

# Crafting Storytelling:

a complete guide to writing a narrative



An easy to follow narrative writing workbook for secondary English students, adults and writing groups/workshops. Format focuses on self-directed activities with modelled responses and includes guidelines for publishing.

SHELLEY McNAMARA

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[www.qwiller.com.au](http://www.qwiller.com.au)

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First published 2021 by **Qwiller Publishing**

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## Cataloguing data

**ISBN:** 978-1-925624-41-0 (ebook)

**Title:** *Crafting Storytelling: a complete guide to writing a narrative*

**Publisher:** Shelley McNamara

**Editor:** Linda Grace

**Proofreaders:** Gloria Van Mosseveld & Shelley McNamara

**Graphic design:** Toby Andrews at Lilypad Graphics

[www.lilypad.com.au](http://www.lilypad.com.au)

**Cover image:** 'Ocean Dreaming' by Paul Heppell from Birds in Suits

<https://www.instagram.com/p/BA4TZbulRSJ/>

<http://birdsinsuits.com>

**Cover design:** Shelley McNamara and Toby Andrews

Typeset in 12 pt Adobe Caslon Pro and Frutiger Light 11pt

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# Welcome

Suitable for both secondary school students and adults, this workbook has been designed to be a one-stop guide, relevant for writers of all levels of experience and ability. The information, writing topics and modelled responses have been compiled from the five years I facilitated the Brunswick Heads Writers Group, as well as from my post graduate studies and professional experience in both publishing and creative writing. I have brought together here much of the knowledge I gained from these endeavours. My intention in creating this book is twofold. Firstly, to make it easy for writers to develop their stories in meaningful ways, and secondly, to provide access to publishing industry knowledge about publishing their writing, whether as a self-publisher or through established publishers.

The activities in this workbook will provide inspiration for you to write a complete narrative, but you could also use some of the strategies to write playscripts and filmscripts. Most importantly creative writing is about tapping into your imagination. You may find that you can connect some of these writing pieces together to make a completed piece. It is up to you.

The imaginative writing strategies offered here are not exhaustive. It is beyond the scope of this book to comprehensively address all elements of creative writing, which is limited only by our imagination.

Keep in mind also that these activities are a guide. If you find yourself writing something different to what the activities suggest, go with what comes to you. When our mind comes in and tells us that what we are doing is wrong, we can block our creative flow. It is more important to stay open to creative ideas and experiment with forms of expression, for in the arena of our imagination, there are no set rules.

This workbook contains seven parts. These are outlined below.

**Part One:** Generating Story Ideas

**Part Two:** The Rules of Your Story World

**Part Three:** Characterisation

**Part Four:** Narrative Elements

**Part Five:** An Authentic Voice and Style of Writing

**Part Six:** Innovative Writing Strategies

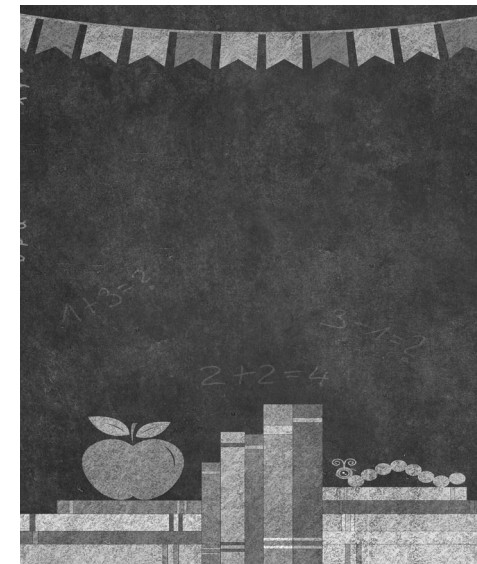
**Part Seven:** The Publishing Process and Reflection.

## USING THIS GUIDE

The different activities may take you anywhere between five and hundred minutes. Later you can rework and edit your writing pieces by expanding on the ideas that appeal to you. A modelled response for each topic is provided to assist you. You can follow the modelled response or interpret the activity in your own way. It's up to you. Keep in mind, however, that the re-drafting process can take a considerable amount of time. You are encouraged to work with other people, especially professionals, when redrafting and editing your work. They can be very helpful in alerting you to opportunities to improve your writing that you may not immediately recognise yourself.

## WRITING STRATEGIES

### Free writing

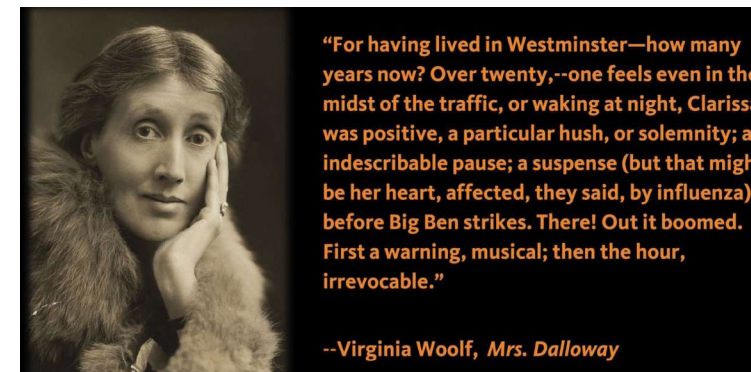


Free writing is an effective strategy to get your mind thinking creatively. It is an idea first explored in combination with automatic writing (allowing a person to produce written words without consciously thinking). Dorothea Brande first introduced the concept of free writing in *Becoming a Writer*, published in 1934, and it was popularised by Julia Cameron through her book, *The Artist's Way* (1992).

This type of writing is about being a conduit: a medium if you like. In order to free write, you write continuously for the allocated minutes in each activity without stopping. The idea is to let go of any constraints, such as form or structural conventions of language and writing. So, you don't have to be concerned with punctuation, grammar or writing correct sentences. Just get your ideas down on paper. Afterwards, read over what you have written, selecting and developing any words, images and stylistic choices you think have potential.

Free writing is a modernist type of writing because free thought and the flow of ideas are privileged over the usual conventions of writing.

### Stream of consciousness writing



Stream of consciousness writing is a form of free writing. It's a writing technique and literary device where you allow the thoughts, feelings, ideas and senses to pass through the mind. It was coined by William James, the brother of novelist Henry James, to describe the constant stream of thoughts in the human mind. According to David Lodge in *The Art of Fiction* (1992), the stream-of-consciousness novel is the 'literary expression of solipsism, the philosophical doctrine that nothing is

certainly real except one's own existence' (p. 42). Lodge goes on to say that this type of novel offers the reader 'imaginative access to the inner lives of other human beings, even if they are fictions' (p. 42).

As a technique for writing, the intention is to allow your subconscious to go with the flow of any ideas and thoughts that come into your mind, allowing the words to appear on the page. It is usually not recognisable as prose, but random thoughts and musings.

### Inner monologue and free indirect discourse

According to David Lodge (1992), there are two basic techniques that encompass the stream-of-consciousness style of writing. The first is the inner monologue. This type of writing is more like prose. Virginia Woolf is a notable example of a writer who adopted this style. Although Woolf employs the third-person omniscient (all-seeing) narrator in her famous novel, *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), to give insights into the personality of each character, the focus is mainly on her central protagonist – Clarissa Dalloway. Woolf uses a type of stream of consciousness writing, which appears as if the narrator is representing the sensory experience of the character as they relay their impressions of the present and the past. We overhear the character verbalising her thoughts as they occur. The 'stream of consciousness' technique enables Woolf to portray the internal world of her characters and to explore notions of memory and recall. As Woolf represents the events in the book accurately, she gives the reader insights into the post-World War One period in London as she saw it. In this way, she captures the culturally significant shift at this time, due to the end of the war.



The second technique is ‘free indirect discourse’, which renders thought as reported speech. Like Jane Austen, who is said to have introduced the style, Woolf uses ‘free indirect discourse’ in *Mrs Dalloway*. This is a combination of third-person narration with characteristics of first-person direct speech. Shown through the entwining of the authorial narration and internal monologues, Woolf allows for both the narration of the author and the character. The following passage exemplifies Woolf’s style of distinguishing the voice of the third-person narrator from that of her main protagonist, Clarissa, about a past love, Peter:

For Heaven’s sake, leave your knife alone! she cried to herself in irrepressible irritation; it was his silly unconventionality, his weakness; his lack of the ghost of a notion what anyone else was feeling that annoyed her, had always annoyed her; and now at his age, how silly! (p. 50)

The passage demonstrates Clarissa’s extreme irritation that Peter pared his nails with his pocket-knife while they were speaking about his hopes that Daisy and her husband would divorce so she would be free to marry him. She sees his attachment to the wife of a Major in the Indian Army with three children as a ‘waste’ and a ‘folly’. In this passage, Woolf still employs traditional third-person narrative techniques, through phrases like ‘she cried to herself’, indicating the omniscient narrator, while giving the reader insight into the internal landscape of her character. Key phrases, such as ‘Heaven’s sake’ and ‘how silly’, convey Clarissa’s consciousness through a type of subjective narration. The impact of such a style is to narrow the gap between the reader and the character, thereby assisting the reader to perceive events as the character would.

‘Show don’t tell’



Writers often hear that it is important to ‘show don’t tell’. What exactly does that mean? As a reader we like to create our own images of what the writer is creating through his or her words and the way the ideas are brought together.

When you read a story, what happens for you in your imagination? Do you associate aspects of the story to your own experiences? Does one thing stand out for you over another? Do you feel certain emotions?

Our reading experience is unique to each of us. That’s why some aspects of a story will stand out for you more

than for someone else. In other words, we all bring our own individual context to a story. It’s the writer’s job to make their stories interesting enough so they can connect with people. One way they do this is by showing the reader what is happening rather than telling them. Readers like to be able to imagine what is being described by filling in the gaps themselves. It’s a bit like being told what to do. We prefer to figure it out ourselves in our own way. Writing is like that too when it activates our imagination.

In saying this, at times you may feel that for certain parts of your story ‘telling’ is the best way to get your message across. Go with that if that feels right, but think about your reader and the effect this will have on them.



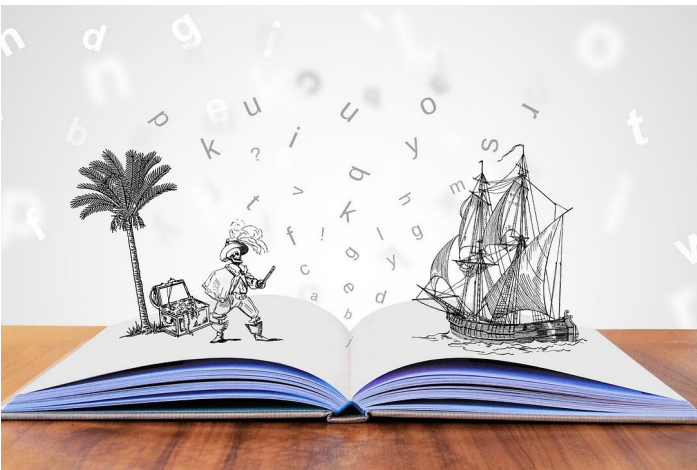
# Part One: Generating Story Ideas

This part is about opening up your creativity so that ideas flow naturally and without effort. You may find that some of the ideas that emerge are excellent starting points for greater narratives. Or you may find that the writing pieces are mere fragments that don’t necessarily belong in a greater narrative. The writing pieces could also help you to understand the background to your characters and setting, and help you to understand why some themes, ideas and concepts are important to you as a writer.

Let’s look at some ways of generating ideas.

- Storytelling and our culture: why write stories
- Writing strategies
- Developing a scene
- Writing the senses
- Memory writing
- Journaling the everyday
- Writing monologues
- Shadow writing.

## STORYTELLING AND OUR CULTURE



Storytelling is at the heart of the human experience. Just about every culture around the world uses storytelling as a way of communicating ideas, concepts, values and beliefs, as well as entertaining others. Originally, stories were passed down from generation to generation through oral storytelling. Writing came later, and printing presses later still, but telling stories has always been a significant part of ways that people connect with one another. During these early times, people relied on memory recall and their voice to tell stories. Often these stories were accompanied by dance and song. These stories changed over time as

they were embellished, eventually transforming into myth and legend. For example, think of the ways Indigenous Australians used dance and ceremony to convey cultural knowledge, beliefs and values.

It was not until the invention of the written word (approximately around 3200BC according to archaeologists) that we started to write stories down. In the Western world texts such as the Bible and Homer’s *Odyssey*, in the Eastern Tradition texts such as the Indian Vedas and Sanskrit poems and in central America texts such as the Mayan Codices are considered to be some of the first texts ever recorded. Hence, ink and paper became a natural extension of memory. Eventually, our evolving relationship with written language led to the creative writing process.

Your motivation to write is a natural result of the development of storytelling. But have you ever considered exactly why you want to write stories? Let’s delve into this a bit further. The following activities will assist you in becoming clear about your motivation to tell stories through writing.

### Why do you want to write stories?

Okay, this is a big consideration for a writer. This consideration is really about the medium of writing – placing words on a page (digital or paper) to express ideas and concepts and explore characters, settings and themes. Why are you compelled to write? Why write stories as opposed to paint stories, for example? Remember, stories can be completely fictional or a mixture of fact and fiction or life writing (memoir writing). What is it about expressing your ideas through a narrative in writing that is appealing to you?



Take some time to think about why you want to tell a story in writing. How do you awaken your creativity and let the ideas flow naturally? The main thing is to allow your ideas to emerge no matter how crazy they seem as you never know what part they might play in a greater narrative. Perhaps these ideas may emerge as an excellent starting point or an unexpected insight into a character or setting.

Modelled response

I want to write stories because that’s the way I think – words, phrases and sentences emerge in my mind. In order for me to understand myself and the people around me, I create narratives. Life is less confronting this way, but also quite endearing. Writing is empathy: it’s at the heart of good writing. Even empathy is required for your less-desirable characters. They are a part of us too.

Writing stories also helps me to sift through my own life and make sense of it. The act of writing or typing is key for me. There is something about the time it takes for my mind to compute something and write it down (or type it) that gives me a sense of freedom. It’s the space in between words forming and being expressed on paper that empowers me. Speaking, I find, is less effective. I find it difficult to think quickly enough to fully express myself. Writing however gives me that space. Editing helps that process a great deal, whereas the spoken word cannot be taken back.

Activity: Why write stories



Time: 5 minutes

Take some time to think about what it is about writing that is important to you. Brainstorm ideas.

Mission statement as a writer

Have you ever thought about what you hope to achieve as a writer overall? Writing a mission statement as a writer can help you to narrow down your purpose and what you hope to achieve as a writer. As a mission statement is personal, it can be written in the first person narration (‘I’, ‘we’, ‘us’).



Below is an example of a mission statement for a writer. Take note of how the first person narration (‘I’, ‘we’, ‘us’) is used to convey a personal perspective about why the writer writes stories and what can be gained from writing.

Modelled response

My mission as a writer is to provide space for myself to bring forth the stories and imaginings that are inside me – from the past, present and future – and just let them be. As I writer I aim to be true to myself and my heart’s desires and be in my bliss as I write and create. I wish to inspire people through my writing and to connect with others on a deep and spiritual level. I aim, through stories and the characters that inhabit them, to reach people’s humanity and share with them the beauty that is life. I wish also to inspire others to write their own stories and imaginings, either through my writing or contact with me as a writer. And overall, writing is about giving me freedom to explore and imagine how the world could be, to make it a better place.

Activity: Writing a mission statement



Time: 10 minutes

- Before you write your mission statement consider the following questions:
  - What is your purpose of writing in general?
  - What do you hope to achieve as a writer?
  - Write your mission statement as a writer.

What do you want to say in a particular story?



There are many ways to tell a story: through images, art or oral storytelling, for example. This workbook will assist you in writing a narrative, whether that be in the form of a novel, short story or vignettes (short writing pieces). All these forms start with start with the written word. Although it’s not necessary to start with an idea in your head about what you want to write, it’s a good idea to give space to the possibility that there is a greater narrative that you would like to explore.

Let’s take the time to see what you actually want to write about. For this next activity think about the greater narrative you would like to write.



Below is an example of a piece of writing that explores a greater narrative that is used as examples of writing in this workbook. As you read it think about not only the story to be developed, but the themes, academic influences and overall intention of the writing.

Modelled response

I am writing a fictionalised narrative about the subtle influence of social and cultural norms and systems of power in rural NSW as passed down from migrant women and men from Ireland, Scotland and England at the turn of the twentieth century and the impact this has had on the construction of identity and the development of agency in inter-generational women that followed in the modern era. My narrative focusses on empowerment and/or disempowerment of women and considers the ethics of systems of power. As Michael Foucault stresses, systems of power can be redirected, disassembled and shattered. I am therefore interested in exploring how these social and cultural norms from Ireland, Scotland and England influenced disobedience and rebellion by viewing these qualities as a virtue. I am also considering how this has led to the progression of strong, powerful and independent women in Australia, whose identities are both connected to and separate from that of the ‘motherland’.

Activity: Why do you want to write a particular story?



Time: 10 minutes

Take some time to write down why you want to write a particular story. Explore your ideas about the greater narrative you would like to write.