

Writer's Quest

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Dear Writer,

Wanted to write a novel but thought it was all too hard? We'll show you how easy it is. Feeling anxious because you're not spending much time writing? Perhaps you didn't realise you don't have to be at the computer to contribute to your writing schedule.

Please contact us via email or check our web site if you would like to contribute to our e-zine.

Happy writing!

From the Writer's Quest team

Writers' Corner Solving Writers' Block: How to Plot a Novel

by Mary Broadhurst © 2008

Many writers avoid attempting a novel because it seems too hard. Thoughts plague their minds: how do I keep the storyline straight in my head? How can I simply sit down and start writing a book? How do I keep track of the characters?

Actually it isn't that hard, all it takes is motivation to keep at it, and dedication to finish it. Let's start in the way that most stories come alive, we have an idea for a story. In this instance, our main character is suffering from amnesia and is unaware of the danger she is in.

First thing is cut up square pieces of paper approximately 4 or 5 centimetres. Write down each point of action onto a separate piece of paper. A point of action is an idea of what will happen and will create your plotline. Keep them brief. Imagine having to summarise the important things that happen in a book, things that move the story forward or hinder the character. These are points of

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forward or hinder the character. These are points of action.

Here is an example of points of action using our story idea:

- Marlene wakes up screaming from a nightmare, she's drenched in sweat. Vivid images of her being chased remain with her
- Marlene confides in a friend about her re-occurring nightmares. Friend advises she seeks hypnotherapy
- Marlene undergoes hypnotherapy.

Writing these points of action prompts some other ideas, or questions. Why didn't she come to this conclusion herself? Now we write down more points of action taking this information into consideration.

- Marlene resists idea even at the opportunity of restoring her memory. She's plagued with doubts: what if she found out something she didn't like, what if she didn't like the person she was?
- Continuous dreams driving her to almost insanity and the feeling that someone is following her forces her to regain her memory.

Now we will insert the last two points of action into the other three so that they run in a precise order.

- Marlene wakes up screaming from a nightmare, she's drenched in sweat. Vivid images of her being chased remain with her
- Marlene confides in a friend about her re-occurring nightmares. Friend advises she seeks hypnotherapy
- Marlene resists idea even at the opportunity of restoring her memory. She's plagued with doubts: what if she found out something she didn't like, what if she didn't like the person she was?
- Continuous dreams driving her to almost insanity and the feeling that someone is following her forces her to regain her memory.
- Marlene undergoes hypnotherapy.

But now we have created another question. Why does Marlene feel as though she's being followed? That means we have to create some more plot points (or points of action) that will answer this question. Perhaps she hears footsteps behind her when she's walking home late at night, but she cannot see anyone.

It's like putting a jigsaw puzzle together, but a lot more fun. Keep building on the storyline until you have a beginning, a middle, and an ending.

beginning, a middle, and an ending.



Having trouble with your story or article?

Why not post the problem to our Writers' Workshop forum and gain help from other writers. It's free!

Sentence Starter ...

Many writers suffer the 'blank page' complex; therefore, each month we will supply you with a first sentence. Now your page isn't blank any more. Let your imagination take you on a journey.

This issue's sentence starter:

The lyrics continued to haunt her long after the music faded ...

Views on Writing

Are Writing Exercises Effective?

(Reprint article)

By Santos

It was reported that the great American author Sinclair Lewis was once asked to give a lecture on writing to a group of college students. 'Looking out at this gathering,' he said to the assembled students, 'makes me want to know how many of you really and truly wish to become writers?' Every hand in the room went up. Lewis looked at them for a moment and then folded his notes and put them away. 'If that's true,' he said, 'then the best advice I can give you is to go home and start writing'. He then turned and left the room.

If the first secret of writing is to write and if you've set up some sort of writing schedule, the next step is to figure out what to write.

Opening a brand new file and looking at a blank screen often results in a kind of brain-freeze; we feel as idea-less as the empty screen we're staring at. Writing exercises can help us thaw our idea bank. The goal of a writing exercise is to open your mind and allow you to hone your skills and experiment. The joy of such an

hone your skills and experiment. The joy of such an exercise is it's not 'for real.' That is, there's no thought of pleasing an editor or finding a publisher or meeting a deadline or getting paid. You're just writing, with your internal editor turned off.

Some freelancers find writing exercises so effective and freeing they actually begin every writing session with a 10- or 15-minute exercise. Others use them more sporadically. But however you do it, writing exercises will help you with your writing. Use writing exercises in your writing schedule, as a natural part of your writing discipline; use the exercises often and watch your writing improve.

Ideally, a writing exercise is short, requiring you to spend no more than 10 or 15 minutes writing, thinking and feeling about something that's unrelated to the rest of your writing work. In a way, they are like mini-meditations and mini-vacations because they clear out the cobwebs and give you a new view.

It's that new view, that different way of seeing, of expressing, that's the key to a good writing exercise. Naturally, not every exercise blows your mind every time. Sometimes you are just not ready for the challenge presented, but even then, the seed is planted. Sometimes you are simply not up for doing a writing exercise, which is okay too. Again, simply reading can set some new thoughts in motion.

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Résumé Builder:

Finding More Time in Your Day to Dedicate to Writing

by M Broadhurst © 2008

It's very easy to get caught up in every day duties that hinder our desire to sit down at the computer and write. But what you may not have noticed, there are times that you could be sorting out problems in your story or character, or brainstorming possibilities, and you don't have to be anywhere near a computer. You might be pleasantly surprised to discover how many ideas will come to you while you're having a shower, driving to work,

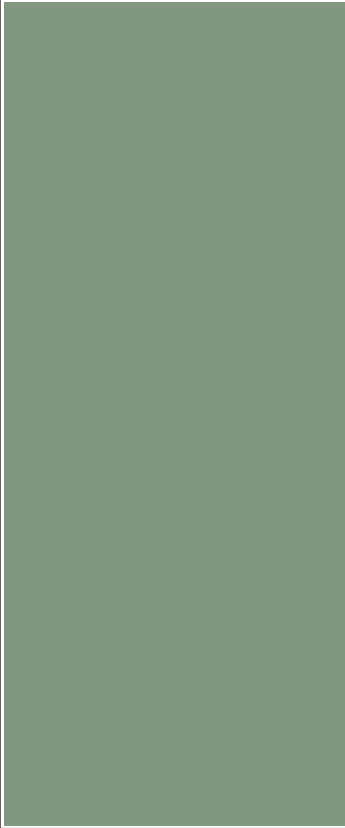
to you while you're having a shower, driving to work, walking the dog, or even washing the dishes. Keep a notepad or voice recorder handy so you won't forget when it comes time to putting these ideas into action (or on the page).

If your household is extremely busy, maybe you have kids running around which makes thinking difficult. Why not suggest a day at the park so the kids can play, and you can sit in the shade of a tree and jot down some ideas. Or explain to your children and spouse that when you are sitting in front of a computer it means it's your time. But after you've finished then you'll spend time with them playing games.

If your children are older then try to organise your writing around their studying time. That way you can all finish together and enjoy each other's company without the nagging thought of wanting to write.

You're already to sit down and work on your story when the doorbell rings. It's a friend or neighbour looking for a chat. Of course it's easy to get annoyed in these instances. It doesn't matter how much you tell people you need a certain amount of time to dedicate to your writing, the truth is that some people will see your writing as nothing more than an unimportant hobby. Or perhaps they think you could do with a break, what they don't know is that you just spent the last three hours trying to hurry through your chores to find some quiet time. And no doubt, the 'just stop long enough for one cuppa' will turn into three or so hours. Don't worry, this happens to most writers, but instead of getting annoyed or contemplating slamming the door in a friend's face (good way to lose friends), why not invite them in and discuss your story. Involving other people in this way is a great way for them to see you are dedicated, your stories are important to you, and they might help you out with whatever character/story problems might be happening.

When I was starting out, teachers kept advising us that we had to be almost ruthless with telling people to leave us alone when we're writing, to shut ourselves away, and treat our writing as a business. Personally, I always had trouble with this. How can you tell someone to go away? Let's face it; it's pretty rude. Why would you want to treat your family or friends that way? It's not always easy, and sometimes you may get a little annoyed, but try thinking of ways around it. If explaining to people to give you some time to yourself doesn't work, then come up with ways that gives you that time but keeps everyone happy. For instance, your dear children walk up to you yet again and utter the famous words, 'I'm bored'. Which has magical powers of getting under your skin. Before you scream, why not round up the neighbours'



Before you scream, why not round up the neighbours' kids and organise a ball game in the backyard. While they are having a great time, you'll be able to get some writing done.

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