

Writer's Quest



Broad Editing and Services

Writers' Corner Solving Writers' Block Character Development through Possession

By M Broadhurst © 2007

- Create a fictional character describing the physical features, personality and mannerisms
- Make a list of insignificant objects
- Take one object and put it in the character's possession
- Question why the character has this object
- Create new story ideas that may not have been considered before

It might feel like we are doing things back to front here, but bear with me, it's necessary for this exercise so don't read ahead, take each step as it comes. Grab a piece of paper and write a list of objects. Aim for insignificant things that you might normally discard.

Here's our example list of insignificant items:

Paper clip
A roofing nail
An empty shoebox
An unopened letter
List of chores
Old used diary
A pin (or tack) used on a corkboard

In last month's issue we developed a character from a paragraph, which could have been used for many story ideas. Reread your paragraph so you have a clear understanding of your character, and get ready to delve further into the unknown. Why unknown? Because, at this stage, all we have is a person with a name, appearance, habits, and personality. We discovered many things about our character through asking questions, you may have written one or more stories and you feel you have a firm grip on the character's personality. But for this experiment, go back to the first piece we wrote. In Molly's case:

Molly's her name, mopping is her trade and has been for more than forty-two years. Actually, it was difficult to tell the difference between her hair and her mop. Every morning she shuffled up the streets and cleaned houses, and every afternoon she would shuffle home again, indulge her weakness for chocolate while watching the early quiz shows, and head off to bed before the late news started. A sweet old lady that would cross the road to the other footpath just to avoid disturbing a bird that was on the ground. Her once beautiful blue eyes had become dull, and a white cloud crept over the pupil of her right eye. Her unwrinkled mouth told the story of a life without laughter. Not that anyone heard her complain, in fact she said very little. She nodded to the postie each morning and to anyone who happened to pass by. Her shapely legs looked as though they belonged on a younger woman, someone who never wore the frumpish dresses she bought from the bargain box at the local shop.

Now, go back to you insignificant list and pick one item that would be unlikely for your character to have in his/her possession. Don't take the easiest object to work with, pick something that will make you think. Then ask yourself why would your character be hanging onto this item? Why not just throw it out?

For the purpose of this exercise, I'm going to pick the corkboard tack. So why would sweet non-assuming Molly, a creature of habit and house cleaner nearing, if not already passed, retirement keep a corkboard tack?

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From page 1: Character Development through Possession

Ah, now the mind is working ...

Molly unravelled the worn tissue carefully revealing the brass tack; she fingered it gently, still sharp as ever. Over the years she had resisted the urge to polish it, she wanted to remember it just the way it was right down to the smudge that had been caused by a single drop of blood – her brother’s. She recalled his taunts all through their childhood, but this – she studied the stain – this was the turning point. Of course their mother scolded her for leaving it on his chair when Timmy sat down, but it was worth it. He shot off that chair as if his backside was on fire, which was how their mother found out, but Timmy just smiled. From then on it was an unspoken agreement that they were equals and became good friends. They shared their secrets, their hopes and dreams. All because of a silly little tack. He died later that year.

Now we have added to the depth of Molly’s character. We could create a new story, one that reflected her life without her brother, or losing Timmy might explain why she doesn’t get too chummy with people. When you get stuck, ask questions such as how did Timmy die? Was he sick, or was it an accident. Or we could change the last sentence and raise concerns about Timmy’s disappearance, which would lead to the tormented questions Molly asked over the years as she desperately searched for her brother.

Of course, it doesn’t have to be so bleak, we could’ve said Molly’s father manufactured brass tacks and they kept turning up all over the house, over the years they became fewer and fewer until this last one that she saved. Or perhaps it wasn’t the tack that was so interesting, but the piece of paper that it held to a corkboard. The story ideas are endless, you can twist the facts around the object – all that is constant is the original first paragraph, which explains Molly’s personality, and the object.

Once you have exhausted ideas try changing the object and see where it takes you.

In the next issue, we will develop our character further with the use of emotions.

Views on Writing

Get Your Act into Gear and Write!

By Mary Broadhurst © 2007

I’m sure we have all heard about making list and read articles about organising your time and achieving your goals, but how many of us actually do it? Just as I thought: not many. You must want to achieve your goal otherwise you wouldn’t be reading this, so here is a challenge. Write a list (come on, there had to be a mention of a list, right?) of what you want to achieve short term. It may be writing that novel you’ve been putting off, or writing and submitting short stories to competitions, or writing articles or poems or whatever.

Next, work out how much time you can set a side, but be honest, don’t make grand statements like twenty hours each week unless you can do that. And don’t sell yourself short by saying you don’t have any time. If you say that then most likely you won’t find the time and your goals will remain dreams for the rest of your life. If you lead a busy life then think how could you re-arrange barriers (things that interfere with your goals) so you can achieve your ambitions. Perhaps take twenty minutes out of your lunch break, or get up that much earlier, or stay up a little longer. It doesn’t have to be all at once, you might not be able to dedicate an hour a day in one sitting, but you might be able to spend twenty minutes during lunch and another forty minutes after dinner.

‘When you get stuck, ask questions...’

‘... don’t sell yourself short by saying you don’t have time. If you say that then most likely you won’t find the time and your goals will remain dreams for the rest of your life.’

From page 2: Get Your Act into Gear and Write!

If you could find twenty minutes a day then you would have dedicated a total of two hours and twenty minutes in a week, and move that much closer to reaching your goals. You will have more time on some days than others so take that into consideration. You might be able to find an hour each weekday, but the weekend is out of the question – that’s okay, that’s still five hours a week. Think how much you could accomplish in five hours!

For arguments sake, let’s say your goal is to write a novel and you can dedicate thirty minutes a day to it. The first day you outdo yourself and spend an hour writing, the next day – 30 minutes, but you’ve still met your target so you’re happy. Day three was hectic and you never got around to it; you promised to make it up tomorrow. Tomorrow comes and goes and so does your ambition. Why? I can tell you why, because no one is there to scold you for not living up to your promise. School children get into trouble for not doing their homework. Bosses threaten to fire employees if they are lazy. But what happens when you don’t complete your writing target? Nothing!

Some times we need to be pushed, and writers usually fall into that I’ll-do-it-tomorrow trap. It’s the same principle when people have trouble saving money. Sure, they pay the bills, if they don’t they get a nasty phone call or a ‘please explain’ letter. But, no one cares if you’ve saved any additional money.

Let’s break the lazy cycle now and put a little pressure on completing that novel (or whatever your goal is). If you have a circle of writing friends then arrange a weekly get-together where you can discuss your targets and if you’ve achieve them. Don’t get too rigid and set a target of an hour every day for the entire year, life isn’t that predictable. If you have a busy week coming up then lower your target, but do it openly and beforehand. It will help prevent you making excuses for a lazy week. And once you get into that habit it’s hard to break. If you don’t have writing friends, then pick someone who will be interested and urge you to meet your target.

Focusing on your targets will take out the scare factor of what it is you want to achieve. It’s a lot easier to deal with reaching thirty minutes of writing a day than it is to write a novel.

Résumé Builder

Introduction in Creating Success

By Mary Broadhurst

You find yourself staring at your résumé template and realise you have little or nothing to add to the headings of achievements and vow never to let anyone see it. Instead of beating yourself up about it, improve it. This article is a brief look into how you can find experience and credentials at the beginning of your career.

Volunteer work

Everyone has to start somewhere and this is one of the best places to begin. Some people treat volunteer work like the plague, they hate the thought of working for free. But it’s not for free. It’s a partnership. You are offering your time in return for skills and experience, which will move you closer to paid work. Don’t forget, it cost money to attend classes and learn new skills so count yourself lucky that you can learn these skills while gaining experience, and it hasn’t cost you anything except time.

Offer to write blogs or articles for friends or family that run their own businesses and want to advertise in this way. These articles provide you with a byline, experience, and the pleasure of writing in your résumé that you have an article published. With so many e-newsletters and e-zines around these days there are plenty of opportunities for you to submit your work, and usually the site owners are delighted for the extra help. And who knows, if a position opens up or if they want to hire a freelancer wouldn’t it make sense for them to think of you first?

‘Target Setting at Writers’ Workshop

Set your weekly targets at Writers’ Workshop to help you achieve your goals. It’s easy!

Step 1: *Join the forum*

Step 2: *Post your target for that week*

Step 3: *Achieve your target with the encouragement of other writers*

Step 4: *Post your outcome and get ready to set new targets for yourself*

Watch how quickly your dreams turn into reality through target setting and following through. You’ll be amazed at what you can accomplish.

Article continued
on Page 7

Word Finder

Words can be found horizontally, vertically and back to front.

S O R E C O N I H R L A M M A M
U Y E P A D O C A M E L N T F R
M E E R K A T O M U S K R A T E
A K D R G O A T G L A N R U I D
T N A H P E L E N E E E A T K Y
O O T S I R O L O O W R M C O H
P M K L D O G M O U S E E O A C
O C A O O R I Y B A L L A W L A
P D N T A C P A A L L A D N A P
P Y G H R O A R B E Z U L I O N
I F A R A R E G I T S L E M U R
H O R S E A N U T N E D O R C A
A X O C B B I S O N M I C E E T
R M O L E B U L L A M B S V S E
E F F A R I G N O C T U R N A L
E P O L E T N A E S N E T T I K



Word List:

antelope	guinea pig	mouse
ape	hare	mule
baboon	hippopotamus	muskrat
bear	horse	nocturnal
bison	kangaroo	pachyderm
bull	kitten	panda
camel	koala	rabbit
cat	lamb	ram
cow	lemur	rat
deer	lion	rhinoceros
diurnal	loris	rodent
dog	mammal	sloth
elephant	meerkat	tiger
elk	mice	vermin
fox	mole	wallaby
giraffe	monkey	weasel
goat		zebra

Turn to page 8 for the answers to the Word Finder and the hidden message.

What is the hidden message?

The remaining letters will spell out a message. Can you work it out?

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!



Writing a Novel on Your Lunch Hour

(Reprint Article)

By Corey Fayman

Okay, so I didn't really write a whole novel on my lunch hour. But I did develop a lot of the characters, locations and plot by taking half an hour out of each workday to sketch some ideas. You'd be surprised with what you can get done in just thirty minutes a day.

First, a little background. I had a job that was driving me crazy. Corporate priorities at the company I worked for changed on a weekly basis. Projects I managed got cancelled halfway through development, blew up on the launch pad, or went on indefinitely without any measurement of success. My job had become more about shuffling papers and schedules than creating great work. I was frustrated. My thoughts turned to that novel I'd never managed to write.

But how was I going to write it? I never had time. When I got home from work every day, it was late. I was tired and cranky, unable to do much but eat dinner and go to sleep. Weekends were filled with taking care of the house, doing laundry, seeing family. I needed to come up with some kind of plan if I was going to get anything done. I began by promising myself I'd take a half-hour break each day at work, pick up a notepad and pencil and write down whatever came into my head.

Some days I went out for lunch, sat by myself at the juice bar or taco stand and wrote as I ate. On days when I'd brought lunch from home, I'd drive to a distant parking lot or side street and sit in my car making notes. And on days when I couldn't get out for lunch, I'd make sure to reserve a private half hour slot in the corporate calendar so no one could schedule me in for a meeting. At the appointed time, I'd pick up my notebook, find a cubby hole in some corner of the building where staff rarely went, sat down and started writing.

At first it was difficult to put aside thoughts of work. But soon enough, by implementing some simple strategies, I was able to write at least a couple of pages each day. Some days I just scrawled out lists of phrases, adjectives and names, and on other days I managed a few paragraphs of tolerable prose. But the more I did it, the easier it became. After three months I'd filled two notebooks with ideas for characters, situations and locations. My novel had shape. Rough shape, to be sure, but shape nonetheless.

There were other benefits too, ones I hadn't expected. Writing in my notebook for half an hour gave me a sense of satisfaction that helped alleviate the stress of my job. My afternoons became lighter, less dreary. I dare say I developed a spring in my step that hadn't been there before. It also gave me the confidence to look for a new job, one with less time load so I could dedicate myself to completing the work.

So if time is a problem for you, here's ten suggestions on how to start a lunch-hour writing routine, including some tips to keep you on track.

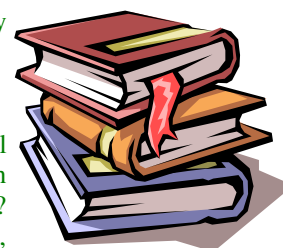
1. Character sketches

Pick a character you've thought about. Or invent a new one on the spot. Start with a name. Is the character male or female? How old? Single, attached or married? What colour eyes? What colour hair? What do they do for a living? Where do they live? Start with the city or town, and then add details. What does their house or apartment look like? Details make a difference. Keep adding as many details as you can. What kind of car does your character drive (if they drive)? What do they eat for breakfast? What kind of clothes do they wear?

2. Location sketches

Again, start from the general and work your way down to the details. You can start with a real location or imagine one, or start with a real one and move to an imagined one. Is the location outside or inside? Who's there? If it's outside, what kind of plants and animals might be there? Once you've come up with the idea, take a tour of the location in your mind. Walk through it,

'There were other benefits too, ones I hadn't expected. Writing in my notebook for half an hour gave me a sense of satisfaction that helped alleviate the stress of my job.'



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pause, and look around. What do you see? Step through your senses as you look around. How does it smell? What does it look like? What do you hear?

3. Mix it up

Once you have a dozen characters and locations or so, try putting them together. What would happen if character A and character D met at location C? Why would they be there? Are they meeting there for the first time or do they already know one another? How does each respond to the meeting?

4. Schedule your sessions

Put it in your calendar system. It's easier to make yourself write when you treat the process like all your other business meetings.

5. Get out of the cubicle

There's too many distractions in your workspace. How are you going to be creative with all those responsibilities staring you in the face?

6. Turn off your cell phone

There's nothing so important it can't wait for half an hour.

7. Get a pad of paper, and a pencil or pen

Computers are great for making things look nice. They're not great for brainstorming. A pad of paper allows you to write in the margins, scrawl anywhere.

8. Pause, but don't stop

Don't spend twenty minutes deciding if your character prefers donuts to bagels. That can come later. Just pick one and see what happens. Writing things, anything, down pushes you forward.

9. Don't worry about "writing"

This is not the time to critically assess the quality of your prose. In fact, you may not want to "write" at all in this first phase. Make lists of character qualities or location features. Make lists of names for characters. On the other hand, don't be afraid to start writing either. Go with whatever feels right on that day.

10. Don't worry, period.

If nothing much happens at first, don't worry about it. It's just half an hour out of your day. At worst it was a quiet break. And you get to come back tomorrow.

About the Author:

Corey Lynn Fayman is an interactive media instructor, musician, and author of Black's Beach Shuffle. You can buy his book, listen to his music, read the Rolly's World blog, or sign up for his newsletter at <http://www.coreyfayman.com>. A review on Black's Beach Shuffle can be found at <http://blogcritics.org/archives/2007/03/21/231131.php>. Purchases can be made from Amazon, <http://www.amazon.com>.

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From page 3: Introduction in Creating Success

Competitions

Make it a part of your schedule to write and submit to competitions. There are many of these and they cater for fiction and non-fiction writers, and poets. Look hard enough and you'll find competitions that are right for you. As your writing improves, so will your ability to climb closer and closer to the winner. During this period you'll probably acquire a stack of runner-up certificates and similar – don't dismiss them; these awards are worthy of your résumé. You've worked hard to get those certificates so be proud of them. Sometimes it's the organiser's intention to create an anthology of the best pieces, if the offer to include your work is presented then accept – it's another success to add to your résumé. It shouldn't cost you anything to submit your work, but if the organiser does charge a fee then it's up to you if you wish to have your work included. A word of caution: be mindful of vanity publishers, they don't usually care about quality, just the fee they can charge you.

Magazines

If you wish to submit your work to magazines be aware that they receive thousands of stories each week; therefore, the competition is extremely high, but if you're lucky to succeed than that's definitely cause for celebration. Study the magazine for a few issues before submitting to them, make sure your work fits their demography. There's little point sending a story with adult themes to a children's magazine or a story on alien invasion to a gardening magazine. Be patient after you have sent off your story or article to the chosen magazine, they can take a while before they respond – up to three months for some. Don't expect feedback, if it's rejected you will most likely receive a short typed note, which basically says 'thanks, but no thanks'. Don't take it personally, remember they have to sort through thousands of submissions.

Remember: persevere with your writing and your persistence will pay off.

*'Make it a part of
your schedule to
write...'*

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 bus swerved to the left just in time to miss ...



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Answers: Word Finder

S O R E C O N I H R L A M M A M
U Y E P A D O C A M E L N T F R
M E E R K A T O M U S K R A T E
A K D R G O A T G L A N R U I D
T N A H P E L E N E E E A T K Y
O O T S I R O L O O W R M C O H
P M K L D O G M O U S E E O A C
O C A O O R I Y B A L L A W L A
P D N T A C P A A L L A D N A P
P Y G H R O A R B E Z U L I O N
I F A R A R E G I T S L E M U R
H O R S E A N U T N E D O R C A
A X O C B B I S O N M I C E E T
R M O L E B U L L A M B S V S E
E F F A R I G N O C T U R N A L
E P O L E T N A E S N E T T I K

Hidden message: Don't forget to record all your successes.

Authors

We are currently accepting articles, short stories and poems. Emails us for more details.

