

# YOUR STORY, YOUR WAY

40 Tricks, Tips & Exercises to  
Improve Your Creative Writing



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# **Your Story, Your Way**

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## ***Introduction***

Thanks for downloading this e-book *Your Story, Your Way* is a collection of tips, tricks and advice designed to get you writing. When I first set out to write a novel, I had no idea how to do it. I took an evening class, which was great for stimulating the senses, but I still didn't work out how to write the thing. I looked at some books, which gave some conflicting advice.

I then came to the conclusion that there is no *one true way* to write. The most important lesson you can learn is how to discover how *you* write. Which way is best for you? Are you a planner (jotting down tonnes of notes before you start your manuscript) or a pantsier (flying by the seat of your pants)? How do you best get a hold on a character? Is it by writing out their likes and dislikes or by having a conversation with them?

Here are forty ways to help you find out how you write best. It's not exhaustive, and you may find that none of them are useful to you! It is a useful thing however to find out the ways in which you *don't* write best.

As an added extra, I've included sections which instruct teachers on the best way to adapt the advice into lessons for their students. As a children's writer I often tour schools giving creative writing advice and have found that sometimes students can struggle to be inspired. Hopefully some of the tips given can light a creative fuse and get the next generation writing.

**So here we are. What are you waiting for? Set forth and learn how to write *Your Story, Your Way!***

***DJ Metcalf***

## **1. Music**

Do you listen to music while writing? It can be a really good way of keeping you in the mood of your piece. Choose your music wisely! Use it to inspire you – hard rock for fight scenes, classical chillout for love scenes – You'll know what works best for you. If you need some filler, go to SoundCloud and type in 'Ambient', there's some great stuff on there. Try it.

**Teachers:** Give your class some time freewriting while listening to different music.

## **2. People Watching**

Take some time to sit and stare at the people around you. Not in a creepy way! Do it subtly! Maybe they're on the bus, in the street, in a coffee shop. Watch how they move, how they talk, their facial expressions. – Finally grab your notebook and write a biography or scenario for them. You might even want to use them as a character in your story.

**Teachers:** Let your students observe each other, or if you can get them out of the classroom, take them to a park or public place and see what observations they come up with.

## **3. Walk Away**

So, we've all been there. You're staring at the unwritten novel in front of you. You can't get past a certain point. The writing is beating you, so - just walk away. Take a walk, away from the screen, away from your notes. Don't force it. Write something else or go and play with the dog. It'll come eventually when you've relaxed and your subconscious has worked it through.

## **4. Use Your Senses**

Here's a great tip: Use all 5 senses to describe your location. – If you're in the middle of writing something and you're having trouble describing a

location, try this little shortcut: Write a sentence for each sense - touch, see, hear, smell, taste. Describe how your character senses the location around them and the reader will begin to picture the place in their mind. Try it and see how it goes!

**Teachers:** Let your class give this a go with a variety of settings.

### ***5. Notice The Details***

Close your eyes. Imagine a location you know well. Now write a paragraph describing the place. If you can, go to that place. Look at it. Write a new paragraph with the things you missed. You'll find the first paragraph you wrote will have broad strokes, so now look the details – is the furniture in good condition? Have squirrels been nibbling at the trees? This may help when writing your story.

**Teachers:** Let your class give this a go with a variety of settings.

### ***6. Get It Done***

I have a no nonsense, tough love stance when it comes to how to write your novel. Here's my foolproof 3 step process. – Start it. Write It. Finish It. That's it! It's that simple. The key message is GET IT DONE. Once you have a first draft, you will begin to see its flaws and how to fix them. So what are you waiting for? Get Writing!

### ***7. The Character Ratio***

Here's a tip for creating your characters from Hollywood writer Jane Espensen: A good character has one uncharacteristic trait. Try using a 3:1 ratio. Write down three characteristics that would be stereotypical: Your leading lady's could be: Caring, soft-spoken, librarian. Now have a trait which goes against the grain: She's a big Ultimate Fighting fan! This one surprising aspect deepens her character and takes her from stereotype to individual.

**Teachers:** Let your class give this a go with a variety of characters.

## **8. Six Word Story**

This is a fun exercise to try which will hone your power of choosing the right words. Ernest Hemingway once bet his peers he could write a novel in just six words. He wrote: 'For Sale: Baby Shoes, never worn.' He won the bet! Now you try to craft a story using just six words. How about: 'He lied. She cried. Romance Died.'? See? Write your best ones in the comments.

**Teachers:** Let your class give this a go. You'll be amazed at the amount of stories they can come up with!

## **9. Get A Buddy**

Are you lacking motivation? Need someone to lean on? Grab a like-minded buddy and meet up with them occasionally to tell each other how you're doing. Make it a regular thing so that you are accountable to someone. You can call or Skype them, read them parts of your writing, or swap stuff over email. Having someone to answer to and be honest with can really help you drive your writing forward.

**Teachers:** With a long term writing project, get students to buddy up together in pairs so that they encourage each other.

## **10. Freewriting**

The object of this exercise is to write a stream of consciousness without stopping for three pages. If you're thinking about dinner, write it. If you're thinking about romance, write it. Once you've finished, put it away. The result may be mostly garbage, but look at it the next day and you may be able to find a little golden nugget, a phrase you like and are able to use.

**Teachers:** Let your class give this a go even if it is just for five minutes at the start of a lesson.



## ***11. Establish A Routine***

Write three hundred words, and time yourself. Finished? Okay, if you wrote each day for three hundred and sixty five days, you can't *not* have a novel by the end of the year. OR measure out what time you do have spare. Just an hour every Friday and Saturday to write a thousand words? That's one hundred thousand words in a year! That's a novel! Now get writing!

**Teachers:** Let your class have ten minutes each lesson to write a set number of words/pages of an ongoing story. Soon, they will have a huge file of a long story. Encourage them to keep writing and not to give the story an ending until it needs one.

## ***12. Read Widely***

A writer cannot claim to be a one unless he has submerged himself in the mires of literature. You wouldn't set out to design a car without driving one, would you? So drink it in. It'll settle in your brain and contribute to your writing. Non-fiction is useful for gaining information which you can pass on in your writing, be it asteroid mining or carpentry. Read well, Read widely and enjoy it.

**Teachers:** Encourage your students to read widely. Get them to talk about their own book choices in groups to hopefully inspire others to read differently. Get a selection of books and wrap them in paper bags or wrapping paper so the reader does not know what they are choosing!

## ***13. Use Writing Prompts***

A simple sentence or picture can be all that is needed to spark the imagination. A quick web search for the phrase 'writing prompts' will give you hundreds or thousands of blogs, pictures, tumblrs and twitter accounts all dedicated to giving you a seed to grow your story. If you don't like one of the prompts, move on and find another.

**Teachers:** Let your class give this a go with a variety of prompts.

#### ***14. Join A Writing Group***

This will provide a way for you to get feedback on your drafts, to meet like-minded people and most importantly, get out of the house! Most offer cake or wine, which doesn't hurt either. A good writing group can motivate you by giving you a deadline to work with and a degree of accountability.

**Teachers:** Make your own writing group! Get students to give constructive feedback to each others writing.

#### ***15. Treat Writing As Your Job***

Once you have changed your mindset to make money from writing and not just treat it as a hobby, you will find that your productivity will receive a boost. I'm not saying to quit your day job, but rather just to rebrand yourself in your head. Instead a Barista that writes, become a writer that sometimes works in a coffee shop. You might even want to get a business card made and hand it out at a conference.

#### ***16. Take A Class***

Everyone needs a bit of help sometimes, and fortunately the education sector has lots of Creative Writing programs at your disposal. You can sign up to an online course, or if your local college/night school offers a programme, then that would be an ideal way to get to know other writers as well. Visit your local library and ask if they can help track one down for you.

#### ***17. Meet Up With Other Writers Socially***

A meet up is a great way to bounce ideas off each other in an informal setting. You may find that just being around creative people will give you an energy to create. If nothing else, it is a good place to have a moan about your woes (not too much though!). Other workers can chat to their

colleagues over the water cooler, but writers may need to go the extra mile to find like-minded people.

### **18. Flash Fiction**

The internet was able to usher in a new wave of the short, short story. Flash Fiction are stories of maybe 200 words or less, and were made for the internet. The concentration of words is the key; with such a small word count, the writer is forced to rethink their vocabulary, leaving lots to the reader's imagination. Search for site on the internet which feature Flash Fiction, and you'll find lots of competitions too.

**Teachers:** Let your class try writing flash fiction. Set a word limit (EG 100 words) and give a prompt. See what happens! Perhaps make a display of their writing so all can see.

### **19. Go To Conferences**

Writing conferences are great for getting advice and tips from those already in the industry, as many are brought in to speak, run workshops and receive pitches. If you go back year after year, you'll make friends you can send ideas to, and you may even make that key connection that gains you an agent or publisher.

### **20. Show Don't Tell**

This is an overused comment, but what does it mean? It means that the sentence you write is much less effective if you simply SAY what the character is doing. Try to describe the feelings and emotions that the character is going through, or a physical 'tell' that clearly states their state of mind. Go back over your 1st draft and put in the letters SDT; 'Show Don't Tell'. And here's an exercise: How can you rewrite the sentence 'She hated him' without saying those words? What physical or emotional attributes say the same thing?

Try the next few emotions with the same approach:

- Jealously
- Fear
- Rage
- Happiness

**Teachers:** Let your class give this a go with a variety of emotions.

### **21. Avoid Clichés!**

Sweating like a pig, All over him like a rash. We've all done it. Pause for a second and try to express it in a different way. OR take the cliché and subvert it. Sweating like a junkie pig going through customs. She was all over him like a rash, not even the mild kind, but one that needs constant applications of calamine lotion.

How would you re-write the following?:

- He put two and two together and made five.
- Her heart was in her mouth.
- He waited with baited breath.

**Teachers:** Let your class give this a go with a variety of clichés.

### **22. It's Okay To Suck.**

Seriously. When I was writing my first ever book, the only way I got through it was to silence the devil on my shoulder, forever whispering 'this is rubbish' into my ear, by replying with 'Yeah, but I've read worse...'. Your first book will suck. Your second book will probably suck too. Heck, the first DRAFT of everything you ever do will suck. That's what editing is for – to make it suck *less*.

**Teachers:** Get your students to write something – anything! Then make sure you have time to come back to that work, maybe a few weeks later,

and get them to make it better by editing the story, changing and deleting sentences, and applying the 'show don't tell' rule.

### **23. Structure**

If you're someone who struggles with plotting their story, then you might find the following useful.

The Hero's Journey is an idea put forward by Joseph Campbell, an anthropologist who travelled the world collecting stories. On comparing them, he found a common storyline to them. This was documented in *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, and has been simplified by him into twelve steps. These have been embraced by the writer community at large, not least the screenwriting community in Hollywood, who sometimes take it as their mantra.

I won't attempt to précis it here, you can read the book.

However - and this blew my mind - Dan Harmon (creator of [Community](#)) has managed to simplify it even further into a simple diagram. Here's the gist:

*Draw a circle and divide it in half vertically.*

*Divide the circle again horizontally.*

*Starting from the 12 o'clock position and going clockwise, number the 4 points where the lines cross the circle: 1, 3, 5 and 7.*

*Number the quarter-sections themselves 2, 4, 6 and 8.  
Here we go, down and dirty:*

- 1. . A character is in a zone of comfort,*
- 2. . But they want something.*

3. . *They enter an unfamiliar situation,*
4. . *Adapt to it,*
5. . *Get what they wanted,*
6. . *Pay a heavy price for it,*
7. . *Then return to their familiar situation,*
8. . *Having changed.*

From [Dan Harmon](#)

And that's your story structure right there! When I've been looking for a plot, I often turn to the Hero's Journey for help, but this easy to draw and remember diagram has revolutionised my planning stage. Harmon continues:

*Start thinking of as many of your favourite movies as you can, and see if they apply to this pattern. Now think of your favourite party anecdotes, your most vivid dreams, fairy tales, and listen to a popular song (the music, not necessarily the lyrics). Get used to the idea that stories follow that pattern of descent and return, diving and emerging. Demystify it. See it everywhere.*

Read the rest of his articles at [Channel 101](#).

**Teachers:** Get students to draw the story embryo described above and apply it to their favourite films and stories.

## **24. The Grabber**

Spend some time thinking up an opening line to your story that really grabs the reader. A way to do this is to instantly raise the expectation of the reader, then twist it to shock and excite. Look at this line:

*Hale knew, before he had been in Brighton three hours, that they meant to murder him - From Brighton Rock by Graham Green*

The first part has us wondering what the man is doing in Brighton, a sleepy seaside resort. The next, we switch to shock mode to grab the reader. We know from here on in that the story is going to get dark and exciting.

See if you can come up with a single line that shocks and intrigues...

**Teachers:** Let your class give this a go with a variety of genres.

## **25. Writing Place**

To get your description of your location exactly right on the page, try sitting in a public place and writing down the sounds that you hear. Close your eyes to concentrate if it helps. Add these to your descriptions of a place to give it a deeper image in the reader's mind.

Places you could try are:

- A public park.
- A cafe.
- A bus or train.

**Teachers:** Let your class give this a go with a variety of places.

## **26. Word Webs**

One creative writing exercise which can be very productive can be the use of word webs, also known as clustering. Similar to a spider diagrams, start with a word or central theme in the middle of a large piece of paper. For this example, let's choose 'Winter'. From this, draw a small line out from the central word and write the first word you associate with it. In our case, this could be 'Snow'. Then draw a line from that word and write the next word you associate with it – 'White'. Continue the process until it is exhausted. This may mean that the word at the end of the association line is completely unrelated to the one in the middle of the paper. Then start another association line, beginning with the central 'Winter' theme,

and continue that to its logical conclusion. Keep adding association lines until your piece of paper looks like a giant web of words.

You can use this piece of paper as a mood board to inspire your writing, and even as a starting point for a bit of focussed freewriting; start with a word, phrase or image that surprised you and weave in whatever other images from the wordweb come to mind. It can be used as a wordbank to inform your creation of atmosphere. The words further down the association line will be further removed from the central theme, so you can avoid cliches and repetition by using these. Again, the purpose of this exercise is to have fun and inspire yourself, so get going.

Try composing a word web for the following:

- Anger
- Freedom
- Hero

**Teachers:** Let your class give this a go with a variety of words.

## **27. Use Notebooks**

The purpose of the notebook is whatever you make it. It can be a place for ideas, scribbles, doodles, cuttings, poems, photos, first drafts or a combination of them all. It is, most importantly, *your own space*, and a stranger looking into it should feel as though they are gazing on your pure, raw thoughts. A tidy notebook is a reflection of the owner's mind. A messy one, more so.

They are a way of capturing your thoughts, of trapping them in ink so they don't float away into the night. You won't use a lot of what goes into them, but that's okay. Eighty or ninety per cent of the pages will be covered in scrawl that is unusable (in my case, unreadable), but the remainder will be pure gold.



It is important to experiment with your favourite type of notebook, to find a fit with your writing, your way of life. Do you prefer A4, A5 or A6? Hard or softback? Spiral bound, perfect bound, saddle stitched or legal pad? Plain or decorative? There are as many variations as there are writers, so search for your soulmate. Digital pretenders try to usurp the throne of the mighty notebook; the elephantine Evernote – the social Pinterest – the humble blog. None can take the place of the battered book in my pocket, waiting to be folded, felt, fondled, to be torn, scribbled on and abused. The tactility of the notebook is its USP. An individual feel which can not be replaced.

Try carrying a notebook for a week – any sort will do. In idle moment when you might look at your phone or read a book, open your notebook and start writing.

**Teachers:** Let your class give this a go. Get them to keep a notebooks for a week and write in it everyday. Then in class get them to share the thought they had, and see if they can develop them into a story or piece of writing.

### ***28. Travel Writing***

Take the time on a seemingly boring trip - a train journey perhaps, or the bus to work - to write a paragraph or two about it. Focus on the things you haven't noticed before; the squeak of a chair, the blinking light in the corner of the carriage. Turn your attention to passing scenery, be it rural or industrial and comment on how the setting makes you feel. Turn the mundane experience into a magical one by focusing on the senses that usually are ignored.

**Teachers:** Let your class give this a go with their usual ways of getting to school.

## **29. Change the Viewpoint**

One way to inject some fun into your writing, especially if you are stuck or if you feel your story is getting somewhat lacklustre, is to change the viewpoint. Many stories may be told from one character's view, or *POV* (point of view) as they might say in screenwriting circles, but differing that view may provide a good way to ramp up the story. Usually the hero, or main character, holds the POV in the story. But what about the supporting characters? Or the villain? Shifting to their thoughts to provide a fresh take on the scene may be a good way to illuminate the reader on the whole story. For example, what would the main character's mother say about the predicament the hero has got themselves into? Have you considered the thoughts the antagonist may be thinking? Why are they acting like they are?

Try it. Take a sample of your own writing or a traditional tale and write it from another point of view. You can change the writing style from, say, 3<sup>rd</sup> person to 1<sup>st</sup> person ('He went to the door' to 'I went to the door'). What would the woodcutter in the story 'Red Riding Hood' say about the situation? Or Grandma, who spends most of the story locked in a cupboard? (or worse, depending on the version of the story!)

Changing viewpoints can be a quick way to find a new route into your story.

**Teachers:** Let your class give this a go with a variety of tales.

## **30. Subvert Expectations**

A great way to create new, believable characters is to take someone's assumptions of a character and completely turn it upside down. Try this exercise: take an object. I'm going to use the example of a pocket watch. Ask yourself who would use such an item? Traditionally you might say an old man or someone from times past. If you flip this assumption and make the character a modern day, young woman, what does that

character begin to look like? As yourself why she uses it instead of a wrist watch or a mobile phone. Does it have sentimental value? Is she using it for aesthetics only? Perhaps (if you like fantasy/genre fiction) it has another use, maybe magical?

Try this exercise again with the following:

- A Smart Watch
- A tin of mint imperial sweets.
- A blonde wig.

**Teachers:** Let your class give this a go with a variety of objects.

### ***31. Use a Character Matrix***

One way to create characters is to use a matrix. Take a piece of paper and write down four character names in a column(EG, Bill, Fred, Suzy & Ethel). Now write down four places you know well or have lived in a column next to it. Write down four hobbies you have an interest in next to that. Now write down four jobs or identities you have had (EG Waiter, Father, Window Cleaner, Wife). You can continue this with other interests and headings.

Now pick one name at random and move across the page with your finger. This will create a character with varied backgrounds, elements of which you have experience of. This will help you bring your knowledge of the jobs, places or interests to the character as you describe them.

See if you can create four new characters using this technique. Then start writing a scene in which some of them interact.

**Teachers:** Let your class give this a go and try to get them to develop four distinct characters.

### **32. *Write Drunk. Edit Sober.***

Metaphorically, of course. The wisdom behind this quote from story master Ernest Hemingway (who was well known for liking a little tippie now and then) is to write the first draft of your story with little to no thought for the consequences. This is the time when you are most free to do what you wish.

Once written, apply the 'sober' part of your brain to the text. Be cool, calm and clinical. Feel free to chuck out any drunken mistakes. It'll take time but it will be worth it. You should be left with something that resembles the drunken jollity of your first draft, but with more sense and purpose attached.

Take a look at a first draft of something you have written and apply your 'sober mind' to it. Edit liberally and cruelly!

**Teachers:** Get your class to swap short stories and see if one student can edit the other's.

### **33. *Everyone Has A Villain Inside Them.***

You may find it easy to write your main character and to gain some sympathy for them. But the chances are that they are not the only character in your story. You will likely have some sort of antagonist, or villain, that the hero is at odds with. In order to write the 'villain' - who may be a comic-book bad guy, an evil wizard, ruthless businessman or femme fatale - you will need to know their back story and personality inside out. Why do they do what they do? What is the reasoning behind their actions?

Write two pages of a scene from the story you are planning, but from the point of view of the villain. This will help you get into the mind of them and once you know what their reason is for their actions, you will be able to write their character a little more fully.

If you do not yet have a story in mind, try this exercise with someone else's. A killer from a crime novel? The wicked queen from Snow White? The dastardly cad in a romance book? Try it and see how you feel about the character afterwards.

**Teachers:** Let your class give this a go with a variety of villains from traditional tales.

### ***34. Where Does Your Story Begin?***

If you have a plan for your story, then you might need to think about when in your main character's life the story begins. Does it start when they are born? When they come of age? When they are told they are going to die?

This is an important question for you; if you take a look at the lives of real people, when would you start writing a story about them? For example, if you were writing about Nelson Mandela, what part of his extraordinary life would you write about? You could start with his birth in South Africa. Perhaps when he met his wife, or maybe when he decided to dedicate his life to fighting for freedom. You could even start on the day he gets out of prison, and the story becomes his rise to become the President of his country.

Most adventures (which is really what stories are, no matter how tedious the subject matter) begin with the main character going through an inciting incident. This is where everything changes for them and they then set out to achieve a goal. This might be a chance to escape from prison and prove their innocence, or maybe the witnessing an injustice they have to set out to correct. In most detective stories, it is when the detective accepts the case or sees the scene of the crime.

Try doing this with other real life figures. Some examples are below.

- Richard Branson

- Elon Musk
- Amelia Earhart
- Florence Nightingale
- Indira Ghandi
- George Washington
- Or any person from your own life whom you know well.

**Teachers:** Let your class give this a go with a variety of personalities.

### ***35. Where Does Your Story End?***

This is the other important question you need to answer! Stories tend to end when the main character has achieved their goal. But which goal? Many stories may have more than one strand being told at the same time. Make sure that you tie up any loose ends by resolving these.

For example, a crime novel may end when the detective (in whatever form that takes; journalist, cop, nosy granny...) solves the case and catches the killer. There are likely other areas to resolve though – a love interest that the main character does or doesn't act on, or maybe a subplot involving a different client or sidekick.

Books often allow time for this at the end. This is where the detective takes time to explain how they came to their conclusion. In terms of the hero's journey, the template recognised by Joseph Campbell, the final reveal of the killer (or achievement of the main goal) is called the Resurrection, but is followed by the twelfth step which is termed 'The Return With The Elixir'. In mythical stories this is where the hero returns to the ordinary world with whatever treasure they have managed to find. This may of course be love or wisdom, or something else intangible.

Have a try at recognising when the stories based around the lives of the people mentioned in tip 34 should end. When do they achieve their goal?

**Teachers:** Let your class give this a go.

### **36. Face The Fear.**

Sometimes the thing we write best about is the thing we fear most. Alfred Hitchcock used this to his advantage when creating stories out of his biggest fears; birds (The Birds) and heights (Vertigo). What are your fears? Make a list and see what might make a good story.

Your fear may not be a true phobia, but something you dread happening; a loved one going missing. A disaster. Losing one of your prized possessions. Make a list of these and see what you come up with. Delve deep.

Now take a character you have created, either in one of these exercises or for a story you may be working on. What are their fears? What do they dread? Whatever it is can drive the story forwards, either by the character running away from them, actively trying to avoid it happening, or by the thing they fear most happening and then they have to face it full on.

### **37. Ready, Steady – SPRINT!**

If you're facing pagefright - that feeling of anxiety that comes from trying to start a new story – one way to get over it is to just write. It is a useless piece of advice, I know. How can you 'just write'? What if you need some help and support?

Luckily, there is the internet for this, and one organisation has built itself on that one piece of advice. National Novel Writing Month, or NaNoWriMo for short, takes place in November across the world. The aim is to write 50,000 words in just 30 days, from 1<sup>st</sup> November to 30<sup>th</sup> November.

That's 1,666 words a day, if you want to average it out. Thousands of people enter this challenge from all over the globe, and many succeed.

The staff at NaNoWriMo are very encouraging and provide pep talks along the way, along with guidance on how to get the thing written.

Many find this word count target motivating; the 'game' of posting and comparing your magic number is exhilarating. The feeling of accountability to other NaNoWriMo participants is a driving force also. There are even social events where you can get together with fellow writers and just write! The community behind the site is supportive and they run other schemes such as junior challenges for younger writers, school activities, and courses.

Check out the website at <http://nanowrimo.org/>

**Teachers:** Host your own NaNoWriMo! Check out the link above for more details.

### **38. Write To Market**

If your aim in writing is to get published, then you'll need to know your market. Take some time to go to your local library or bookshop and look at the stuff that people are actually reading. Don't be afraid to ask the staff there what they would recommend. Perhaps you want to write children's books; have an idea of what sort of person you want your ideal reader to be – for example, an eight year old boy. Ask the staff what they might recommend, but make sure it is **current and selling well**. Take a selection of the recommendations and make a list of their features. You should look at:

- Title – Is it short? Snappy? Mysterious?
- Cover – Is it exciting? Spooky? Action Packed?
- Length – How long is it? This is very important for children's books as it defines the ability of the reader. Take a quick calculation: Number of pages (minus the illustrated pages – flick through and take a quick count) multiplied by the number of lines on a page, multiplied by the average number of words in a line (count how



many words are on a full line. Do this for ten lines and then divide that number to get an average.

- Content – Is the story funny? Realistic? Fantasy?
- Genre – Is it Sci-fi? Romance? Western? A mixture?
- What are the common themes that unite the selection of books?  
Take a look at the copy on the back (or the 'blurb') and see if there is a pattern. Vampires? Dystopias? Violence?

Now consolidate this data (IE pool it all together) and see what is the average sort of book your audience is looking for. For our made-up eight year old boy, this may be funny horror stories of around 20,000 words that deal with the theme of sadness and the loss of a friend. Bingo! You have a template for your book. See if any of your story ideas would fit into this mould, or set about generating a story with these parameters in mind.

**Teachers:** You could use this in a classroom to see if a group can come up with a best-selling formula for the next publishing sensation!

### ***39. Partner Up.***

This is slightly different to 'Get A Buddy' (tip 9, mentioned above). A writing partner is a like-minded writer that you could get together with and start to write with. This is a practise that some writers use, a lot of time in the entertainment field.

(Ever see the credit 'Written by Mr X **&** Ms Y' on a film or TV show? The ampersand (&) indicates that they are a writing partnership, and split their work and the fee equally. Incidentally, if you ever see the credit 'Written by Mr X **and** Ms Y', the word 'and' indicates that the writers wrote drafts of the script separately; the first writer mentioned would have written the first version of the screenplay, and the second writer listed would have rewritten it. It's an infuriating practise that Hollywood excels at and it is not uncommon to see two, three or four names on a project where it has been rewritten over a number of years.)

Anyway, a writing partnership has all the benefits of a buddy system – support and accountability, for instance – but instead of both working on different projects, you work on one between you. The way you work will depend on the partnership.

James Patterson has published hundreds of titles and sold millions of copies. He often uses writing partners, where he provides them with a written outline of the novel, perhaps a chapter by chapter breakdown, and the partner writes a first draft. Patterson then writes a second draft to make sure it is consistent with his best-selling tone, and voilà, a novel is born.

Other may work differently. You may come up with a plot together and then decide who writes it. Or you could hammer out a story together and then write successive chapters each, ping-ponging it to each other over email.

You could even write blind. One of you writes a chapter, the other writes the next. This can be fun as each has to obey the rules of whatever happens in the previous chapter. Your partner has killed off your favourite character in their chapter? Tough luck, you can't use that person again! It also has the benefit that you will consistently be surprised by the story, as you only have 50% control over it.

**Teachers:** Try this in class. Get each student to write a chapter or part of a story and then hand it over to their partner, who writes the next part. It's great fun!

#### ***40. Just Have Fun.***

Writing is, at its heart, a kind of play. It is a way of channelling the imagination. Just like children role-play with swords and water pistols, or magic wands and fairy dust, the writer is setting their creative mind loose to construct lives and worlds that do not exist. It is essential then that you remember to never take it too seriously. If you start to feel anxiety over your novel, try to change your mindset and let yourself have fun. Write a chapter in which your characters do something completely out-of-character (you can discard it later). Or if you are stuck on your writing, take a moment to write a short story which is off-topic to your main novel. Maybe penning a sci-fi short will free up the creative part of your brain? Or a violent action story may get all the blood and guts out of your system so you can get back to writing that children's book. In short, make sure you're having fun. It's a privilege to be able to write, so take advantage of it and have a ball!

## ***Epilogue.***

I hope you've enjoyed this e-book. You should have plenty of ideas now on how to get the ball rolling on your own story. If you haven't already, please sign up for my newsletter over at [danmetcalf.co.uk](http://danmetcalf.co.uk) where you can get tips and book recommendations, news and events delivered direct to your email inbox.

Have fun, and above all, go create something!

Dan Metcalf