management systems like Wordpress. If you’re yet to be published, consider setting up a blog.

3) Make a list of all your current ideas and works in progress. This could include:
• Ideas which you haven’t started working on.
• Stories you’ve started writing but have become stuck with.
• Stories you’ve started writing and are progressing well with.

Ask yourself what on this list really fires you up. Is there anything which really speaks to you at the moment and you can’t wait to work on?

Although it’s often good to finish off one project before starting another, if your current WIP makes you feel like you’re wading through treacle, either find what you need to push through with it or sidestep it for now and try something else.

Write down the ideal order of preference for all your ideas. This isn’t written in stone – it just helps you prioritise and understand your current creative passions. Spend time developing a couple of these ideas to test them out if needed.

4) Hopefully this will result in a clear focus for November and December. Can you hammer out an idea? Finish off that picture book? Write notes for a potential young fiction series? Can you write a synopsis? Finish a chapter? Or finish editing that novel? Can you plan a list of agents and publishers to submit to, and know which order you’re going to do it? What is achievable for you?

5) Be clear about whatever it is you need to do. Write down your goals. Give yourself a deadline for where you want to be by the end of November and the end of December. Pin these goals up where you (and other people!) can’t ignore them.

**BY THE END OF NOVEMBER:**
1) Check on your progress on the above. Did you find the goals easy to meet? Did you struggle? Do you need to adjust or reset your goals for the end of this month, and consequently, for the end of December?

2) Create some new goals specifically for November. The danger of only having long-term goals (eg ‘by the end of the year’) is that motivation and application can drift a little. There’s the problem of, ‘I’ve still got plenty of time before then.’ Short-term goals are ideal for keeping focus. Can you get another chapter written? Can you research agents and publishers? Write a cover letter?

**BY THE END OF DECEMBER:**
1) Check on your October and November goals. Adjust and reset if necessary, and don’t forget to reward yourself for the goals you’ve met.

2) Decide what you want to achieve by the end of December, bearing in mind that celebrations like Christmas, school holidays and winter illnesses may slow the writing process down. Can you finish off a piece of work, even if that’s a website or creating a Twitter account, or signing up to a writing course, so you have a real sense of achieving something by the end of the year – perhaps something which has exciting potential to motivate you as you enter 2020?

3) You want to start 2020 with a good idea of where you’re heading, otherwise January can drift a little. Make a long-term wish list for 2020. Where do you want to be ideally by this time next year? Don’t worry too much about creating a time-specific plan at this stage but try thinking more generally. Do you want to significantly improve your craft? Do you want to find an agent? Do you want to get your book self-published? Be thinking about what you need to reach that goal and write down some thoughts. This will start preparing you for January and the exciting year ahead.

By making goals and sticking to them as best you can, you stand a better chance of moving your writing forwards. Stay motivated, stay organised, stay focused, and you’ll be surprised what you can achieve.
Have you ever read a historical novel and been pulled up short by instances of anachronistic vocabulary? Maybe I’m just a grouch (don’t answer that), but I’ve been known to shout at a book when I come across instances of characters using words and expressions which were out of vogue (or hadn’t even been invented) at the time the story takes place. Not that my shouting does any good…

Words, like everything else, go in and out of fashion. If you’re writing a period novel, the characters clearly need to speak in contemporaneous English, and when I say ‘period’ I don’t necessarily mean very long ago. Just a couple of carefully chosen words here and there can evoke a precise decade – or even year – effectively. Writers are naturally more conscious of this than most, and are usually particularly careful where slang is concerned, as it changes so quickly: no-one would let a modern-day Laura Fauntleroy have said ‘fab’, but words in other less obvious areas go in and out of fashion. If you’re writing about more recent times, try asking your older or younger relations. My nonagenarian father is my most valuable resource for early 20th century language, and my grandchildren (after pitying looks, for early 20th century language, and my grandchildren (after pitying looks, to a character’s absenting herself for a time as the words (and euphemisms) they use for the smallest room in the house. In the 1850s the term water closet (or WC) was coined, but it’s rarely used in speech today. The word toilet was originally used in the phrase ‘to do one’s toilet‘, (meaning the act of dressing), and only came into use meaning lavatory (not often heard today either), in the latter half of the 20th century. Privy, loo, john, bag, all have a place – but make sure it’s the right place… Referring to it at all may be a mistake: in a historical novel you could – as the narrator and only if you really must! – make some reference to a character’s absenting herself for a call of nature, but the character would never (in polite society at least) mention it herself. Think Jane Austen: six long novels, and not a loo in sight.

The same goes for swearwords. Today they are so ubiquitous that it’s hard to remember that ladies in particular did not sprinkle their sentences with four-letter-words. In 1914, when Bernard Shaw’s Pygmalion was first staged in London, and Eliza Doolittle was scripted to say ‘not bloody likely’, the Daily Mail speculated that the censor might forbid the ‘incarnadine adverb’ (now there’s a euphemism to conjure with). A little later, when I was a child in the 1950s (a very young child, I’d like to stress) the strongest expletive my grandfather ever used was ‘oh pot!’ Though on reflection that might just have been in front of me…

Some words of course have actually changed their meaning over time, such as gay and horrid (who knew the latter used to mean rough and bristling?), and, as attitudes have changed, lots of words have become unacceptable today which were in common parlance in earlier times. When choosing your words there’s a lot to consider.

How can we avoid literary gaffes of this sort? Dictionaries are the obvious first port of call: the OED will often give a date for when a word or phrase first appeared in print, and a slang dictionary can also be very informative about when expressions were used. But a word of warning: if your novel or story is set in the UK, make sure you use a British dictionary – American usage through the ages can be alarmingly different.

Reading the newspapers from a particular year is a good way of getting a feel for the language being used at the time as well, and reading other novels of the same period can be helpful – but do stick to novels which were written during the time you’re writing about. Novels set in your chosen period, but written more recently, may not be accurate – other people’s research may not be as conscientious as yours.

If you’re writing about more recent times, try asking your older or younger relations. My nonagenarian father is my most valuable resource for early 20th century language, and my grandchildren (after pitying looks, which I rise above) correct my version of today’s children’s usage.

And talking of usage, Fowler’s Modern English Usage should certainly be on your writer’s bookshelf, as should a decent thesaurus (for when your brain goes on strike). In the writing of this article I looked up loo in the thesaurus (which gave me a plethora of synonyms – see above) and then checked it in Fowler, who gave chapter and verse on who would use which of them, and when.

So there you have it: adieu, farewell, toodle pip, by-eee and may good fortune be yours.
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James McCreet
THE ART OF
THE SCARE

Right on time for Halloween, Alex Davis offers his top ten tips on writing horror

This month we bring you the second part our series of top ten tips from across genre fiction. We’ve already stepped into the future with science-fiction and next month we’ll take a glimpse into the past with fantasy fiction. Now, in the run up to Halloween, it’s time to take a long look at the dark side with our headline advice for aspiring horror writers. I’ve been very much heartened by the resurgence within the genre of late, and the next few years are going to be an exciting time to be both writing and reading within the field.
So, let’s get to it, shall we?

1 Remember the importance of the build

While many of the moments we might remember in horror are great finales or impactful images towards the end of the piece, a huge part of what makes these so memorable is the build towards them. Pacing is a very important aspect of horror, and whatever it is you are intending the reveal as, the ‘element of fear’ within your story needs to be properly presaged. In that way you should be able to get the right reaction from the reader rather than them feeling bewildered, underwhelmed or flat-out amused by the randomness of your ‘other’. Plant clues along the way that will not only give some hint of what the horrific element of your story will be, but also drill home to the reader just how serious confronting this thing will be for the characters. If you don’t do this it’s very unlikely your story will stay with a reader.

2 Consider the atmosphere

Something that goes hand-in-hand with this element of building the ‘other’ is also to work at the atmosphere of your story. Most horror stories don’t really go for the jugular (if you’ll forgive the pun) until at least halfway into the tale, so to keep readers invested early on your need to build a mood of menace and dread. You can do this partly through setting, as well as in your language. Adjectives might be the obvious first stop for this, but you can also very much use verb choices to work up atmosphere – it’s worth considering the connotation that a particular word will have for a reader in developing this sort of ambience. This is also in part about establishing with your reader what sort of story they are getting into – the contract between writer and reader in action.

3 Think carefully about the reveal

The moment in which we first see the ‘other’ in our horror stories is not only a memorable one, it’s also usually the split second in which the pace of the story shifts and we enter explicitly into horror territory. As such, getting
this moment right is pivotal. Before you even start writing word one it’s well worth considering how you can introduce the ‘element of fear’ into the story for maximum impact. It might be visual, or more about sound, or smell, or some combination of all these things that can stay with the reader. Ghost stories in particular tend to be a masterclass of how the supernatural element is shown. You may also want to think carefully about when. Are you bringing the ‘monstrous’ into the story early on to be an adversary for your protagonists, or are you holding it back until later on as a shocking surprise to close on?

4 Veer away from the obvious
While there does remain a market for traditional monster stories – werewolves, vampires, zombies, etc – you can see a definite trend moving away from those things and into more unusual and ambiguous monsters, or indeed stories that take something that is well-known within the field and put a new spin on it. To take two very notable horror releases of recent years, Josh Malerman’s Bird Box presents a new sort of entity that we haven’t seen before, and does it with plenty hidden to boot. Equally Paul Tremblay’s The Cabin At The End of the World is a fascinating blend of the old tropes of home invasion and the end of the world story, but in combining these two in a way that hasn’t been seen before it becomes something new, fresh and exciting.

5 Play with metaphor and simile
We’ve already spoken a little about the use of adjectives in horror fiction, and their importance to atmosphere, but one thing that can sometimes happen is that the adjectives become redundant or are simply drawn from the same word pool. As much as I love Edgar Allan Poe, in classes I sometimes talk about the opening of The Fall Of The House Of Usher and the huge list of adjectives it uses in one paragraph alone, with most boiling down to it being ‘dark’. Fiction has moved away from this sort of thing, and using metaphor and simile in your stories will give you the chance to get away from those old favourites. After all, saying that something is ‘terrifying’, ‘horriﬁying’ ‘horriﬁc’, ‘scary’ and ‘ghastly’ is sort of saying the same thing five times, especially when there is more originality and variety to be had with more thought and effort.

6 Don’t be hostage to the happy ending
Another trend I have noticed – not just in horror books, but also in a small but growing percentage of movies – is that more stories are offering endings that are either ambiguous or flat-out dark and unpleasant. Don’t feel as though your protagonists have to overcome ‘the big evil’, or even that you have to give a hard and fast ending – if you feel that the creative risk in doing so will work out for your narrative. Gimmicky or doing something just for the sake of being different very rarely works out in any creative endeavour.

7 To sequel or not to sequel?
In our fantasy in particular, there’s a prevalence of series and many volumes in that genre run to three books or more. That doesn’t quite hold as firm for science-fiction, but the series is still a relatively common thing in that field. Where it comes to horror, that rule is rather different. Most books tend to be stand-alone offerings, and it’s extremely rare that the series that exist push beyond that ‘rule of three’. So in the instance of horror it’s probably best to consider one book at a time rather than the vast, epic storyscapes that often exist in SF and fantasy.

8 Short stories can be a good route
While you might hear from many places the concept of the ‘death’ of the short story, I would say the rumours of that death have been greatly exaggerated. And this is especially true for horror short stories. There’s a reasonably strong scene of magazines and a very strong range of anthologies within the field. But successful horror titles in the mainstream can cover a broad range of ground – ghost stories, folk horror, cosmic horror, body horror, psychological horror – and that’s before reminding you about the active short story scene, which might also be looking for stories in particular subgenres. Read about them, read from them, watch movies in the field and know what these terms mean before you get stuck into them, because there can be notable differences.

9 Be aware of your subgenres
While fantasy and science-fiction both have their subgenres, in horror these can have an added significance. What I mean by this is that in fantasy and science-fiction there are one or two subgenres that are particularly dominant from a host of different publishers, taking in small presses, indie, and even some of the mainstream publishers. This can provide meaningful opportunities for publication alongside some well-known names in the field, and when you combine that with the active market for single-author collections then horror shorts can be a better route to a career in the field than in many other genres. Of course nothing is a banker, and writers follow all sorts of routes to success, but horror is not one of those fields where I would say ‘you have to be writing novels’ in order to ultimately succeed.

SUCCESSFUL HORROR TITLES IN THE MAINSTREAM CAN COVER A BROAD RANGE OF GROUND – GHOST STORIES, FOLK HORROR, COSMIC HORROR, BODY HORROR, PSYCHOLOGICAL HORROR

Anybody who has spent more than five minutes with me will tell you just how much I care about horror in all its forms, and that’s because I think it’s a genre that has real power and can tell us a lot about ourselves and individuals as a society. While all fiction is in a way a response to our times, horror takes a look at it through that darkest lens, and in that way offers a sort of catharsis, a way for us to safely look at what we might prefer to ignore. I’d encourage anyone who hasn’t had a try at it yet to tackle it at least once, just to see what it might do for you, and I hope that some of the advice above will prove useful for those authors tackling it for the first time as well as those not long started out in the field. And most of all I would say try and enjoy it – while you might think that creating a horror story would be an unpleasant experience, you might be surprised at just how enjoyable and creative it can feel. 

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Are you a creative? Or are you a spreadsheet nerd? Do you know what a cash flow forecast is, or would you much rather study the weather forecast?

When it comes to the business of writing, it’s easier to focus on the bit we enjoy most – the writing. The numbers can get a bit confusing and, if we’re honest, as individual writers it’s not as though we’re a FTSE 100 company trying to please our shareholders, is it?

Having said that, we are the most important shareholder in our writing business, and if we want to keep doing what we enjoy then having the right money management tools can put us in good stead. It doesn’t matter whether we write in our spare time, part time, or full time, number-crunching is an important aspect of running a writing business. The question is, which numbers should we crunch, and what’s the best tool for the job?

Data collection

Hands up how many of you record the number of words you write every day? Most of you. Just as I thought. (You can put your hands down now.)

By recording our word counts, we’re collecting accurate data. If I were to ask you how many words you wrote last month, most of you could go to a spreadsheet, or a list in a notebook, look at your records and give a precise figure, with confidence.

Those writers who don’t keep such records may find this exercise more challenging. They may feel they’ve had a productive month but, without this accurate information, can’t say definitively. It’s so easy to be busy without actually doing anything. (Did you spend fifteen minutes writing, or fifteen minutes browsing social media websites?) Therefore, keeping accurate information gives you a greater understanding of your writing business. Money management tools do exactly the same thing for a writer’s business.

Income and expenditure tool

The one tool in every writer’s money management toolbox should have is an income and expenditure spreadsheet. It needn’t be complicated. In fact, it needn’t be a spreadsheet. All you need is a table with six columns: date, customer/supplier, transaction category, expenditure, income and notes.

The customer/supplier column is where I record the business name. If it’s income, I record the name of the organisation who paid me. If it’s expenditure, I record who I paid the money to.

My transaction category column enables me to allocate my income and expenditure to specific categories. My income categories include articles, book royalties, photograph sales, author talks, workshops and so on. Expenditure categories include subscriptions, stationery, travel and research.

This is where I record all of my writing income and expenditure over the year. I use a spreadsheet because the filter options enable me to extrapolate how much money I’ve received from one particular customer, or how much I’ve spent over the year on stationery. (Lots – I’m a writer!) Even at its most basic, this tool allows me to tot up all of my income and expenditure over the year.

Cash flow forecast tool – income

A cash flow forecast can be a really useful tool because, as we all know, our incomes can fluctuate considerably over the year. As a writer with some traditionally published books, I get
six-monthly statements from a couple of publishers, which means I receive royalties from them twice a year. These tend to be good months.

I also get PLR money for my books borrowed from public libraries, and money for secondary rights from ALCS. PLR pays out in January, while ALCS pays out in March and, sometimes, in September.

Writing this regular, monthly column means I get paid monthly by Writing Magazine (Thank you, Jonathan!) and I know how much is going into the bank each month. I also receive an income from my self-published books on Amazon and other platforms on a monthly basis, although these amounts vary each month.

A cash flow forecast is another tool that captures this data, when I know what it is. I have a column for every month of the year, and then a row for each income stream.

At the beginning of the year, I fill in the figures I know I should receive, and when I should receive them. So regular magazine monthly columns are added, as are pieces I do for certain magazine clients. One pays me on acceptance, and I know roughly which months I shall be working for them, and when I’ll be paid.

Likewise, I do some editing work for an American publisher, and I can profile roughly which months I’ll receive payments from them and roughly how much that will be.

Completing a cash flow forecast isn’t always scientific, particularly to start off with, nor is it cast in stone. It’s a tool that changes as your writing year progresses. It tends to be accurate for the immediate few months, and a bit sketchier in the future.

If you’re fortunate enough to sign a deal with a traditional publisher and get an advance, place the staged advance payments into your cash flow forecast. Not only will it help you plan your future income, but it’s a great way to visualise your writing success.

For it to be of most use, it’s best to update this tool as soon as you learn of any future income. When an editor accepts an article or short story from you, record in your cash flow forecast which month you’ll be paid and how much. (At the time of writing, I’ve just had an article accepted by the October issue of a magazine, and the editor has advised me how much the payment will be and that I’ll be paid in November. So I’ve dropped that figure into my cashflow forecast.)

Similarly, Amazon KDP issues royalties for books sold sixty days after its monthly accounting period. This means I’ll be paid at the end of December for any books I sell through Amazon during October. Amazon KDP’s prior months’ royalties dashboard tells me what my royalty figures are for the previous month.

So, at the beginning of each month, I simply log on to see how much I’ll be paid for the prior month’s sales, and then I add those figures to my cash flow forecast.

Cash flow forecast tool – expenditure

A cash flow forecast doesn’t just monitor cash flowing into your writing business. It can also track cash flowing out: your expenditure.

I repeat the same exercise with my expenditure. At the start of my year, I insert all the known expenditure I will incur each year, such as my Writing Magazine subscription in April, my Society of Authors subscription in March, my computer software subscription in January, and so on. As I become aware of other expenditure, I add that in.

This means that I can add up all of the income and expenditure for each of the monthly columns. Not only does this show me the actual figures, as each month passes, but it helps me to predict my income and expenditure over the coming months. This is particularly useful at highlighting any months where I have more going out, than coming in.

Being able to see what’s coming up, both on the expenditure side, as well as the income side, can be extremely useful. I often time many of my subscriptions so that they fall into a month with good income, such as when I receive my royalty statements from my traditional publishers.

Forward planning

Cash flow forecasts can help self-published authors decide when might be a better time to undertake a Facebook or Amazon advertising campaign. This is because you’ll be charged for your advertising campaign in one month, but you may not see the income benefits for a couple of months afterwards.

For example, if you were to run a Facebook advert during October, you’ll be charged for this advertising in either October or November. That’s cash flowing out. If your adverts are successful and generate more sales of your books on Amazon during October and November, you won’t see that income, until Amazon pays out, some 60 days later, at the end of December or January.

Therefore, if you’re planning an advertising campaign for one of your books, your cash flow forecast can help identify which months you’ll have the money to invest in that campaign, and you can flag up when you should see the income from that advertising. And that future income could help fund your next advertising campaign.

This is why a cash flow forecast doesn’t just keep track of future income and expenditure, but helps us to plan our writing business for the future. Book launches cost money, so scheduling them for a time when we know there’s money coming in to cover those costs makes good business sense. Or, think of it the other way around – if we need to launch our new book in six months’ time, but there’s not currently much income showing in our cash flow forecast for that time, we have time to change that. It’s only by having a cash flow information that we can see that.

A writer’s toolbox needs a variety of business tools. In addition to grammar, spelling, punctuation and social media skills, we also need the right tools to crunch some numbers. Tools for monitoring income and expenditure, and cash flow forecasting, might not be our favourite tools, but if used well they’ll keep our writing business well-oiled for the future.
Plagiarism refers to incorporating someone else’s work into your own writing in a way that’s identical or substantially similar to the original material without an appropriate acknowledgement. This means that copying a passage verbatim without putting it inside quotation marks is plagiarism; not citing your sourcing or citing them incorrectly also count as such.

Plagiarism can also be an infringement of copyright although the two are not coterminous (plagiarism is about ethics while copyright infringement is a legal term – you can read more about them at https://writ.rs/copyrightvsplagiarism. Copyright applies to many different kinds of creative works, such as written text and images, regardless of whether they are officially published or not, or whether they are printed or appear online. There is a common misconception that you can just copy, paste and use anything that’s online, but this isn’t the case. Breaching copyright unintentionally is not a valid excuse.

If you want to include other people’s work in your writing, how do you protect yourself against accusations of plagiarism? Fortunately, this is simple: you tell your readers openly that you’re using someone else’s content and give details of the said work.

Quoting and paraphrasing
You have two options regarding how to incorporate other people’s work into your text: to quote the original source or to paraphrase it. Quoting means using a piece of text unaltered and placing it inside quotations marks: Darrell Huff introduces his book How to Lie with Statistics as follows: ‘This book is a sort of primer in ways to use statistics to deceive. It may seem altogether too much like a manual for swindlers…[but] the crooks already know these tricks; honest men must learn them in self-defence.’

You can make modifications to a quoted passage provided you indicate to the readers how you’ve done it: to omit any words, replace them with an ellipsis; to add your own words, put them inside square brackets.

Paraphrasing refers to using your own words to express the passage:

Darrell Huff tells his readers that his book How to Lie with Statistics is kind of a primer for how you can use statistics to deceive people. He admits that it may be taken as a manual for swindling, but is quick to point out that the crooks are already familiar with the different tricks and that it’s the honest people who need to learn them for their own good.

In both cases you need to cite the source in order to acknowledge the creator of the content.

There are different citation styles depending on the publication you’re writing for. For instance, the reference information above could have appeared in footnotes or endnotes as opposed to within the main body of text. You should always

RECORDING REFERENCES
Use reference software (eg EndNote, https://endnote.com, or Mendeley, www.mendeley.com) to record your references or jot down the following in your notebook:

- **Book**: author(s), title, publisher, publication date and place
- **Article**: author(s), article and journal titles, journal volume and issue numbers, publication date, page numbers for the article
- **Web page**: author(s), webpage title, web address, website host/publisher, publication date (or date of copyright/when the page was created or updated), date you accessed the web page (not all these elements may be available, but make a note of as many as you can)

Additionally, if you intend to quote or paraphrase a specific passage, note the page number(s) where it’s located.
follow your publisher’s style guide to the letter. Generally speaking, the more academic the publication is, the more detailed your attribution is likely to be. In the example above, some publications might have requested that I also include the page number (p11) and/or the year of publication (1973).

**Reference lists and bibliographies**

For certain publications, such as books and some of articles, you’re required to produce a reference list or a bibliography. Make sure you know which one you’re required to compile: a reference list refers to sources that you’ve cited in your writing while a bibliography additionally includes all the background material you’ve read, even though you have not directly cited them.

To create a reference list or a bibliography, you need all the relevant reference information handy. You should get into a habit of jotting down these details whenever you consult new sources. It’s so much easier to do this at the time and not have to retrace the information afterwards (see the box-out for what to record).

The entries in a reference list are usually arranged alphabetically by author’s last name or in the order they were cited. Longer bibliographies are sometimes organised by categories (such as books, articles and archival sources), but within each category the alphabetical arrangement by author’s last name tends to be the norm. As for the exact way in which reference information is presented, there are different styles that are used. Ask your publisher for their style guide and follow it meticulously. If you’re not given a specific style, choose one that is commonly used in the subject area you’re writing about. The book in the above example could be referenced in line with the APA style as: Huff, D. (1973). *How to Lie with Statistics*. London: Penguin Books. You can get an overview of the different styles at https://writ.rs/citation.

Although referencing may seem confusing, it’s actually rather straightforward: if you’re explicit when using someone else’s work and follow a style guide when acknowledging it, you’re on the right track.

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**BEHIND THE TAPE**

Expert advice to get the details right in your crime fiction, from serving police officer **Lisa Cutts**

**Q** If an adult male disappeared from a hotel room, at what point would the police consider him a missing person?

A few more details:

The character has no known mental health issues or learning difficulties. His wife would be the one reporting him missing (she was also staying in the hotel room) – she considers him to have no reason to ‘walk out’.

He has left all his possessions behind, including his mobile phone. **Nicki Robson via email.**

**A** If his wife contacts the police, he would be classed as a missing person. Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until they’re located and their wellbeing or otherwise confirmed.

In your scenario, the CAD (Computer Aided Dispatch – the log created when his wife calls the police) will be marked up as High rather than Immediate as it would be thought he had merely left the hotel rather than any mental health issues putting him in immediate danger. Someone for instance who was voluntarily at a mental health clinic and left would probably be considered as Immediate Risk. Self-harm or a danger to others would be a major consideration.

There would also be cross-border checks and inter-agency liaison if applicable.

I think from what you’ve described, it would suit your plot if his wife reports him missing and the police mark it up accordingly, alert local patrols in the area, tell local CCTV operators and try calling his phone, depending on how quickly, if at all, you want him found.

**Q** Whose responsibility is it to speak to and provide information to the press in a murder investigation?

**JM Smith via email**

**A** The Senior Investigating Officer, the DCI or DI, will liaise with the press officer for that particular force and they will put together a press release. If there is a media appeal, that will again be organised by the press officer with the SIO. At the end of a trial, local journalists usually approach the senior officer as she or he comes out of court for them to make a comment for that evening’s local news.
Editorial calendar

Strong forward planning will greatly improve your chances with freelance submissions. Here are some themes to consider for the coming months.

120 years ago

An outbreak of bubonic plague – the first in US history – started in February 1900 in San Francisco’s Chinatown. The epidemic, which claimed 119 lives, ended in 1904.

90 years ago

1930

Actor Robert Wagner (Number Two in the Austin Powers trilogy) was born on 10 February 1930.

Crime writer Ruth Rendell was born on 17 February. She died in 2015.

Art critic and nun Sister Wendy Beckett was born on 25 February. She died in 2018.

80 years ago

1940

Actor David Jason was born on 2 February.

Night of the Living Day director George A Romero was born on 4 February. He died in 2017.

Walt Disney's second animated film Pinocchio premiered on 7 February.

Nobel Prize-winning South African novelist JM Coetzee was born on 9 February.

The animated short Tom and Jerry films by William Hanna and Joseph Barbera debuted on 10 February.

Singer Smokey Robinson was born on 19 February.

Actor Peter Fonda was born on 23 February. He died in August 2019.

On 29 February, Hattie McDaniel became the first African-American woman to win an Oscar for her role in Gone With the Wind – the film won a total of eight Oscars at the 12th Academy Awards.

70 years ago

1950

Singer Natalie Cole was born on 6 February. She died in 2015.

The US senator Joseph McCarthy accused 205 State Department employees of being Communist on 12 February, giving rise to the largest witchhunt in modern history and a label, McCarthyism, that endures to describe accusing someone of subversive activity without regard for evidence.

Walt Disney’s animated film Cinderella premiered on 15 February.

Actor Julie Walters was born on 22 February.
The Greensboro sit-ins, non-violent civil rights protests which led to the Woolworth chain removing its policy of racial segregation in the USA’s Southern states, were carried out by black students Joseph McNeil, Franklin McCain, Ezell Blair Jr and David Richmond between February and July 1960.

Federico Fellini’s film *La Dolce Vita* was released in Italy on 5 February.

Frankie Goes to Hollywood singer Holly Johnson was born on 9 February.

Actor Greta Scacchi was born on 18 February.

Killing Joke singer Jaz Coleman was born on 26 February.

Blondie released their single *Call Me* on 1 February.

Legendary nightspot Studio 54 held its closing party on 4 February, attended by Diana Ross, Liza Minnelli, Sylvester Stallone and Jack Nicholson.

Liberal Democrat leader Jo Swinson was born on 5 February.

Political satire *Yes Minister* premiered on BBC2 on 25 February.

Nelson Mandela, who led the movement to end apartheid in South Africa, was released after 27 years of imprisonment on 9 February.

In February 2010 Wikileaks published a cable, Reykjavik 13, that was the first of the classified documents allegedly provided by the whistleblower US Army Private Chelsea Manning (then Bradley). Manning is currently in jail for her refusal to testify against Wikileaks founder Julian Assange.

2021 will mark the 100th anniversary of the original magazine serialisation of F Scott Fitzgerald’s second novel *The Beautiful and the Damned*, which was published in book format in March 1922. What themes from this landmark Jazz Age novel are still relevant today?
Carole Hedges is a successful novelist who is both commercially and independently published in adult and young adult fiction. She’s been writing all her life and says she doesn’t think there was ever a particular Damascene moment that prompted her to start.

‘A bit like the Brontës, I was writing stories from a very early age,’ she says. ‘When I was six or seven I used to make little books for my toys. I never merely wanted to write. I just wrote. It’s still like that today. My stories are an extension of who I am and, if I go for a long period without writing anything, I get tetchy and become rather unpopular with members of my family.

‘My parents came to the UK in the late 1930s as German Jewish refugees. I was born in the UK, but my upbringing was far from being traditionally British and middle-class. At home, my parents spoke German. We were Reform Jews so I went to synagogue and had my Bat Mitzvah when I was thirteen. There were no Jewish kids in my primary school or secondary school.

‘I feel that being an outsider was good preparation for writing. It gave me a sense of looking at things dispassionately. Most writers are solitary by nature and I was a solitary child because I never fitted in. As a child, I remember trying so hard to be English. It was a painful and unsuccessful process and for much of the time I was desperately unhappy. Nowadays, I revel in being myself.

Carol’s latest project is a series of crime novels set in Victorian England. The first book in the series entitled The Victorian Detectives is Diamonds & Dust, which was an instant hit. Every novel in the series has an alliterative title, with Intrigue & Infamy being the seventh outing for her detectives Stride and Cully.

‘I have been much struck by the anti-immigrant and anti-Jewish rhetoric that has gained currency over the past few years,’ says Carol. ‘So, in Intrigue & Infamy, I’ve written about how things were very similar in 1867. Foreigners were regarded with similar suspicion and the same accusations were levelled against them. They were allegedly taking jobs from “honest” British workers. They were driving up rents. They were “diluting” the purity of English blood. In my novel, some Jewish businesses are attacked, and an elderly Italian man is beaten to death. Stride and Cully have to deal with prejudice as well as criminal activity. As usual, some characters from other books step on to the pages. I never invite them. They just appear.’

What does Carol do when she’s not writing fiction?

‘I look after my two adorable grandchildren aged three and five two days a week, which keeps me busy, fit and rather more au fait with CBeebies than I might otherwise wish to be,’ she says. ‘Other than that, I have a cat who wants to be the next Prime Minister, and I am a political activist, which involves weekly trips to London. I’m also a member of The Archers Tweetalong, which meets every evening at 7.02 pm to comment along to the episode. Sadly, down my end of the Twitter pool, we tend to focus upon what we are eating and drinking rather than discussing the actual plot-lines.’

Carol has made a big success of the Cully and Stride series set in Victorian England. She’s also written contemporary stories for young adults, and her YA novel Jigsaw Pieces was shortlisted for a Carnegie Medal. Does she prefer to write stories set in the present day or in the fairly recent past?

‘I like writing both,’ she says. ‘The
first book I ever had published, a story for young adults entitled *Ring of Silver, Lord of Time*, has historical and contemporary themes. I only stopped writing YA fiction because the market was getting over-saturated, and it was becoming harder to find readers. Also Usborne, along with many other mainstream publishers, decided to weed out the mid-listers, preferring to focus on big names, or on newbies who could be marketed in an exciting manner.

The Victorian Detectives series is independently published and has lots of fans. How does Carol market these novels to readers – by blogging, on social media, by using paid advertising, in any other ways?

‘Ah, marketing!’ she says. ‘Well, I have never paid for a review or for publicity, and I never would. I am lucky in that I am a born engager. I use Twitter and Facebook. I blog at [http://carolhedges.blogspot.com](http://carolhedges.blogspot.com) and I interact with other writers, too: I retweet the details of their books, I review their books on Amazon, and I comment on their blogs. I use Twitter to post Victorian snippets that might attract people to The Victorian Detectives series: for example, Charles Dickens loved his cat Bob so much that when the animal died he had his paw made into a letter-opener. People love seeing bizarre or interesting things, and they will frequently check out my sites as a result of something I’ve posted. One thing I absolutely do not do is tweet endless promotions of my books, which would be very boring. But I do use a lot of the “tribal” hashtags: #historicalfiction, #histfic, #crimefic, and so on, which help to widen my reader base. I feel the best kind of publicity is to be yourself because people are drawn to the person and then to the books.’

It’s been said by some fans of The Victorian Detectives that Carol writes better Dickens than Dickens. ‘Oh, I love Dickens, for all his flaws,’ she says. ‘If you read my books, you will see that I not only set them in the 1860s, but that I write in his discursive style, occasionally addressing to the reader as Dickens did – remember his diatribe about an uncaring society when Jo, the crossing-sweeper in *Bleak House*, dies? I’m a big fan of Wilkie Collins, who was a contemporary of Dickens and who, in *The Moonstone*, wrote the first detective novel. But I also enjoy the work of many modern writers: Henning Mankell, the late Helen Dunmore, Robert Harris and Kate Atkinson are all favourites of mine. I do not think you can be a successful writer without being an avid and constant reader. I always have at least three novels and a non-fiction book on my to-be-read pile. ‘As for any special writing ambition – mine is probably just to keep going. Every time I finish writing a book, I get that sinking sense of doom and feel I will never write another one: that this is it, the end. Then I find myself slowly sidling up to the mountain that is a new book, eyeing the foothills curiously, and taking tentative steps into the next unknown journey.’

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**Fish Publishing**

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- **Short Story**
  - closes 30th Nov
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  - closes 31st Jan
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  - closes 28th Feb
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**WRITERS’ NEWS**

**A common wealth of stories**
Tina Jackson

The Commonwealth Short Story Prize 2020 is inviting entries.

The overall winner in the competition for unpublished short fiction will receive £5,000, with £2,500 for each regional winner.

The prize covers the regions of Africa, Asia, Canada and Europe, Caribbean and Pacific. Entrants must be citizens of a Commonwealth country.

The annual Commonwealth Short Story Prize is for original, unpublished short stories between 2,000 and 5,000 words. It is administered by the Commonwealth Foundation.

Entry is free. Each writer may submit only one story.

The closing date is 1 November.

Website: www.commonwealthwriters.org

**Sharp entries**

The Acumen International Poetry Competition is inviting entries.

The competition from literary journal *Acumen* is for original, unpublished poems up to fifty lines. The winning poet will receive £1,000 and a five-year subscription to *Acumen*. The second prize is £400 and a three-year subscription, and the third prize is £200 and a two-year subscription. There is also a special £100 prize for the best poem by an *Acumen* subscriber. Six highly commended poets will receive £25 and a one-year subscription, and ten commended poets will receive a one-year subscription. The judges are Michael Bartholomew-Biggs and Nancy Mattson.

The entry fee is £5 per poem or five poems for £20.

The closing date is 28 February 2020.

Website: www.acumen-poetry.co.uk

**Café society**

Win a first prize of £1,000 in the annual poetry competition from Café Writers

The competition is for original, unpublished poems up to 40 lines. This year’s judge is Zaffar Kunial, whose debut *Us* (2018) was shortlisted for the TS Eliot Prize and the Costa Poetry Award.

There is a first prize of £1,000, a second prize of £300, a third prize of £200 and five commended prizes of £50. There is also a £100 Norfolk Prize for the best poem by a permanent Norfolk resident not winning another prize.

The entry fee is £4 per poem or £10 for three poems and £2 per poem thereafter.

The closing date is 30 November.

Website: www.cafewriters.co.uk

**Lucy’s a leading light for women writers**

The Lucy Cavendish College Fiction Prize is open for entries.

The prize is for a novel by an unpublished women fiction writer from the UK and Ireland.

Now in its tenth year, the Lucy Cavendish College Fiction Prize looks for fiction with an ‘unputdownable’ quality and has a strong track record of helping undiscovered women writers launch literary careers. Submissions may be literary or genre fiction for adult, young adult or child readers (as long as the novel is primarily text-based). The winner will receive £1,500.

All shortlisted writers are offered consultations with literary agents.

Writers entering the competition should be unagented and must not previously have published a novel. Each writer may enter one novel. Send the first 40-50 pages and a synopsis (3-5 pages).

The entry fee is £12. There are sponsored entries for low-income writers available on a first-come-first-served basis.

The closing date is 17 January 2020.

Website: www.lucy-cav.cam.ac.uk/fictionprize

**Poems for a good Causley**

The Charles Causley International Poetry Prize 2019 is inviting entries.

This year’s competition will be judged by Michael Rosen.

The winner of the competition will receive £2,000 and a one-week writing residency at Launceston, Charles Causley’s former home in Launceston. The runner up prize is £250, and the third-placed winner gets £100. There are five Highly Commended prizes of £30.

The competition is for original, unpublished poems up to 40 lines. All poems must have a title.

Writers may enter as many poems as they like. The entry fee for the first poem is £7.50, and subsequent poems are each £5.

The closing date is 11 November.

Website: https://causleytrust.org/
UK MAGAZINE MARKET

**Good cheese for posh mice**

Tina Jackson

*Country & Town House* is a monthly luxury lifestyle title that covers everything from fashion, culture, books, jewellery and cars to interiors, food, drink, property and travel.

‘It is predominantly aimed at the top end of the London market, who enjoy the best of both worlds in town and country, but not in an exclusive way,’ said editorial director Lucy Cleland. ‘It could be anything from a wonderful walk and a pub lunch to driving down to Glyndebourne in a top of the range Aston Martin – it’s about enjoying the finer things in life.’

Readers are style conscious but also interested in wellbeing and realness.

‘They’re bright, sparky, intelligent, they want to get the best out of life, but it’s not all about the money, it’s about the good, nourishing things too. My best feedback is that the magazine is actually read – and people love to rip out the little nuggets of information or shopping. I hope to deliver this each month.’

*Country & Town House* covers the whole gamut of lifestyle topics with a country and town spin. ‘We specialise in interiors, travel and culture mostly. ‘We run anything that piques our fancy and would make an interesting read for our cultured, affluent audience – whether that’s meeting the owners of a wonderful historic house, who are launching a new arts festival or hanging out with Yasmin Le Bon in a London hotel, our features are generally rooted in British culture with an international tone.’

Features tend not to be more than 1,500 words. ‘The content should be stimulating and intelligent but also with a light touch,’ said Lucy. ‘The tone is one of kindness and inclusion but not taking oneself too seriously and has a whiff of a sense of humour. We want to find out something new too – not something we already know.’

Lucy’s happy to hear from prospective contributors who understand her readers and what interests them. ‘I’m hoping for a pitch that knows the magazine and the audience; something that hasn’t been vastly covered elsewhere. Make it personal and show you know what you’re talking about.’

Contact Lucy by email. ‘Firstly introduce yourself, tell us your interest in the title and maybe two or three top line ideas. Do feel free to write back if you don’t hear anything initially. Email is very hard to keep up with.’

Payment varies.

Website: www.countryandtownhouse.co.uk

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**Brave new worlds**

To commemorate the 400th anniversary of The Mayflower, enter short stories and poems that explore new worlds in the Elmbridge Literary Competition 2019/20.

Now in its fifteenth year, the Elmbridge Literary Competition invites international entries of poems and short stories. In the adult categories stories may be up to 1,500 words and poems up to thirty lines. There are prizes in each 19+ category of £250, £150 and £100. There is also a special Elmbridge Prize of £50 in book tokens for the best story or poem by an Elmbridge resident. All the winning entries will be printed in a chapbook.

Each year the competition, which is run by the RC Sherriff Trust and Elmbridge Borough Council in Surrey, has a different theme. To celebrate this year’s 400th anniversary of the sailing of the Mayflower, entries are invited on the theme of ‘New World’.

There is a £5 entry fee for each story or poem in the adult categories.

The closing date is 7 February 2020.

Website: www.rcsherrifftrust.org.uk/competitions

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**Tread these streets**

Fiction with a focus on ‘action and atmosphere over characterisation’ and articles on pulp related topics are invited for the USA-based Crimson Streets, a web now/print later magazine which occasionally publishes anthologies of stories and articles from the website. The magazine has a broad definition of pulp. See the website for further information on this and to read free content.

Stories should be 800-6,000 words long. If you have a longer work there may be some interest if it is complete and can be broken down for publication. Three qualifying questions are asked by editors as the stories come in: does the story take place between 1925 and 1965, does it have a strong sense of atmosphere or mood and does it have a fast-paced focus on action, adventure or drama? A story not set between the years mentioned will however be considered if it has a strong pulp or noir feel and is strong in the other areas.

Simultaneous submission and reprints will not be considered and you should submit no more than one story at a time.

Payment is 1s per word of the final edited work

Submit by email: editor@crimsonstreets.com

Website: www.crimsonstreets.com/submission-guidelines

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**Buy your books in the cloud**

China’s Duoyun Books, a major chain owned by The Shanghai Century Publishing Co, has just opened the highest bookshop in the world, its new flagship store in Shanghai. The store is called Books Above Clouds and is sited on the 52nd floor of the city’s tallest building, the Shanghai Tower. The 2,259 sq m store stocks 60,000 books and also includes a cafe, study room, exhibition space, theatre and a garden. With fantastic views across the city, and sometimes over a cloudscape, the beautifully minimal store is intended to become a new cultural landmark.

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**GLOBAL MAGAZINE MARKET**

*Narrative focus*

**PDR Lindsay-Salmon**

_Narrative_ is a well-paying zine open to submissions all year. The editorial team publish just about everything, fiction, poetry, and nonfiction, including stories, novels, novel excerpts, novellas, personal essays, humour, sketches, memoirs, literary biographies, commentary, reportage, interviews, and audio work. They prefer ‘features of interest to readers who take pleasure in storytelling and imaginative prose.’ and pride themselves on supporting new talent and encouraging reading across generations and around the world.

Read what they have in their extensive digital library, which is what their archives are called, and understand the types of writing they prefer. Only work ‘of the highest literary calibre’ will be published.

Short-short stories should be two to five pages, 500-2,000 words. Prose between 2,000-15,000 words may be short stories, essays, one-act plays, and other complete short works of nonfiction, as well as excerpts from longer works of fiction and nonfiction. Novellas and other long works that are less than book length should be 15,000 to 40,000 words. Submit only the first 15,000 words with a synopsis. When submitting novels for consideration for serialisation, send the first chapter and a one-page synopsis.

Poetry submissions, no more than five poems, should be submitted in a single file. The poems should give ‘a strong sense of…style and range.’ All poetic forms and genres are welcomed but not translations.

One-act plays should produce as much impact on the page as in production. Out of print plays are accepted. Length preferred is under 15,000 words. _Narrative outloud_ audio prose, may be fiction or nonfiction ‘but should take a storytelling form in mp3 format.’ _Narrative outloud_ audio poetry submissions must be in mp3 format and both prose and poetry should be no more than ten minutes long. Narrative outloud video submissions may be short films and documentaries of up to fifteen minutes. Submissions must be in mp4 or mov format.

A fee is charged for unsolicited submissions, except during the first two weeks of April and at other times, which will be reported. Documentaries of up to fifteen minutes. Submissions must be in doc, docx, rtf, pdf, txt, odf, mp3, mp4, mov, or flv file.

Paid: $1,000 for 15,000 word prize. Payment varies: from $150 to $200 for the annual Top Five Stories of the Week; $1,000 for 15,000 word manuscripts; $50 per poem and audio piece; $200 for the annual Top Five Poems of the Week.

Website: www.narrativemagazine.com

One of the most coveted awards in science fiction has been rebranded. Founded in 1973, the John W Campbell Award for Best New Writer was named for the editor of the classic magazine *Astounding* (now *Analog*), considered by many as the most influential editor in the SF Golden Age, from the 1930s to the 1950s. Controversy has continued to grow around Campbell and his values, coming to a head in August when Jeannette Ng won the Campbell Award at the World Science Fiction Convention in Dublin.

During her acceptance speech, the *Under the Pendulum Sun* author said: ‘I was born in Hong Kong. Right now, in the most cyberpunk in the city in the world, protesters struggle with the masked, anonymous stormtroopers of an autocratic Empire... I’m sorry to drag this into our fantastical worlds, you’ve given me a microphone and this is what I felt needed saying. John W Campbell, for whom this award was named, was a fascist.’

Nine days later Trevor Quachri, current editor of *Analog*, posted: ‘Campbell’s provocative editorials and opinions on race, slavery, and other matters often reflected positions that went beyond just the mores of his time and are today at odds with modern values, including those held by the award’s many nominees, winners, and supporters.’

As *Analog* celebrates its 90th year, making it the second oldest science fiction magazine in the world, the Campbell Award has now been renamed the Astounding Award for Best New Writer.

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**FLASHERS**

Antique Collecting magazine is edited by Georgina Wroe. Letters and article ideas are welcomed. Content, articles and news for the website can be sent to Richard Ginger. Details; email: georgina.wroe@accartbooks.com, richard.ginger@ accartbooks.com; website: https://antique-collecting.co.uk

The first community news reporters on a Facebook-funded scheme started training for their diplomas with the National Council for the Training of Journalists, Press Gazette reported.

Essex author Lorna Cook won the Romantic Novelists’ Association’s (RNA) prestigious Joan Hessayon Award for new writers with her debut novel _The Forgotten Village_.

_The Telegraph_ has revamped its weekly Saturday lifestyle magazine with more content and new regular sections.

Charlotte Seligman, formerly head of news and entertainment at ITV’s _This Morning_, is OK! magazine’s new editor.

‘It’s also great to see the end product of all your hard work, because there’s nothing quite like being sent a copy of your first novel and seeing it and smelling the pages.’ Chris Berry, who has written his first crime thriller
UK CRIME MARKET

Bloodhound sniffing out talent

Gary Dalkin

Based in Cambridge and founded in 2014 by publisher Fred Freeman and best-selling author Betsy Reavley, Bloodhound Books has become one of the UK’s leading publishers of crime fiction, with a roster of authors including the bestselling Rob Sinclair (The Red Cobra), Dreda Say Mitchell (Spare Room), Rob Ashman (Suspended Retribution) and Anita Waller (Strategy). Books are sold as ebooks and print on demand rather than through physical bookshops.

The imprint is currently accepting submissions from authors with or without representation and are looking for crime fiction, suspense, mystery, domestic noir and psychological thrillers and chillers. No non-fiction, young adult, children’s, science fiction, erotica or romance.

All books must be at least 60,000 words long. Make your submission by email to submissions@bloodhoundbooks.com. Include the first twenty pages of your manuscript, a complete synopsis of your work, no longer than 1,500 words, and a cover letter about yourself and your writing career to date.

Bloodhound Books is a member of the Crime Writers’ Association and the Independent Publishers Guild. Their titles have sold over 4 million copies to date. Full guidelines are on the website: www.bloodhoundbooks.com/submissions

Score with ScreenCraft

Win $1,000 first prizes and Hollywood industry introductions in ScreenCraft’s competitions for books and short stories with cinematic potential.

• The ScreenCraft Book Competition is for books with the potential to be adapted for cinema. There are prizes of $1,000 and $500, plus introductions to Hollywood agents, managers, producers and executives and a phone call with the ScreenCraft development team to discuss the project. To enter send the first 20,000 words. The entry fee is $59 for submissions received by 30 September, then $79. The closing date is 30 November.

• The ScreenCraft Short Story Competition is for short fiction (from flash to novella) with cinematic potential. There are prizes of $1,000 and $500, plus Hollywood introductions and a consultation with the ScreenCraft team to discuss the project. The entry fee is $39 before 30 September, then $59. The closing date is 30 November.

Website: https://screencraft.org/screenwriting-contests/

Cloudbank covered

Cloudbank magazine is the journal of Cloudbank Books and editor, Michael Malan, is addicted to poetry. The magazine is a poet’s delight, ‘at least 65 pages of poetry and short prose’ as well as a couple of book reviews. Read the back issue samples at the website to get an idea of the wide range of what is published.

Submissions are accepted year round. 30 April, 2020, is the cut-off for the next issue. Simultaneous submissions are accepted but not reprints. Postal submissions are accepted, although you can submit through the website. Submit no more than five poems or flash piece (each less than 500 words). Your name, address, and email address should be included on each page of the submission.

Response time is ‘slow’. There is a $200 prize for one poem or piece of flash in each issue and two contributors’ copies for each published writer.

Details: Cloudbank, PO Box 610, Corvallis, Oregon 97339-0610; website: http://cloudbankbooks.com

It’s a Funny Old World

Derek Hudson

Crime writer Patricia Highsmith, we’re told, was ‘so attached to her garden snails that she once took 100 of them in her bag to a party so that she’d have someone to talk to’. Also, she is known to smuggle them through airports in her bra.

Her unusual travel companions and choice of party goers were highlighted in The Week’s regular column, It Must Be True… I read it in the tabloids.

‘There was also the story of Magdalena Dusza who has only one snail – but hers is very large. ‘She bought the giant African snail from a pet shop in Krakow six years ago, and is now so devoted to it, she takes it out of its tank and cuddles it on the sofa while watching TV.’

• Critic and essayist Charles Lamb (1775-1834), best known for Essays of Elia, also tried his hand at writing for the stage, according to The Mammoth Book of Literary Anecdotes.

‘In 1809 his farce Mr H was badly received at the Drury Lane Theatre. In the theatre pit Lamb joined in the general hissing which greeted his own effort. Afterwards he explained that he had done this because he was “so damnably afraid of being taken for a plagiarist.”

• Advertising copywriting has kept the wolf from many a writer’s door. Novelist Fay Weldon is credited with creating the punning slogan ‘Go to Work on an Egg’ for the Egg Marketing Board in the 1960s. She insisted ‘it was her crack creative team that penned the line’.

• ‘I always strive, when I can, to spread sweetness and light. There have been several complaints about it.’

PG Wodehouse, quoted in The Washington Post.
GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT MARKET

Go green

PDR Lindsay-Salmon

Chelsea Green Publishing is a well established US publisher of ‘books on the politics and practice of sustainable living’, which now has an office in the UK. The editorial team like to publish authors ‘who bring in-depth, practical knowledge to life, and give readers hands-on information related to organic farming and gardening, ecology and the environment, healthy food, sustainable economics, progressive politics, and, most recently, integrative health and wellness’.

The ethical company is 100% employee owned and a member of the Green Press Initiative which has been printing books on recycled paper since 1985.

The company’s official aim is ‘to reverse the destruction of the natural world by challenging the beliefs and practices that are enabling this destruction’ and they ‘seek to build a community of new voices that will empower and inspire individuals to reduce their ecological impact and to participate in the restoration of healthy local communities, bioregional ecosystems, and a diversity of cultures’.

Writers who have work on the practice and politics of sustainability, organic growing and renewable energy, or who provide information about ‘democratic citizenship, political action, and cultural resistance and rebirth’ could find a home here. Check the website, read their list, follow the guidelines carefully.

Possible submissions include: organic gardening and market farming, from home- to professional-scale, sustainable agriculture and permaculture with an in-depth, how-to approach, local and global agricultural movements and healthy food supplies.

Be aware that academic or educationally based books, non-organic farming, and new age or spiritual books are not wanted.

Query with a one- or two-page email letter, by email, or submit a full proposal, with table of contents, sample chapter, possible markets, etc.

Response ‘can take several weeks’. Rights and royalties are discussed with the contract.

Detail: Chelsea Green Publishing, email sub to: submissions@chelseagreen.com or contact the UK office on UKenquiries@chelseagreen.com; website: www.chelseagreen.com

Get your work boxed off

Perhaps unique in its means of publication and distribution Word-o-Mat is a zine vending machine delivering short works, in a box, via a vintage vending machine at events and venues in Glasgow and beyond. The 5cm x 7cm handmade boxes are filled with six books containing the work of international writers. Every year four editions are published, each containing six writers’ work.

The idea began in Malmo, Sweden and came to its home in Glasgow in 2016 via a literary tour through Europe. International submissions are more than welcome so the zine can continue ‘providing a wordy gateway between Scotland and the rest of the world’.

There are additional hubs and writer links in Montreal, Istanbul and a collaborative link with African writers is being developed.

Submissions may be fiction, poetry, creative non fiction, essays, excerpts from longer works, image-texts or cartoons. The emphasis is on short works of a maximum 2,000 words. Several pieces may be submitted to be published as a small collection. You may submit previously published work, just say when and where it was published and that you have the rights to republish.

The zine supports new writers and aims to give feedback and support as much as possible. There is a commitment to ‘representing a heterogeneous set of voices and in seeking submissions from female and non-binary writers’.

Email your work as a pdf document with numbered pages, your name and country of residence on each page. Send to: wordomat@gmail.com

Website: https://word-o-mat.hotglue.me/
**UK BOOK MARKET**

**Have a pop at Lolli**

Tina Jackson

Lolli Editions publishes contemporary literary fiction and creative writing that engages with art and culture. ‘We are particularly interested in authors who challenge and innovate the novel – formally, narratively and thematically,’ said editor Denise Rose Hansen. ‘Although we operate a small list at present, our rather grand aim is to diversify the literary landscape in the UK by making available to British readers some of the most exciting and original work being published in Europe right now.’

Lolli was launched in 2018 on the occasion of Manifesta 12, the roving European Biennial of Contemporary Art, which that year was hosted in Palermo, Sicily. ‘It takes its name from Stazione Lolli in Via Dante – we like to think of books like trains that move people from one position to another, the journey there the most important part. That year we published *Walking Through Palermo*, a cultural, historical, architectural and literary guide to the capital of Sicily in 33 sights. Though it was an art book, it included what I like about good fiction: the playful, the original, the formally compelling. And even better if it has a strong footing in the art world.’

Lolli will publish two to four books each year. ‘We are looking for writing that pushes the boundaries of form and speaks to the current cultural moment,’ says Denise. ‘This August, we are publishing Johanne Bille’s *Elastic*, translated by Sherilyn Hellberg, in which the fairly unlikely and yet exceedingly recognisable protagonist Alice is having a hard time with her new open relationship(s). Alice wants to live the ideals she sees the enigmatic couple Mathilde and Alexander living; what they call free love, sexual fluidity, never feeling jealousy, believing that work is less important than love and so on, but putting it all into practice proves a messy ordeal for Alice. Bille’s prose is very “clean” and merciless; she allows Alice no concessions. Next year we are publishing Tine Høeg’s *New Passengers*, translated by Misha Hoekstra, a pared down, poignant and wry novel confronting the norms for how “new passengers” in adulthood ought to conduct themselves.’

Denise wants to grow Lolli’s reputation as a home for innovative, experimental literature. ‘I hope to expand our list as we gain ground and become a publisher that readers and authors go to for the most innovative new writing. We aim to publish works in translation a lot quicker than the industry standard. This is to work against the lag that sometimes produces a bell jar effect. We should be able to access the work of our neighbours in real time even if we don’t speak their language. I think, and statistics show, that literature is an important and powerful way to help lessen the cultural divide in Europe in these Brexit times.’

Lolli accepts submissions that aligns with its list by post and email. Authors should send 10-15 pages of their writing, a one or two-page synopsis, and a biographical note.

Details: email: office@lollieditions.com; website: www.lollieditions.com

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**Chasing the Booker**

The shortlist for the 2019 Booker Prize is: *The Testaments*, Margaret Atwood (Chatto & Windus); *Ducks, Newburyport*, Lucy Ellmann (Galley Beggar Press); *Girl, Woman, Other*, Bernardine Evaristo (Hamish Hamilton); *An Orchestra of Minorities*, Chigozie Obioma (Little, Brown); *Quichotte*, Salman Rushdie (Jonathan Cape); *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*, Elif Shafak (Viking).

Margaret Atwood’s nomination is the author’s sixth and she previously won in 2000 for *The Blind Assassin*. *The Testaments* is her widely feted sequel to *The Handmaid’s Tale*.

The Guardian pointed out that, ‘Four of the six shortlisted books are published by major publishers, and worthwhile writing as by the need to work to make it publishable – one adverse comment should not be allowed to put you off.

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**Subjective opinion**

Patrick Forsyth suggests an encouraging lesson from a famous case

Faber & Faber is a long established and still independent publisher which perhaps deserves the description iconic. A recent publication is a book describing their own history: *Faber & Faber: The Untold Story*, by Toby Faber. This has the slightly odd format of consisting mainly of verbatim copies of a variety of correspondence and documents from their archives and going back to the early 1920s.

It provides an intriguing insight into the working of such an organisation, a very traditional publisher motivated as much, sometimes more, by the search for good and worthwhile writing as by the need to be profitable. Indeed, as the publisher of T.S Eliot’s poems, the company’s income was boosted by royalties from the musical *Cats*. One tale makes a point worth linking to this column.

The company published William Golding’s famous book *Lord of the Flies*, despite the first report on the manuscript reading thus: ‘Absurd and uninteresting fantasy about the explosion of an atom bomb on the colonies. A group of children who land in jungle country near New Guinea. Rubbish & dull.’ Remember this when you get your next rejection. It could be that your writing is bad, but more likely it is only evidence of one person’s opinion, and an opinion influenced by current mood and circumstances at that. Of course, one should always take note of criticism and – be honest and objective – respond if it does contain sense about something’s potential for publication. Change may be necessary. But equally do not despair; much writing has been subject to criticism, but has subsequently been published, well regarded and sold well.

If you aim to sell your work you need to work to make it publishable – one adverse comment should not be allowed to put you off.
Folks remedies

PDR Lindsay-Salmon

Folks is an online magazine for determined survivors, publishing true stories of ‘remarkable people who refuse to be defined by their health issues’. The editorial team hope that by ‘sharing the experiences of these individuals, we hope to change people’s notions about what it means to be normal.’ It is always open for ‘narratively well-written, humanist stories about people living with chronic conditions in a way that neither reduces them to their conditions, or objectifies them’, but the story must go beyond the chronic conditions to the person and their life. The condition should be ‘just another layer in a rich and varied life’.

A good Folks story should make illness relatable, educate readers, reduce stigma and empower people, usually in the first person. Interviews with ‘unique and articulate individuals who live with health conditions’ are also welcomed, as are simple guides ‘that break down a condition in a relatable, humanist way’, and profiles of highly-visible individuals who live with disabilities or health conditions.

Check out the detailed guidelines at their website and submit a pitch or a complete essay, which should be up to around 1,200 words, by email: folks@pillpack.com Do inform the editors of any quality, high-res photos and you or your subject’s website/social media handles. There is a good example of a pitch at the website.

Payment is $400 for essays, $600 for reported profiles, and $800 for reported features.

Website: https://folks.pillpack.com

Over the edge

Published annually by the Maryland Institute College of Art, Full Bleed is committed to exploring the interdisciplinary aesthetic experience and welcomes controversy and varied points of view.

Submissions are open for criticism, belle lettres, artwork, design, illustration, fiction, poetry, and graphic essays’, especially ‘about artists working with, playing with, re-contextualising, or elevating archival materials... [and] historical documents’. Submit feature-length essays, no more than 7,500 words.

Other Columns, 800-2,000 words, include Close Looks, in-depth appreciations of individual artworks; Design Futures, where designers propose new ideas relevant to contemporary challenges facing their discipline; Cities, where writers examine urban conditions, innovations, and tendencies; and Studio Visit, where the writer visits with and interviews a contemporary artist or designer.

Submit through the website by 1 January, 2020. Response time is slow. All contributors receive a small payment.

Website: www.full-bleed.org

Hugo victors

The winners of the Hugo Awards were announced at the 77th World Science Fiction Convention in Dublin in August. The winners were: Best Novel, The Calculating Stars, Mary Robinette Kowal; Best Novella, Artificial Condition, Martha Wells; Best Novelette, If at First You Don’t Succeed, Try, Try Again, Zen Cho; Best Short Story, A Witch’s Guide to Escape: A Practical Compendium of Portal Fantasies, Alix E Harrow, Apex (Feb 18); Best Series, Wayfarers, Becky Chambers. Also presented was the now renamed John W Campbell Award for Best New Writer, won by Jeanette Ng (see p79), while the Lodestar Award for Best Young Adult Book went to Children of Blood and Bone by Tomi Adeyemi.

Get ink

Inscape is the well-established literary annual from Washburn University. It publishes fiction, nonfiction, poetry and visual art. Read what is available at the website and follow the guidelines: there is a lot to fill in on the submission form.

Submit fiction and non-fiction, up to 3,500 words, up to five poems, or up to three pieces of art. The team do appreciate and welcome any form of hybrid or mixed-genre works so long as they adhere to the submission standards.’ Just submit under the nearest genre with a note that the work is ‘mixed’ or ‘hybrid’. The deadline for submissions to the 2020 issue is 31 October.

Website: https://washburn.edu/inscape/index.html
GLOBAL LITERARY MARKET

Head north

PDR Lindsay-Salmon

Published by the University of Michigan, Michigan Quarterly Review calls itself an interdisciplinary and international literary journal, featuring poetry, fiction, and nonfiction, as well as works in translation. The journal has an online presence where cultural commentary, reviews and interviews with writers, artists, and cultural figures around the world are showcased.

Submissions are open from August to December and January to April. Currently, as well as general submissions, there is a call for submissions for a special water-themed issue, Not One Without. The team want writers to provide ‘urgent, complex, and revelatory writing on water from around the world.’ Explore the paradoxes, water gives life and takes it; it divides humanity, connects humanity, and is vital to our planet. The team want ‘work that addresses any aspect of water: from the contested oil pipeline beneath the Straits of Mackinac to water shut-offs in Cape Town; from flooding in the Midwest to water scarcity in India and the Sahel; from the role of water in regional and global conflict and migration to the way that storm surges and shifting coastlines are forcing us to rethink the shapes of urban centres.’ Work may be nonfiction, fiction, poetry, drama, translations, or pieces that don’t fit into a neat category.

Submit prose of 1,500 to 7,000 words, with 5,000 the average preferred length. All published stories are automatically finalists for the $2,000 Lawrence Prize. Poetry should be 3-6 poems in one document, not exceeding twelve pages in total. Response time is ‘four to six months’. There is payment for published work.

Details: Michigan Quarterly Review, email: mqr@umich.edu; website: https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/mqr/contact-us

GLOBAL NON-FICTION MARKET

Top rates for wise women

Gary Dalkin

Under the banner ‘Aging is a fact of life. Aging boldly is a state of mind’ US website Next Tribe states that their mission is to offer information and inspiration with a healthy dose of irreverence for women over 45, ‘to make you feel heard and understood, and to connect you with women as smart and cheeky as you are’. The editorial team are always looking for fresh voices with clever, unexpected or insightful takes on being a woman over the age of 45. Singer-songwriter Judy Collins is part of the advisory board.

The site has an irreverent tone and, where appropriate, a slightly humorous approach is preferred. Read some of the stories on the website to get an idea of the house style. Recent features have included a tribute to the late Valerie Harper, an account of why ‘I Love My Husband But Don’t Love Traveling with Him’, a look at changing career in mid-life and a piece on why kaftans are cool again.

The ideal length for a feature is 700-1,000 words, though ideas for longer pieces are also considered. Do not send a completed article, but pitch your idea by email to info@NextTribe.com. Payment is 25-50¢ per word, depending on the subject and the amount of editing a piece requires, paid thirty days after acceptance.

Next Tribe also requires short pieces, 250 words or under, called Hot Flashes. These can cover a wide range of topics from popular culture, money, inspirations, health and much more, paying a flat rate of $50 per item. As above, email a pitch info@NextTribe.com, but use the title ‘Hot Flash Idea’ followed by a few words that describe the idea in general then put your pitch in the body of the email.

Website: https://nexttribe.com

And another thing...

‘A book is made from a tree. It is an assemblage of flat, flexible parts (still called “leaves”) imprinted with dark pigmented squiggles. One glance at it and you hear the voice of another person, perhaps someone dead for thousands of years. Across the millennia, the author is speaking, clearly and silently, inside your head, directly to you. Writing is perhaps the greatest of human inventions, binding together people, citizens of distant epochs, who never knew one another. Books break the shackles of time – proof that humans can work magic.’

Carl Sagan

‘It is worth mentioning, for future reference, that the creative power which bubbles so pleasantly in beginning a new book quiets down after a time, and one goes on more steadily. Doubts creep in. Then one becomes resigned. Determination not to give in, and the sense of an impending shape keeps one at it more than anything.’

Virginia Woolf

‘Go for broke. Always try and do too much. Dispense with safety nets. Take a deep breath before you begin talking. Aim for the stars. Keep grinning. Be bloody-minded. Argue with the world. And never forget that writing is as close as we get to keeping a hold on the thousand and one things – childhood, certainties, cities, doubts, dreams, instants, phrases, parents, loves – that go on slipping, like sand, through our fingers.’

Salman Rushdie

‘Playwrights seem to share a deep love of cricket. Ayckbourn is a nut for it. Richard Bean adores the game so much he wrote a play about it despite it being notoriously difficult to make work on stage and Harold Pinter said: “I tend to think cricket is the greatest thing God ever created. Certainly greater than sex.”’

Nick Ahad, in The Yorkshire Post
**GLOBAL HORROR MARKET**

**Submit to the dark side**

**Jenny Roche**

You are invited to ‘experiment or deviate from the ordinary… to fallout of regular categories’ when writing horror or dark fiction for The Dark monthly online magazine which pays Can$6 a word for original fiction and 1¢ for reprint fiction.

Graphic, violent horror is not wanted for this magazine and neither are simultaneous or multiple submissions. Reprints will be considered if they have been published in the past two years in an established print magazine, short story collection or anthology.

Stories should be 2,000-6,000 words, emailed as an attached doc or rtf document along with a cover letter which includes a biographical note. Unless there has been a surge in submissions you should gain a response in 24 hours. Email: submissions@thedarkmagazine.com

Website: http://thedarkmagazine.com/

**Ten minute comedy plays**

Playwrights of any age, anywhere in the world are invited to submit original comedy scripts of up to ten minutes length for the 2020 Snowdance 10 Minute Comedy Festival.

The plays will be performed by Over Our Heads Players theatre company for five weeks from 31 January 2020 at the Sixth Street Theatre, Wisconsin. Audiences will vote for their favourites, with cash prizes for ‘best in show’.

Submissions must be unpublished and free of royalty and copyright restrictions and not be a musical, adaptation or translation. Your play should have a cast of 1-5 characters, be easily staged and have simple set requirements. It is emphasised that this is a comedy festival so laughs are perhaps essential.

The closing date for submissions is 1 November. Email: snowdance318@gmail.com

Website: http://overourheadplayers.org/snowdance-submissions.html

**Turn blue**

Truth Serum Press is inviting submissions of poetry for Indigomania.

For this project Truth Serum Press is inviting poems that somehow encompass ‘blue’. The expression ‘indigomania’ was coined to describe the Impressionist painters’ obsession with the colour blue.

Submit poems between 70 and 500 words that somehow mention, include or encompass ‘blue’ and its variants. International submissions are welcomed. Submissions for the Indigomania project are open until 30 November. Truth Serum Press is an Australian independent publisher. Website: https://truthserumpress.net/

**Listen to this one**

An audio journal that specialises in ‘strange fiction’, Breakroom Stories aims to ‘evoke the eerie familiarity between wakefulness and dream… a forum for odd or untraditional voices… a home for stories that make readers shiver and shake’. If you are up for the challenge of writing for this journal then you may do this through original fiction, poetry or drama. Although there are no word limit restrictions there is a preference for pieces that can be read aloud in 15-20 minutes. Both previously published work and simultaneous submissions will be considered although any story depicting child-aged characters being harmed will not be considered. Payment is $10 for one time publication rights.

Submit your work as a doc, docx, txt, rtf or odt file using the Submittable link on the website. You should not send an audio recording of your piece as editorial staff will work with you to develop the best recording strategy for your story.

The journal will also consider visual artwork, music and video footage for use with the stories recorded. If interested make an enquiry via the contact page on the website with artwork, music or video submission in the subject line.

Website: www.thebreakroomstories.com

**Spice up your writing**

To win mentoring for fiction or poetry in the Cinnamon Pencil Mentoring Competition, enter either ten poems up to fifty lines each, or two short stories, or the first 10,000 words of a novel, plus a synopsis and personal statement.

The winner will receive a free place on the Cinnamon Pencil Mentoring Service and two runners up will each be offered 50% bursaries. International entrants are welcomed.

The entry fee is £12.

The closing date is 30 October.

Website: www.cinnamonpress.com
INTRODUCTIONS

Granta literary journal, published four times a year, is open for fiction and non-fiction submissions between 13 October and 13 November. Writers may submit one complete story or essay. All material submitted to Granta must be original and unpublished. There is no minimum or maximum length but most submissions are between 3,000 and 6,000 words and submissions over 10,000 words are unlikely to be read. Include a cover letter with information about previous publications. Submit all work through the online system. There is a £3 fee for prose submissions. Payment varies. Website: https://granta.submitable.com/

The Stinging Fly will have an open submission window between 2 December and 16 January 2020 for work for its summer 2020 issue. The Stinging Fly publishes new work by Irish and international authors and has a particular interest in the short story. One prose work per author may be submitted or up to three poems. There are no length restrictions. Payment per accepted piece is €25 per magazine page. Submit through the online system, which will only go live when the submission window opens. Website: https://stingingfly.org/

The Fiction Desk has replaced its annual ghost story competition with a new annual call for submission for ghost stories. The call has two stands, for general ghost stories and themed ghost stories (the theme was yet to be announced when WM went to press). Stories may be between 1,000 and 20,000 words, and for the general strand may be in any style of ghost story as long as they retain an element of the supernatural. Submissions are open from mid-October to 31 January 2020. Submit through the online system. Accepted stories will be paid at a rate of £20 per printed page. Website: www.thefictiondesk.com/

Library Tales Publishing is a US indie specialising in ‘self-help, memoirs and niche fiction books by qualified and talented authors’. The editorial team is proud of their domestic and international distribution, film rights, and sales representation throughout the world. They have a unique way of accepting submissions. At the website there is a long and detailed questionnaire which an author must fill in and attach when the manuscript is submitted. It is planned that this information ‘will help us better evaluate your publishing potential... [and] better promote and sell your book once published.’ Submissions are currently open. Check out their list and publications before submitting and make sure to present a business-like, social media savvy, presentation. Response time is reasonable and rights and royalties are discussed with the contract. Website: www.librarytalespublishing.com

CRAFT is an international online platform for new fiction from established and emerging writers. Submissions of flash (under 1,000 words) and short (up to 6,000 words) fiction are accepted. Submit one piece of shot fiction or up to three pieces of flash fiction. Work for consideration should be original and previously unpublished, although CRAFT may accept reprints on a non-paying basis. Payment for accepted new work is $100 for flash fiction and $200 for short stories. Submit online. Website: www.craftliterary.com

One Story is a literary magazine that publishes a single story at a time. The writer of each accepted story is paid $500 and receives 25 contributor copies. Submit original, unpublished literary fiction between 3,000 and 8,000 words through the online submission window. There is currently a submission window open until 14 November. The next submission window will open in January. Website: www.one-story.com

GLOBAL SELF-HELP MARKET

Library Tales Publishing

PDR Lindsay-Salmon

Library Tales Publishing is a US indie specialising in ‘self-help, memoirs and niche fiction books by qualified and talented authors’. The editorial team is proud of their domestic and international distribution, film rights, and sales representation throughout the world. They have a unique way of accepting submissions. At the website there is a long and detailed questionnaire which an author must fill in and attach when the manuscript is submitted. It is planned that this information ‘will help us better evaluate your publishing potential... [and] better promote and sell your book once published.’ Submissions are currently open. Check out their list and publications before submitting and make sure to present a business-like, social media savvy, presentation. Response time is reasonable and rights and royalties are discussed with the contract. Website: www.librarytalespublishing.com

WRITERS’ NEWS
C&R Press is a US indie publishing 'new and emerging writers whose work might otherwise be ignored by commercial publishers'. It needs fiction, non-fiction and poetry which will ‘grow readers’ knowledge and imagination, take them into new lives, and illuminate truths’.

Currently C&R Press is open for submissions of full-length manuscripts in every category for their 2020 and 2021 catalogues. Novels, poetry, short story collections, creative nonfiction, memoir, essay, experimental and hybrid work are all considered. When submitting novels and memoir include a synopsis. Twice a year the editorial team ask for submissions of chapbooks. The winter submission for chapbooks start in December. Present a fully edited work, in a standard publishing format, with a brief bio, full contact details and make it a professional presentation.

Check out the website, published list and guidelines. The company also runs an annual competition, with three $1,000 prizes for ‘a poetry book, a novel or short story collection, and a creative non-fiction or memoir book.’ Winners and the short list are usually published.

Response time is very slow, ‘6-18 months to respond, in some cases faster and in some longer’. Rights and royalties are discussed with the contract.

Website: www.crpress.org

A fertile furrow for poets

The 2019 Plough International Poetry Prize is inviting entries.

There is a first prize of £1,000, a second prize of £500 and a third prize of £250. This year’s judge is Greta Stoddart.

The competition is run annually by The Plough Arts Centre in Devon. The International Poetry prize is now in its 16th year.

Enter original, unpublished poems up to 40 lines. Poems may be in any style or form.

The entry fee is £5 per poem.

The closing date is 31 January 2020.

Website: www.theploughprize.co.uk

Gary Dalkin

In the first instance, even for fiction, send an email enquiry to info@histriabooks.com with a brief biography, a description of your book and the intended audience. For fiction only include 1 or 2 sample chapters.

The Acquisitions Manager will review your enquiry and may request a full proposal, for which you should be able to supply a complete manuscript (for fiction) or (for non-fiction) an outline or proposed table of contents, thoughts on marketing considerations, comparable and competing volumes, and for academic works only, the names and contact details of two or three people who could potentially review your material.

Details: Histria Books, 7181 North Hualapai Way, St East, 130-86, Las Vegas, NV, USA; guidelines at: https://histriabooks.com/submission-guidelines/
For doggy tales

Jenny Roche

Literate and entertaining dog focused articles and stories are wanted for The Bark, a magazine of modern dog culture.

Based in Berkeley, California the magazine has a slogan of Dog is My Co-Pilot and is an award winning quarterly print and web publication whose readers are said to be serious dog enthusiasts, ‘very sophisticated in matters pertaining to dogs’. It is advised you familiarise yourself with the voice and scope of the magazine before submitting work and aim to avoid subjects and themes that have been previously covered by the magazine. Content can be read online.

Articles should take a journalistic approach and memoirs are strongly discouraged. Primary sources must be supplied for fact checking. You should aim for universal themes and articles not centred on a particular breed of dog. At the time of writing essays and fiction were being considered but check with the website for any changes. Poetry will be considered but as there is little space for this, shorter poems will have a better chance of acceptance.

Short pieces of less than 600 words on general tips, how-to and other topics will be considered as will articles of a maximum 300 words written from a dog’s point of view. Articles for web only should be no more than 600 words long.

When submitting include a word count at the top of the first page and your name, address and contact details on every page. Mention if this is a simultaneous submission and if it has been previously published give the name and date of the publication.

Payment rates depend on the complexity and length of article and are negotiated individually.

As submissions are only reviewed between production of the magazine this may take up to a year. If submitting by post your work will only be returned if a SAE is included.

Send print magazine submissions to: submissions@thebark.com
Send web submissions with your surname and ‘Web Originals Submission to: editor@thebark
Website: https://thebark.com

Tell Tales

Madness Heart Press calls itself a new kind of digital horror publisher, welcoming great horror fiction, from chapbooks to novels, and poetry. Extreme horror writers note, they welcome things that might put off other publishers.

Violence, sex, and gore, racism, sexism, and bigotry must be ‘pertinent and interesting to the story... Anything too gratuitous will be rejected’. Submit a synopsis first as a query and wait for permission to then submit a well edited and correctly formatted work in doc/rtf/mobi format.

Madness Heart Press also publish anthologies. See the website for current guidelines. Calls are out for: Corners of the World: Judaism, a Jewish Horror Anthology, with a deadline of 30 October; Ghastly Gastronomy, for food-based horror stories, all of which must feature a recipe readers can recreate, by 31 December; an annual, Trigger Warning, closing on 28 February 2020; and Devouring Earth, closing 30 April 2020 for stories of massive monsters.

Submit stories over 1,500 words, online, in doc/rtf format. Payment for novels is ‘50% net retail royalties’. Payment for anthology stories is $5.

Website: https://madnessheart.press

Worried about writer’s block? Give your writing time to grow, advises Lynne Hackles

Several writing friends have reported that they haven’t written in ages. ‘It’s been almost twelve months since I wrote anything,’ admitted one. Another reckoned he was blocked. It reminded me of some comforting words novelist, Eileen Ramsay, said years ago.

‘You think you’re suffering from a block. Don’t panic. Consider it part of the writing process. The fields outside my house look very bare and barren at the moment. You’d think nothing was going on but don’t believe it. An unbelievable amount of activity is going on underground. It will take several months but, oh boy, come and look out of the window in March. That’s what writing is like. Accept the fallow moments. Do other things. Your fingers may not be working but your head and heart are.’

I learned to accept these barren times a long time ago. They always come to an end and I return to writing with renewed energy and enthusiasm. Just like any athlete, recovery time is as important and as the time when a full effort is required.

Read Eileen’s words again. Digest them. Print them our as a reminder not to worry.

There is no point in sitting in front of a screen or clutching a notebook and pen if you have nothing to say. It’ll only make you feel worse. Accept your fallow fields time and try something else. Be creative in other ways. Paint, make bread, go for walks. It’s often when we forget our worries about not writing and are concentrating on something completely different that ideas arrive.

Sign up for a course or go to a day class for something you would never normally do. Visit new places. Meet new people. You’ll get fresh ideas and only one idea is needed to become the seed that will grow and get you working again.
GLOBAL SPIRITUAL MARKET

Get into Fortress

Gary Dalkin

Fortress Press is an American independent Christian publisher which produces idea-based books for general readers, clergy, students, and scholars. Titles for general readers intersect religion with topics in art, literature, and culture, and strive to reach general readers who are culturally engaged and grounded in fresh, substantive, timely, and inspiring theological reflection. Recent or forthcoming titles range from Hemingway and Ho Chi Minh in Paris: The Art of Resistance by David Crowe to Sex, God and Rock and Roll by Barry Taylor to 30-Day Journey with Jane Austen by Natasha Duquette.

Education titles should be suitable for use in a school or educational setting, academic titles explore issues of Christian faith at a post-degree level while books focused on ministry should be attuned to the needs of clergy, whether preaching, serving, counselling, planning, administering or some other aspect of professional ministry.

Initially send a pitch by email to one of these editors: Non-Fiction General Reader, Theology and Culture: Emily Brower, browere@fortresspress.com; Ministry & Professional Resource: Scott Tunseth, tunseths@fortresspress.com; Education, Academic or Christian History: Neil Elliott, nelliotto@rowman.com

Details: Fortress Press, 1517 Media, 8th Floor, 510 S Marquette Ave, Minneapolis, MN 55402; Minneapolis, MN 55440-1209, USA; website: https://fortresspress.com/submissions

ONLINE SPECIFIC MARKET

A gi-normus opportunity

Jenny Roche

There are no strict guidelines as to the kind of stories that might be liked, you are just invited to submit the story ‘you really believe in’. Editors are actively looking to include stories from ‘a diverse range of cultural backgrounds, sexual orientations and genders’. You can read content on the website.

What’s on your pile?

The Hawking Index is the tongue-in-cheek name given by mathematician Jordan Ellenberg to his formula for calculating which books Kindle readers are least likely to finish. The Index was named after Stephen Hawking’s famously oft abandoned A Brief History of Time.

The website For Reading Addicts reports that the current top five unfinished books are Hilary Clinton’s Hard Choices, Capital by Thomas Piketty, Infinite Jest by David Foster Wallace, Thinking, Fast and Slow by Daniel Kahneman and, still in the top five, A Brief History of Time.

Meanwhile the most given-up-on classics are Catch-22 (Joseph Heller), The Lord of the Rings (JRR Tolkien), Ulysses (James Joyce), Moby Dick (Herman Melville) and Atlas Shrugged (Ayn Rand). The top five most abandoned contemporary books are: The Casual Vacancy (JK Rowling), Fifty Shades of Grey (EL James), Eat, Pray, Love (Elizabeth Gilbert), The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo (Stieg Larsson) and Wicked (Gregory Maguire).

All submissions must be previously unpublished, including self-publication. There is a link to Standard Manuscript Format on the website and your story, once only, should be submitted as an rtf file using the Submittable link on the website.

Website: https://giganotosaurus.org

Snapshot seeks short poems

The Snapshot Press Book Awards are inviting entries of book-length collections of haiku, tanka and other short poetry. Award winners will have their collection published by Snapshot Press.

To enter, send collections of between 60 and 100 original short poems between 1 and 25 lines. Prose poems or haibun must not be longer than 200 words. Individual poems may have been previously published but the collection as a whole must be unpublished as a single-author book.

The entry fee is £30.

The closing date is 30 November. Snapshot Press is also inviting entries for the Haiku Calendar Competition 2020. Submit original haiku. Twelve haiku will be selected as monthly winners. £400 prize money will be shared between the winners. Entry costs £10 for up to four haiku and £20 for up to 12 haiku.

The closing date is 31 January 2020.

Website: www.snapshotpress.co.uk

FLASHES

A new print and online literary journal, Middle House Review wants work that ‘will still be standing after the dust from the bomb of submissions has settled’. It publishes poetry (send 3-5), fiction (under 7,000 words) and flash fiction (up to 2,000), through the website. Response time is ‘around sixty days’. Payment is $25 for First North American Serial Rights. Website: www.middlehousereview.com

Feminist-friendly fiction, non-fiction, poetry and reviews are wanted by Australian online literary magazine Scum. Submissions should be a maximum 1,000 words, or 50 lines for poetry. Submit no more than three poems. Submit by email between the 1st and 7th of each month only, to submissions@scum-mag.com

Payment is Aus$60 per piece. Website: www.scum-mag.com

Good Movies for Kids website is happy to hear from people interested in writing reviews for children’s films old and new. Send pitches by email to hello@goodmoviesforkids.co.uk

Website: http://goodmoviesforkids.co.uk

‘Editing might be a bloody trade, but knives aren’t the exclusive property of butchers. ‘Surgeons use them too.’ Blake Morrison

www.writers-online.co.uk

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INTERNATIONAL ZINE SCENE

by PDR Lindsay-Salmon

Liner Notes is the parenting magazine of the Juno website, a friendly, informative site for new mothers full of useful facts, and the members are encouraged to offer help and support for each other. Aiming to build a safe and supportive space, they prefer ‘women writing for women’ and ‘stories that inspire confidence, give insight into this journey, and let others know that they’re not alone.’

There are story suggestions at the website. Submissions, 500-1,100 words, preferably first-person and certainly non-fiction, should be pitched first. Product reviews should be specific and short. Payment is competitive and negotiated, paid on acceptance.

Details: Liner Notes, email pitches to chelsea@hellojuno.co and iza@hellojuno.co; website https://hellojuno.co

Barrelhouse is a print and webzine, needing ‘short fiction, nonfiction, interviews, and random stuff… with an edge and a sense of humour’ for their readers. Read lots of web issues and check the rolling submissions periods which change overnight. Currently book reviews and poetry are wanted. Fiction and non-fiction will be up next for submissions.

Work, ‘shorter than 8,000 words’ should be submitted through the Submittable online submissions manager. Poets may submit ‘up to five poems in one file. Response time is ‘two to three months… even six months’. Payment is $50 ‘for the usual rights’.

Website: www.barrelhousemag.com

Big Fiction is a great market for longer stories, ‘ambitious fiction and nonfiction’. It needs novelettes and essays which are ‘experiments of curiosity and self-awareness that examine the lies that we believe in, consciously or not’. Most work appears online but they also publish limited edition, commemorative print issues.

Submissions are open until 1 December, then 15 March to 1 June. Fiction in most genres is accepted if it is written ‘with a clear literary intent’, and essays should be ‘narratively straightforward or as experimental as you envision.’

Submit self-contained work, 7,500-20,000 words, through the website: www.bigfictionmagazine.com

Payment is $50 and ‘Every published writer will also be interviewed for our podcast.’

Polu Texni is a zine publishing ‘mixed-media arts and speculative or weird fiction’. Editor Dawn Albright and her team ‘are interested in the intersection where different media, styles, crafts, and genres meet to create something more interesting than what they would be alone’. Currently it seek ‘articles, poems, or art profiles’.

Non-fiction is urgently wanted. Articles on ‘future art, technology and art, fannish culture, emerging media, art and science, or art and fantasy, among other things’ are sought. Query with ‘a quick email with an idea and a short bio’ before completing a piece.

Poetry on SF or fantasy themes should give the reader a strong visual image. Book Reviews of speculative fiction books, art books, illustrated books or graphic novels are also welcomed.

Payment is €3 a word for book reviews, 3-5¢ a word for articles, and $20 for poetry.

Website: www.polutexni.com

With an editor who is ‘crazy’ about horror, the Haunted MTL wants work that really makes a reader ‘tick, chill, and shiver’. They want ‘gore… moaning banshees… anything unique’, as short stories, flash, or graphic pieces. Read the work, guidelines and contract at the website: https://hauntedmtl.com

Submissions are always open. Just scare them silly!

Switchback is published by the Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program of the University of San Francisco. Submissions are open until 1 December. It needs your ‘best work… strangest work… most honest work’. Read the submission guidelines and published work, then submit online: www.switchbackjournal.com

For prose submit a story or essay under 4,500 words, preferably around 3,500 words. For poetry submit up to three poems. Payment and rights are discussed on acceptance.

A swimming short story competition

Fish Publishing is inviting entries for the Fish Short Story Prize. This year’s judge is Colum McCann.

The winner will receive €3,000 and a five-day short story workshop at the West Cork Literary Festival. The second prize is a week at Anam Cara Writers’ Retreat and €300, and the third prize is €300. Seven honourable mentions each get €200.

The top ten stories will be published in the Fish Anthology 2020 and their writers will be invited to read at the launch at the West Cork Literary Festival.

Enter original unpublished short stories up to 5,000 words. International entries by writers writing in English are welcomed.

The entry fee is €20 online and €22 for postal entries.

The closing date is 30 November.

Website: www.fishpublishing.com
FLASHES

First prize is £300 in the Writers Bureau Flash Fiction Competition, with £200 for second and £100 for third. All winners also receive a Writers Bureau course of their choice worth over £374. Entry costs £5 for one story of £10 for three stories. The closing date is 30 November. Website: www.wbcompetition.com

Christopher Mackie has won the Kelpies Book Prize which is given by Floris book for new Scottish Writing for Children. Christopher’s prize is a publication deal, mentoring, £1,000 and a writing retreat at Moniack Mhor.

The Voice newspaper is to go monthly after 37 years as a weekly.

The National Creative Writing Industry Day will take place at Manchester Metropolitan University on 1 November, including panel events, workshops and opportunities to pitch to literary agents and editors. A standard ticket is £45. Website: https://ncwindustryday.wwebly.com/

‘The story must strike a nerve in me. My heart should start pounding when I hear the first line in my head. I start trembling at the risk.’ Susan Sontag

GLOBAL FICTION MARKET

Edgy tales for Cinestate

PDR Lindsay-Salmon

Cinestate is an edgy indie film production company, specialising in the horror, mystery, thriller or related genre films and perhaps best known for the horror western Bone Tomahawk. The team now want to ‘apply the page-turning attraction of indie genre films to high-quality literature’. They want accomplished authors of ‘riveting gems exemplify cinema-scope stories that are richly visual, utterly unique, and eminently shareable.’ Cinestate is ‘hungry for unique voices that push boundaries in the horror, mystery, thriller or related genres.’ Stories should be cinematic in scope with a great hook.

Check out the website and present work professionally in a well-edited finished product. Make sure to have the work professionally edited and be clear about your copyright. Response time is ‘slow to very slow.’ Rights and royalties area discussed with a contract.

Details: Cinestate, email subs: info@cinestate.com; website: http://cinestate.com/books

GLOBAL SPECIFIC MARKET

Sic mundus creatus est

Gary Dalkin

Editor-in-chief CD Watson is reading for a special themed issue of the quarterly US speculative fiction magazine Alternate Realms. Future Watch 20/20 will be released in 2020, and feature original, never before published short stories addressing the question ‘what does the future look like?’ bringing the clarity of hindsight to potential futures.

Focus should be on the human aspect of the story, even if the narrator is a non-human character, e.g. a robot or AI. Any genre of science fiction is okay as long as it is based in our reality and set in the relatively near future. Preference is for unpretentious, well-written stories combining strong ideas and good characterisation. Any violence, profanity, or sexual elements should be integral to the story. Romantic subplot are fine, but keep actual sex discreet.

Submit only one, standalone, story, 1,500-7,500 words, by 31 March, 2020. Payment is royalty-based on the words, by 31 March, 2020. Payment is royalty-based.

Website: http://alternaterealmsmagazine.com

Who will watch The Watchmen?

Loosely based on, rather than a direct adaptation of, Alan Moore’s now iconic 1980s graphic novel Watchmen, comes HBO’s new series, The Watchmen. Showrunner and writer Damon Lindelof (Lost) says, ‘Set in an alternate [sic] history where “superheroes” are treated as outlaws, Watchmen embraces the nostalgia of the original groundbreaking graphic novel while attempting to break new ground of its own.’

The cast includes Jeremy Irons, Don Johnson and Louis Gossett Jr. Coming at the end of a decade in which every other film and TV show seems to be a rebooted, franchised remake, the tag line is, without apparent irony, ‘nothing ever ends’.

Take this competition Littorally

The Littoral Press Nature Poetry Collection Competition 2019 has a first prize of publication of the winning collection by Littoral Press.

At least half the poems in the submitted collection should be directly or indirectly concerned with nature, spirituality or the environment. Individual poems may have been previously published but the poems should be unpublished as a collection.

Littoral Press will publish sixty copies of the winning collection, and the poet will receive fifty copies.

The finished book will be A5 and have between 50 and 100 pages.

The entry fee is £20.

The closing date is 30 November.

Website: www.southendpoetry.co.uk/littoral/Competition.html
Vulpine Press was set up in 2017 to publish stylish, innovative books.

'Ve were set up in 2017 as the second imprint of Ockham Publishing Group Limited (there are now four),' said publishing director Sarah Hembrow. 'In much the same way as Ockham Publishing got the name from Ockham's Razor, Vulpine Press got the name from Brandy, the [founders' furtive] cat who could not be deterred despite her limitations.'

Vulpine Press publishes a wide range of books from romance, crime and sci-fi, to autobiographies and classic literature.

'Vulpine was formed partly because we were turning down some fantastic books that didn't fit our pop-science and pop-philosophy remit with Ockham, and partly because there's a dearth of good independent publishers who will take on stylish, interesting works from authors who are doing something different or something extremely well,' said Sarah.

She's happy to receive submissions that fit with Vulpine Press's ethos. 'We are looking for a story that we can connect with in some way, a story that is innovative, creative, and does something different.' Sarah would rather wait to discover books that reflect Vulpine Press's identity than simply commission books to hit fixed publishing targets. 'We don't set a target, as we want to ensure we take on only works which suit,' she said. 'A good book for Vulpine will be well written and well thought-out. It would tell a story that we feel people just have to read. Ideally it will be doing something other publishers wouldn't touch; mixing genres, using unique formatting or pushing the boundaries of normal literature.'

Vulpine is gaining traction in the industry, and will be at Frankfurt Book Fair for the first time this year. 'We will also be developing our relationships with translation partners over the next couple of years – we already have books coming in Italian, and we hope to further that trend.'

Sarah is happy to receive submissions for Vulpine, but she advises prospective authors to put care and thought into their submission. 'Take time putting your submission together,' she said. 'You want to really grab the publisher's attention. Don't rush it – publishers don't want to read a submission that's full of errors! And always follow the rules the publisher has set out: we specify maximum word counts for each section, for example, and at least half of our submissions don't follow these.'

Submit via the submission form on the website, including information about what makes your book different or interesting. Vulpine Press will contact those authors whose ideas interest them.

Vulpine Press publishes in paperback and ebook and pays royalties.

Website: www.vulpine-press.com

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Travel writing includes a number of forms and styles, but when is travel writing not travel writing at all? There is an interesting area in which something is only prompted by travel and, if it is an article, then it might find a target home in something other than a classic travel publication.

Consider an example. Say you visit Stonehenge, perhaps the most iconic megalithic site in the world and one which has made Salisbury Plain a much visited place for millennia. You could visit this and write about that visit, about how Stonehenge struck you, something of its long history and the people who built, used or just visited it, taking essentially a local approach. Such a feature might well find a home in a travel magazine. Or you could…

- Link what you write to other stone circles (of which there are many), maybe on a global basis.
- Investigate the history and the reason for its being built in archaeological detail, perhaps suggesting a more technical home for your feature.
- Focus on the actual construction (how did they move those huge stones with such precision?)
- Similarly focus on the work and techniques of the archaeologists who have investigated the structure.
- Consider the 'new-age' and mystical aspect of the monument.
- Make your piece primarily about the wonder of humanity having such mathematical and astronomical skills so far back in history (estimates still vary and research continues, but the first phase of building Stonehenge probably goes back beyond 3000BC).
- You could probably stretch this concept further, linking to paganism, burial practices or the fact that Stonehenge is regarded as a special place by UFO hunters.

All this from somewhere that can be visited in a day, is down the road for some in the UK and accessible to many. One could make a list of a similar nature by starting with many famous sights around the world. The Empire State Building might lead into a piece primarily about the modern conundrums of immigration. A beach might lead to making points about erosion, rising sea levels and global warming; and if the beach was in Norfolk to suggestions of selling up and moving to higher ground. The Merlion statue on the waterfront in Singapore might lead to mention of Sir Stamford Raffles and the history of The East India Company's role in the development of that great city.

All this does not just inform and extend the content of what you write, it also increases – widens – the opportunity for placing work by making it fit a greater range of possible outlets – and still keeps it sufficiently close to classic travel writing to deserve a mention here. So perhaps the moral is to link wherever you go to this kind of thinking and see where it takes you.
**GLOBAL LITERARY MARKET**

**Open submissions for Open Books**

Gary Dalkin

Established in 2007, US independent publisher Open Books publishes high-quality literary, contemporary, and historical fiction, nonfiction, and narrative poetry. Paperback editions are distributed internationally and its writers include winners of the Pushcart Prize, the Dundee International Literary Prize, the Nautilus Book Awards and others. Editor-in-chief David Ross wants the very best of the new generation of authors from around the world.

Submit literary fiction and intelligent, cutting edge contemporary fiction in most genres, though not romance, horror or paranormal titles unless with a very original or literary spin. For non-fiction, they especially want political, social and ecological subjects; no self-help, diet books or pseudo psychology.

For all submissions include a cover letter with your contact information, an author bio and a basic author marketing strategy. For fiction submissions, include a one-page synopsis and the first three chapters of your manuscript. For non-fiction, include a detailed outline of your project and a sample of your writing.

Alternatively, you can submit a simple one page enquiry letter. Send all submissions and enquiries to David Ross by email: submissions@open-bks.com

Response time is around four weeks.

Website: www.open-bks.com

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**Plays for children**

Short scripts with strong female characters are invited from playwrights worldwide for the Nightlight Children’s Play Festival taking place February 2020 in Chicago, MA.

The Festival is being run by Ghostlight Ensemble, a theatre company aiming to ‘challenge the status quo through timeless stories, immersive environments and unconventional staging’.

Scripts should be a maximum fifteen minutes and appeal to audiences of under-twelves. Ethically and culturally diverse scripts not requiring complicated sets or costumes will be given priority.

Submit your script along with a cover letter containing your contact information, a short bio, and a brief synopsis of your script with, if applicable, a note of any of its development and production history.

Email scripts to Maria Burnham with ‘Nightlight Script Submission’ play title and your name in the subject line to: scripts@ghostlightensemble.com

Website: www.ghostlightensemble.com

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**Room to write**

Hosking Houses Trust, set up by Sarah Hosking to provide women writers and artists over forty with ‘a room of their own’ where they can create free from domestic constraint, welcomes residency applications from published women writers.

Residencies consist of accommodation at Church Cottage in Clifford Chambers near Stratford on Avon for between one week and three months. To apply for a Hosking House residency, applicants must be professional women writers over forty in need of a period of peace in which to work undisturbed. Writers applying for a residency must have an agreed legal contract for publication, broadcast, performance or some kind of public dissemination so that the work will emerge into the public domain. Most writers who apply to Hosking House are agented but it is not strictly necessary.

Bursaries of up to £1,000 per month are available.

To apply, send a CV and a written letter detailing your aims and circumstances.

Hosking House commissioned the recently published Canterbury Press anthology *Kiss and Part*, which features stories by ten writers who have stayed at Church Cottage, including Marina Warner, Salley Vickers, Maggie Gee and Joan Bakewell.

Website: http://hoskinghouses.co.uk

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** FLASHES**

Prizes are £1,000, £300 and £150 in both categories of the Magma 2019/2020 Poetry Competition, for poems of 11-50 lines, and up to ten lines. All six winning poems will be published in *Magma*. Entry fee, £5, £4 for the second, £3.50 each subsequent. The closing date is 11 January.

Website: https://magmapoetry.com/competition/

Gavin Hamilton edits football monthly World Soccer. Contact him with feedback.

Details: email: World_Soccer@timeinc.com; website: www.worldsoccer.com

Chris McGine is acting editor of Canal Boat magazine. He welcomes letters, with prizes for the star letter writer.

Details: email: chris.mcgine@archant.co.uk; website: www.canalboat.co.uk

Hay Festival Europa 28 is a project highlighting the contribution of women in Europe. It’s running a writing competition to win a trip for two people to Hay Festival Europa 28 in Croatia in June 2020. Submit 100-500 words in any form on what Europe means to you by 1 February 2020.

Email: europa28@hayfestival.com; website: www.hayfestival.com/ europa28/home

‘Anybody can make history. Only a great man can write it.’

Oscar Wilde

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Website: http://hoskinghouses.co.uk
Burning Chair was set up in the summer of 2018 by two friends: Peter Oxley, an indie author, and Simon Finnie, a digital marketing professional.

'The short answer to what we publish is great books – we have a strict rule of only publishing the kind of books that we love and would go out of our way to read,' said Peter. 'The slightly longer answer is that genre fiction is our real passion, as opposed to literary fiction. Our main sweet spot at the moment is thriller/suspense and YA sci-fi/fantasy, but we are also open to most types of genre fiction – with the exception of romance. Not because we have anything against romance, but it's not a genre we read, and so we just don’t feel qualified to make judgements on what's good or what we could really do justice to, in terms of editing, marketing and promotion.'

Burning Chair is looking for unputdownable reads. 'We came up with the name “Burning Chair” because it encapsulated what we wanted to produce: books so great, so insanely readable, that your chair could literally be on fire and you wouldn’t notice! Whilst that’s us being slightly flippant (please don’t try it at home, folks…!) the principle holds: if the book and the story is a good one, then we're going to be interested.'

Burning Chair was set up to create opportunities for new voices. 'The one thing we kept seeing, time and again, was that great stories were being lost to the world because they couldn’t find the right home,' said Peter. 'We felt that there was a space in the market for a publisher which took the best of indie publishing – the nimbleness, the cutting-edge marketing, the author-centric model – while also providing authors with all the backing and support (financial and otherwise) which they'd expect from a publishing deal.'

Peter is proud of the way indies have shaken up the publishing world. 'Along with so many other great indie publishers, we see ourselves as disruptors. But, in a British sort of way, rather than shouting about it and banging the drum about how disruptive we are, we’re just quietly getting on with it. Polite disruption, if you will…'

At this stage Burning Chair is focusing on quality rather than quantity. 'We've made a conscious decision to be picky in terms of who we work with, even if that means sacrificing numbers, so that we can really give our all to every one of our authors. We believe that the strategy's paying off: we're insanely proud of every one of the books we've released, and long may that continue.'

Peter is happy to receive submissions. 'If your story is an insanely readable, just-can't-put-it-down, guilty pleasure type of story, then we might just be the home for you,' he said. 'We want authors to send us a book that excites, intrigues, and grips us: in short, something we can get passionate about. We also want to feel how passionate the author is about their idea and the story which springs from it, and how obsessed they are in getting that story out to the world.'

Burning Chair has embraced the indie and digital revolutions to keep costs down and give its books and authors the maximum amount of exposure. 'We keep our overheads low. Our marketing is predominantly digital and very focused so more cost-effective. And we only do print on demand when it comes to paperbacks, so there's less wastage and losses due to returns and unsold stock.'

Submit a completed manuscript and carefully worked synopsis. Burning Chair publishes in print and ebook and pays royalties.

Website: www.burningchairpublishing.com

Travellers’ tales

Off Assignment is a print, zine and audio market for ‘travel journalists, essayists with a sense of place, reporters with swollen notebooks, poets who wander, food writers with street cart taste – to go rogue’.

Off Assignment has a taste for offbeat places and a keen interest in ‘the atmosphere of the street, the feeling of the people, the gossip of the town, the smell; the thousand, thousand elements of reality that are part of the event’. Slots needing writers include: Letter to a Stranger, Behind the Feature, 1,500-2,500 on things that happened while you were on assignment; No Equivalent, 500-700 words on untranslatable words; Under the Influence, 800-1,200 words on pilgrimages inspired by another writer or artist; and interviews.

Email pitches or queries to: offassignment@gmail.com Response time is ‘at least four weeks’. There is ‘modest’ payment for first worldwide rights.

Website: www.offassignment.com
Sign up to our FREE newsletter today
www.writers-online.co.uk/register
How to enter

Competition Rules

1 Eligibility
All entries must be the original and unpublished work of the entrant, and not currently submitted for publication nor for any other competition or award. Each entry must be accompanied by an entry form, printed here (photocopies are acceptable), unless stated.

Open Competitions are open to any writer, who can submit as many entries as they choose. Entry fees are £6, £4 for subscribers.

Subscriber-only Competitions are open only to subscribers of Writing Magazine. Entry is free but you can only submit one entry per competition.

2 Entry Fees
Cheques or postal orders should be payable to Warners Group Publications or you can pay by credit card (see form).

3 Manuscripts
Short stories: Entries must be typed in double spacing on single sides of A4-paper with a front page stating your name, address, phone number and email address, your story title and word count and the name of the competition. Entries will be returned if accompanied by a stamped and addressed postcard.

Electronic entries should be a single doc, docx, txt, rtf or pdf file with the contact details, etc. on p.1, and your story commencing on the second page.

Poetry manuscripts: Entries must be typed in single spacing with double spacing between stanzas on single sides of A4. Entrant’s name, address, telephone number and email address must be typed on a separate A4 sheet. Entries to poetry competitions cannot be returned.

All manuscripts: Receipt of entries will be acknowledged if accompanied by a suitably worded stamp and addressed postcard. Entrants retain copyright in their manuscripts. You are advised not to send the copy of your manuscript. Enclose an sae if you want your manuscript to be returned.

4 Competition Judging
The winners will be notified within two months of closing date after which date unplaced entries may be submitted elsewhere. Winning entries may not be submitted elsewhere for twelve months after that date without permission of Writing Magazine who retain the right to publish winning entries in any form during those twelve months.

5 Notification
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To enter:

• Epistolary Short Story Competition (see p31)
  For narratives in epistolary form, 1,500-1,700 words; entry fee £6, £4 for subscribers; closing date, 15 December.
  Ref Code: Nov19/Epistolary

• 500-word Short Story Competition (see p31)
  For short stories, up to 500; entry fee £6, £4 for subscribers; closing date, 15 November.
  Ref Code: Oct19/500

• Food Short Story Competition (see p53)
  For fiction, 1,500-1,700 words, involving food; free entry, subscribers only; closing date, 15 December.
  Ref Code: Nov19/Food

• Christmas Poem Competition
  Poems, up to 40 lines, with a Christmas theme, in any style or structure. Entry fee £6; £4 for subscribers; closing date, 15 November.
  Ref Code: Oct19/Xmas

Competition Entry

I am enclosing my entry for the.................................

Ref code .................................................. and agree to be bound by the competition rules

TITLE........................................................................

FORENAME....................................................

SURNAME....................................................

ADDRESS..................................................................

.................................................................

POSTCODE..............................................................

EMAIL..................................................................

□ I’m happy to receive special offers via email from Warners Group Publications plc.

TELEPHONE (INC. AREA CODE) ..............................................

□ Tick here if you wish to receive our FREE monthly e-newsletter

ENTRY FEE (please tick one)

□ £6

□ £4 for subscribers

□ Free entry (subscriber only competition)

I enclose my entry fee (cheques/or postal order payable to Warners Group Publications) OR I wish to pay my entry fee by:

□ Maestro □ Delta □ Visa □ Access □ Mastercard

CARD NUMBER .....................................................

VALID FROM.......................... EXPIRY DATE ..............

ISSUE NUMBER..................................................

SECURITY NUMBER..............................................

CARDHOLDER NAME..............................................

SIGNATURE..........................................................

DATE ..........................................................

□ £6

□ £4 for subscribers

□ Free entry (subscriber only competition)

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DATE ..........................................................
Debut novelist, Liz Hyder’s days vary depending on what she is working on. ‘I may have a creative writing workshop coming up or some other freelance work,’ she says. ‘Having written for years and worked with a lot of writers I’ve realised that everyone has their own way of working – it’s about finding a way that works for you. I spend a long time thinking about my stories and my characters, then I structure and plan until I know the start, middle and end well enough to give me a story arc that works – only when I’ve done all of that do I actually start writing.

‘I write best in intense periods aiming to write 3,000 words a day but I’ll edit as I go. I’ll get up, read the papers, drink a lot of tea and then brave the desk to re-read and edit the last 15,000 words or so before starting any new writing. By the time I’ve finished my first draft, it’s actually more like a fifth draft. I’ll read and edit in the morning and into the afternoon and then probably start writing afresh from around 2 or 3pm. I hit my stride around 4pm and like to finish around 7pm if possible. I can only sustain this for around a month (with weekends off for fun and play!) and then I feel over so, it’s not to be recommended as a model but it seems to work well for me.

‘I’ve always written, always daydreamed and always made up stories. For me, writing is a compulsion. Writing West Midlands have been brilliant to me as were Spread the Word when I lived in London. Find your local writing development agency – they’ll offer advice, training and support. Both STW and WWM have been crucial to me getting to where I am now. The Room 204 programme that WWM run is a great idea. They take around ten emerging writers and put them on a year-long mentoring and support programme. They also introduce them to the writers who’ve already been on it. Once you’re in Room 204, you’re there for good. There’s a Facebook group and ongoing courses and training too. I’ve run the WWM Young Writers group in Shrewsbury once a month for the past three years.

‘Hay Festival is an intense period of work during May and early June, I’ve worked at the Festival for four years and love it. I co-ordinate their social media short films which means scheduling, interviewing, planning and plotting. The team I work with are amazingly multi-talented and it’s a real privilege to be able to interview and speak to some of the world’s best writers, thinkers, creators and innovators. It’s an intellectual shot in the arm each year – but it does mean I spend an awful lot of money in the bookshop at the end too!’

‘Bearmouth is my first novel to be published but the seventh I’ve written. I think it’s important to share that. I haven’t done an MA in creative writing, but I’ve effectively served an apprenticeship through writing so much. I’ve written plays, short films, TV pilots, you name it, I’ve given it a go.

‘The germ of the idea for Bearmouth came after visiting a slate mine in North Wales – that was about three years ago. The book is told from Newt’s point of view and that voice was always strong in my head from the beginning but I realised I had to go off and do a load of research in order to do the idea justice. I went down various mines – coal and slate – and read a lot of books on the subject (with a focus on Victorian and early 20th century mining) and a lot of first-hand accounts from the early 1840s of the real children who worked down the mines.

‘Bearmouth is a standalone. It’s about Newt, a young person living and working down a dangerous coal mine for a pittance. When Devlin, a new lad, arrives it makes Newt start to ask questions, to look at Bearmouth with fresh eyes. It’s a page-turner about morality, exploitation and daring to challenge the status quo but, ultimately, it’s about hope.

‘Now I’m editing Glory, which is adult fiction set mainly in Victorian London and Shropshire in the autumn of 1840. I’m tweaking that at the moment but am itching to get started on book three, another standalone adult novel which is set across three time periods.’

Website: www.lizhyder.co.uk

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**Writing place**

‘I write in the attic where postcards adorn the low beams. It’s good to have random visual stimulus in the room. My desk faces the wall but there’s a window to the left where I can watch a collared dove nesting in a tree, red kites and buzzards overhead, as well as sparrows and noisy resident jackdaws. I’ve a bookshelf filled with old books, notepads, receipts and bits of tat. When planning, I stick up charts around the rafters with bits of blue tac. Inevitably, they fall off in the middle of the night and I think I’m being burgled.’
DON’T MISS THE DECEMBER ISSUE OF

Writing Magazine

Crossing genres
Advice from supernatural crime author Catherine Fears

20 QUESTIONS – how to become a children’s author
How to handle young characters in adult fiction

DON’T MISS THE DECEMBER ISSUE, ON NEWSSTANDS 7 NOVEMBER

20 QUESTIONS – how to become a children’s author

How to hold a successful signing
10 top tips for writing fantasy

BACK TO BASICS
A detailed exploration of the most frequently repeated advice for writers, and the one most often misinterpreted: how do you show instead of tell?

INTERVIEWS AND PROFILES

STAR INTERVIEW:
Husband and wife crimewriting team Nicci French on their unusual process, writing collaboratively and keeping thrills coming

Political campaign manager turned novelist Lara Prescott outlines the routines and rituals of her writing day

Meet debut fantasy author David Wragg

Michael Donkor picks his five favourite reads

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I

t is always a joy when one of my columns generates a lot of emails from readers. I am thrilled to receive each and every one. When I wrote about my personal experience of impostor syndrome, I thought it might resonate with a few, but never expected to hear from so many who share that excruciating fear of being found out as a fraud.

Maybe it’s something in the writing gene that means we cannot simply accept we are good at what we do. Maybe it’s the drip-feed of poison from others that if we are not up there with millionaire (and, even more daunting, billionaire) authors, then we don’t deserve to call ourselves writers. However, a writer who asked to be known as Mike felt it wasn’t confined to authors: ‘I think it is absolutely normal and a part of the human condition.’ He could be right.

I received so many emails outlining writer anguish, it was hard to choose which to use. If I haven’t included yours, please don’t think it was because I didn’t find it worthwhile. Everyone’s story deserved a place, but space is limited.

An author who only started her incredible writing career at the age of 84 is Millie Vigor, author of Catherine of Deepdale. She recalls how she felt after the book reached number five on the list of her library’s top ten most borrowed books. ‘I went to meetings where I met well-known authors, people who had been to university. I shrank into my shell. What right had I, a village school kid, to rub shoulders with people like this? I was an impostor. I began to doubt what I’d done.’ Millie, 92 at time of writing this, has seven published books to her credit, but still wants to hide away for fear of being found out as a fraud.

An author friend, whose output I would dearly love to match, also suffers from the same dreaded fear. David W Robinson has so many books to his name (eighteen of them in the Sanford Third Age Club Mystery Series) that it’s hard to believe he could ever suffer from self-doubt, but he does. As he says: ‘I re-read my older books and think “this is a load of rubbish” and “how did the publisher come to accept this tripe?”’ Needless to say, none of David’s books are rubbish, but he’s never going to believe that.

Elizabeth Bailey recently had great success with her historical Lady Fan Mystery novels, but this only deepened her conviction that she will be exposed as a fake. When she had four books in the charts at the same time, it sent her into a frenzy of joy mixed with panic that they wouldn’t stay there. ‘Because, of course, if they are not in the charts, everybody has figured it out. I’m just an average writer who by some extraordinary fluke has managed to grab a piece of one niche.’

As a contrast, Geoffrey Elleray’s success enabled him to turn off his impostor syndrome. He entered his self-published autobiography into a prestigious annual award and felt all the anguish of the rejected author when it wasn’t on the long list. ‘I thought it is so bad that it did not deserve a mention. Towards the end of the proceedings, the prize for the main award was announced. I was the runner up!’ The award changed his outlook. ‘Now, when self-doubt occurs I don’t allow myself to feel like an impostor or pretender. Just good on me.’

Another positive story comes from a writer who would rather remain anonymous. ‘I’d never heard of this condition until I read your original article. It was a really life changing moment for me. I’m a 65-year-old retired graduate mechanical engineer, who’s just had his first novel accepted and published. I realised, thanks to your revelations, that I’ve been dogged by impostor syndrome since early childhood.’

He went on to outline his career where he believed that failure, humiliation and disgrace were lurking behind every corner. Despite achieving great success and being praised by colleagues and superiors, he always felt he had somehow hoodwinked everyone. But then he signed up for a writing course. ‘The weird thing was, once I started writing, I began to believe in myself.’

I am going to use the last two positive examples to help me overcome my own impostor syndrome. As my partner said recently: ‘Stop downplaying what you’ve achieved. Readers enjoy your books. Deal with it!’

Lorraine Mace’s postbag has been stuffed with responses to her recent column about impostor syndrome.
Introducing The Writer’s App, a brand new app that empowers writers to fulfil their potential.

Daily inspiration, writing exercises, industry news, competitions to win big and opportunities to see your work published.

DOWNLOAD THE APP TODAY AND SUBSCRIBE FOR JUST £4.99 A MONTH
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- 15 days trial.
- Advice on how to set yourself up in business.
- Continuing Professional Development Certificate.

* Rates based on the suggested minimum negotiation rate by the Society of Editors and Proofreaders.

What Our Students Say

“Overall, I found the information in this course very useful. It covered all the main areas that anyone interested in working as a proofreader/copy editor would need to know.”

Maddy Glenn

“`The material is very informative and interesting as well as covering pretty much everything you would need to know when starting to proofread. There are a lot of tips and ideas for freelancers in general that you can see have been tried and tested and are being passed on in good faith.

“Overall, I found the information in this course very useful. It covered all the main areas that anyone interested in working as a proofreader/copy editor would need to know.”

Dorothy Nicolle

Expanding this into your own work extremely difficult.”

Shazia Fardous, Freelance Proofreader and Copyeditor

“It was such a helpful and worthwhile course and afterwards I was confident that I could find some proofreading work. Since becoming a proofreader I have had the pleasure of working with authors and students in various genres, some with dyslexia who find proofreading and editing their own work extremely difficult.”

Alison Spencer

Expert Opinions

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