

# Creative Writing

There are 12 Articles in this set, just read and scroll down. At the bottom of the page click next for the next set of articles.

Some links at the end of each article may or may not work.

## 1. English as a Medium For Indian-Writer

by: Samir K. Dash

In a paper at Regional Conference of the Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies Held at India International Centre ,New Delhi on February23-6,1975,R.Parthasarathy , while exposing the position of Indian writers in English referred to the comments of American poets Allen Ginsberg ,Gary Snyder and Peter Onlovsky: "If we were gangster poets we would shoot you"(1), his threat was direct against the Indian writers' failure to take risk with the English language.

To explain the reason behind this R.Parthasarathy says that there at least two problems which prevent Indian writers to take the risk.First is related to the kind of experience he would like to express in English .

Indian who use the English language gets in some extent alienated . This development is superficial and this is why many blame 'Indian Writers in English'(IWE) as writers who present India in a foreign view-point .There work doesn't contain a deep analysis of the Indian realities and Indian characters .

Many regional writers (many of who are even Jnapitha Awardees) say writing in English in India is a severe handicap as it tends to make their writing export oriented .Hindi writer Rajendra Yadav puts it as : "The IWE take a tourist look at India , like Pankaj Mishra's The Romantics , where he is simply a tourist who does not know the inner psyche of people or a more clever device Vikram Seth uses in A Suitable Boy ,the pretext of looking for a bride-groom ,which takes him to different locales and professions . It is a creatively written travelers' guide .They travel into our culture , describe a bit of our geography ; their total approach is a westerner's :a third rate 'serpant-rope trick'"

Many believe that IWE is circumscribed by what only westerner can appreciate :either exotica or erotica .Both these elements are visible in Ruth Pravar Jhabavala's Heat and Dust .There is description of shrines , Sadhus ,Nawabs ,Princes and their castles along with sex and gay-parties and Hijraas .Jhabavala's picture of princely India is extremely un realistic ,quixotic and pseudo-romantic .Similar is the case of Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things . B.Jaya Mohan in a recent interview to Out Look magazine (February 25 , 2002) said : "Writers like Roy are superficial and exotic .When Roy uses English to express a Malayalam idiom , it might be exotic for westerner , but for Indians it is not very exciting ."

Still there are writers in English for whom a little praise is made ,but that even by another English writer.In an obituary to R.K.Narayan in Time magazine ,V.S.Naipul writes : "His people can eat off leaves on a floor in a slum tenement ,hang their upper clothes on a coat stand ,do all that in correct English ,and there is no strangeness ,no false comedy ,no distance" But still regional writers believe ; "...but any Tamil writer would have put more life into his novels than R.K. did".

The battle of the first kind of problem guides us into the second and this is ' the quality of idiom the writer uses' .R .Parthasarathy says that " there is obviously a time lag between the living , creative idiom and the English used in India .And this time lag is not likely to diminish".

It is because the historical situation is to blame .Besides there is no special English idiom ,either .English in India rarely approaches the liveliness and idiosyncrasy of usage one finds in African or

West Indian writing , perhaps because of the long tradition of literature in Indian languages .

This is explained by Kannada d Oyen " writers in Indian language have a rich back-ground -- centuries old literary traditions,flok tales and life all round them -- the IWE only have frontyard".That's why Rushdie draws fom the ethos and Hindi of Mumbai,while writers like Narayan draws from Tamil and Raja Rao from Kannada .But still the idiom they use lacks in liveliness, because "it's impossible to transfer into English the cultural traditions and the associations of language".This is why it is not surprising that writers in English tend to over emphasize their Indianness . This also explains why Michael Madhusudan Dutt after publishing thesis first book The Captive Lady(1849) in English turned to Bengali to become the first modern Indian poet .

While a regional writer can directly concentrate mode of writing the IWE has to face a complex problem---‘he has to go through the tedious explanations of the idioms he uses in his book ,leaving little space for creative writing’.

Perhaps Narayan was the only writer who never cared for such explanations .Naipul writes (Time,June 4 ,2001) :

"There is or used to be a kind of Indian writer who used many italics and for the excitement ,had a glossary of perfectly simple local words at the back of his book .Narayan never did that .He explains little or nothing;he talks everything about his people and his little town for granted".

But this is not possible for every IWE writer who wants to perform an experiment in creative English writing .R.Parthasarathy explains in the context of his own position as an English poet with Tamil as his mother tongue . "English is a part of my intellectual, rational make-up Tamil my emotional ,psychic make-up"Hence it is he believes that every IWE feels that he has an unnecessary burden to do the explanation of the idioms he uses ,and My Tongue in English Chain is a theoretical statement of this problem.

Russian scholar E.J.Kalinikova in Problems of Modern Indian Literature (1975) also refers to this problem in G.Byol's words :

"National colouring is like naivete' ,if you realize you have it ,then you have already lost it [...] Conception of the Indian through Indian eyes is natural,and this only determine the scope of literary subject", where as an English writer ofIndia tries to give .The elements in a foreign language for which the whole experience of that element is strange and in the end what is produced is in Kamala Das's words:

"It is halfEnglish,half Indian

Funny perhaps, but it is honest" [An Introduction]

To provide a compromise M.R.Anand writes in his essay Pigeon—Indian:Some Notes on Indian English Writing : "The real tests are different The first test is in the sincerity of the writer in any language .The second test may be in the degree of sensitiveness or individual talent".

And in what this talent lie ?Anita Desai has the answer :

"I think I have learnt how to live with English language,how to deal with the problems it creates –mainly by ignoring them"

This view is supported by Henery James –"One's own language is one's mother ,but the language one adopts as a career, as a study ,is one's wife[...] she will expect you to commit infidelities .On those terms she will keep your house well"

Perhaps that's why IWE like Raja Rao have justified their own stand as :

"We can write only as Indians[...] Time will alone justify it"

[Introduction to Kantapura]

Every writer (especially poet) ,as many believe ,sooner or later suffers from ‘Aphasia’ or ‘loss of poetic speech’ .His poetry ought to ,from the beginning aspire to the condition of silence.This is similar to Rene’ Wellek’s notion on Endgame of Samuel Beckett :

"Samuel Beckett in Endgame has been looking for the voice of his silence"

But Wellek’s view is applicable to the living force that still move the Indian English writers’ pen on paper .

"The artist,s dissatisfaction with language can only be expressed by language .Pause may be a device to express the un expressible ,but the pause can not be prolonged indefinitely".

So, in spite of the problems related to language and diction in use , the writers must keep on trying their best in carving out on them ,their creativeness on experimental basis ,because that may one day lead us to where we are now caving to reach.

### **About The Author**

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## 2. Essay Reveals a Writer in You

by: Jerry Howells

During your study at college, many eyes will evaluate your essay, many heads will be thinking about its content. And your aim is not to disappoint them, not to hand in just another ordinary essay. There are some fundamentals common for all the essays we want to share with you. Though it may appear too obvious to you, but please DO read the essay topic very attentively and thoughtfully. One of the most common mistakes I come across when checking the essays is misinterpretation of the topic. Some students stick off the point, others don't answer the target problem of the essay. Avoid this mistake.

Some tutors assign their own topics and very often they might be too abstract. Others offer the choice of the topic to the students, mentioning the necessary type of the essay (e.g. comparison/contrast essay [comparison/contrast essay](#)). In either case don't despair! Your tutor wants you to demonstrate your abilities in thinking and your skills in committing them to paper. Impress him, because you can. Though essay excludes plagiarism, you can't do with referring to useful literature. Read a lot, read diverse literature... Then you will put down all the sources into your reference list.

It is a good thing to discuss your topic with someone. An ideal variant is your tutor, because he will give you useful advice and will clarify his own opinion on the subject. If he is not available, discuss your issue with a person you respect. The essay answers the question WHY? (E.g. a [persuasive essay](#) answers the question WHY do I have such an opinion on the point?). In other words, essay can be defined as some kind of a letter to your imaginary friend (your perspective reader) who asked you the question "WHY?". So, the first section of your "letter" is - introduction. Here you inform the reader about the essence of the problem and prepare him for the course of the discussion.

Then you continue your discourse in supporting paragraphs. Your aim is to gain the reader over and to capture his imagination. How can you do it? Examples: A lot of sound, pertinent examples make a convincing and effective essay. Especially rich in the examples must be [expository essays](#) which aim at explaining something to the audience. Last sentences of the essay make up a conclusion. It is your final word with the reader. So, use it efficiently and make a strong notable conclusion. Though essay is not the easiest task, but if you give a conscious approach to it, if you treat it with spirit, then your essay will help you to win the tutor's respect. And what is more important you will believe that you are creative and inventive!

[www.bestessaytips.com](http://www.bestessaytips.com)

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### 3. Field Notes on Country Linguistics

by: Nola Kelsey

As Suzy stammered, my ears perked up. For distraction I called out, "Hey Kathy, put on another pot of coffee." Suzy spoke again. The fact is, gouging my own eyes out with a ketchup bottle would not have distracted me. A linguistic calamity was eminent.

The hair on the back of my neck stood up, then it ran from the room. I knew where Suzy was headed. Her speech was like watching a car accident. It all moved in slow motion. Every instinct in me said tear the phone from her hand before it's too late. But she had to learn to properly communicate with customers. Please Lord, I begged, don't let her say it. Then it happened. Suzy uttered the words, "We'll mam, I ain't fer sures on that."

Across America, English professors collectively wept. My mind locked. How could she have said it again? She had been with our company four months. Still, there was hope. Okay, Lord, you're pretty funny, I sneered. Seriously, could her next words please be, "If you would not mind holding for one moment, I will find out the answer for you." Ha! No such luck.

The gods hate me. After an awkward silence (while the caller and I shared an embolism), Suzy proceeded to take the customer's order. Neither of them was any wiser for the experience. I stepped outside to meditate. Would I have to fire her? I was not fer sures on that?

You hear many endearing phrases in the county. I find, 'a doins' quite charming. Such as there's a doins at Bubba's tonight. Translated this means, festivities will take place at Bubba's residence this evening.

'Pert near' is fun. Linguists translate this colorful twist on grammar as meaning, 'almost' not nearby. As in, pert near everybody ceptin that cidiot been told bout the rodeo. Meaning, almost everyone, except the new city idiot, was informed of the upcoming rodeo event.

Unfortunately, telling a high maintenance Dressage Equestrian (they are all high-maintenance), "Ya aint's fer sures on that," translates as, "Hello, we are illiterate, so buy our product." Following this with no offer to expand your knowledge and assist the customers says, "We may be illiterate, but that's ok. We also suck. Thank you and have a nice day."

Tourists passing through this area have improperly translated another phrase. "What chya doin?" is often misinterpreted as the rhetorical "What's up?" or "What's happening?" Sadly, that is not its meaning. "What chya doin?" literally translates as, "What are you doing?" Confusion on this matter is based on timing.

"What chya doing?" is often asked when your activity could not be more blatantly obvious. For example: You're spreading cheese over flat dough topped with tomato sauce. Mountains of pepperoni are poised nearby. A stranger asks, "What chya doin?" Heads up: They literally have not connected the dots. Do not wisecrack, "Installing solar panels." Before you know it, you'll be explaining how green peppers affect your hot water supply.

Here in South Dakota low wages have brought in large numbers of Customer Service call centers. Airlines, finance companies, catalog sales, these types of companies coagulate around Rapid City. Lately there has been a lot of concern over competition from India. Apparently the population of India is highly educated and enunciates in a manner more understandable than that of South Dakotans.

Americans, not having Hindi as the mother tongue, stand little chance. Still, there is a certain irony in residents of the Black Hills losing something to Indians. How many groups will that statement offend? I ain't fer sures on that.

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Zoologist turned satirist Nola L. Kelsey is the author of *Bitch Unleashed: The Harsh Realities of Goin' Country* and coauthor/"primary scribe" for the political, self-help, satire *Keeping the Masses Down*. She is also an established ghostwriter, as well as, a freelance copywriter for a mixed brew of animal health companies.

Her photographic works appear in the Herpetocultural Library Series by Advanced Vivarium Systems, Cheval International's marketing campaigns and have appeared in *Vivarium Magazine*.

Currently, Kelsey in the process of relocating to SE Asia. Here she is continuing on as a freelance journalist and writer while working on book number four. Her newsletter, *Wanderlust Ink*, is tracking this escape from South Dakota normality to her life as a shoestring backpacker. More about Kelsey's writings, midlife crisis and subscriptions to *Wanderlust Ink* are available on her website, <http://www.nolakelsey.com>

## 4. Guidelines For Reviewing Writing

by: The StoryMaster

Writing detailed reviews is time well spent.

Reviewing itself is a writing exercise. At [Writing.Com](http://Writing.Com), creating detailed feedback for a fellow writer is one of the best tools available for improving your own writing. That said, if you're going to spend the time to do it, helping the author is important. There is a better chance for the ideas in a review to get through to an author if they are well presented.

### Key Characteristics For Reviews

\* Reviews should be honest. Helping writers improve their craft should be the mission of any reviewer. Honest opinions are what help writers improve. Giving false feedback doesn't help anyone and can lead an author down a long road to bitter disappointment.

\* Reviews should be encouraging. Everyone at every level should be encouraged to continue writing! Encouraging reviews are more likely to be used by an author which means the time creating the review was well spent. Whether the author decides to use the reviewer's honest suggestions or not, the review should be motivating and encourage the author to keep writing.

\* Reviews should be respectful. Regardless of an author's level of skill or talent, a reviewer should always respect that the author is an individual person. A reviewer flaunting that they are better than the author they're reviewing is not respectful and is counter productive.

\* Reviews should be well rounded. While honesty is very important, a review that points out only flaws without any mention of an item's positive points is not nearly as helpful to an author as a well rounded review with both positive and negative remarks. Don't forget, the same goes for reviews that only point out positives! Even the greatest pieces of writing have room for suggestions and opinions.

\* The rating should reflect the review. If you're sending a review full of corrections, it's important to consider that with your star rating selection. 5.0's shouldn't need any corrections. On the other extreme, a 1.0 should have endless errors and you couldn't possibly list them all. Offering to return and rerate the item after a round of updates makes it more likely your suggestions will be considered.

\* Reviews should make good use of color, bold and italics. When reviewing, presentation is very important! Color can be used to make corrections stand out or quote small portions of the work. Emoticons can highlight important points in the review and can be creatively used to make the review feel more friendly.

### The Content Of A Review

Keeping in mind the six (6) points highlighted above, a review should contain your opinion. While grammatical, typographical and other errors can be included within a review, don't forget to tell the author how the piece made you feel. Give them your thoughts about the inside of their writing, not just the outside.

Some example questions you may ask yourself about the piece to help you get your opinion across are as follows: Did the plot interest you? Were the characters believable? Did the story fit the time, place and other setting characteristics? Is there anything you would change within the story?

Incorporating these thoughts within your reviews will expand your own analytical skills allowing you to better analyze your own writing. Whether the author agrees with any of your suggestions or ideas is not relevant. You have given them another perspective on their work they would not have otherwise had. They may hear the same thoughts from a number of different people which may give them a better understanding of their readers as a whole.

Use "copied and pasted" portions of the item you are reviewing as little as possible. Posting sections of an item within your review leads to "review bloating" and takes away from the impact your comments and suggestions will have on the author.

### Your Own Review Format

Developing your own format for reviewing can be a great asset. Determine what aspects of writings you like to focus on most, create a short outline to follow and start reviewing. Following this process will help keep your reviews honest and consistent. As your experience grows, you'll find ways to improve your format and your skills.

Get into the good habit of using a custom tag-line of encouragement within your reviews. Including a "Keep Writing!" or something unique and individual within your reviews goes a long way to motivating an author. We know you mean it, so don't forget to say it!

### Make Reviewing a Daily Creative Writing Exercise

Remember, reviewing grows your own writing skills unlike any other writing tool. Critically analyzing and reviewing others' writings makes a writer stop and think about what works and what doesn't. Putting that into words and communicating that to another writer, ultimately helps the reviewer to improve his or her own writing skills, as well. So it's about helping others, but it's a valuable way to help ourselves!

Have Fun & Happy Reviewing!

### **About The Author**

The StoryMaster is WebMaster @ [Writing.Com](http://www.Writing.Com/) ( <http://www.Writing.Com/> ). Established in 2000, [Writing.Com](http://www.Writing.Com/) is the online community for readers and writers of all ages and interests. Whether you're a casual reader searching for a good story or a creative writer looking for the perfect place to improve your skills, [Writing.Com](http://www.Writing.Com/) is the site for you!

## 5. Have You Completed A Character Questionnaire?

by: Nick Vernon

Creative Writing Tips –

Complete a character questionnaire for each of your main characters or even secondary characters that play a vital role in your story. This way you will know your character(s) well before you start writing about them.

Fill in as much information about them as possible. Don't only answer what you will need in your story. The objective here is to get to know your character till he becomes a 'live' person in your mind.

So let's begin...

1. In a few sentences write down a summary of the plot
2. Character's personal details
  - a. First name
  - b. Surname
  - c. Age
3. In a few sentences write down the character's back story (a bit about his background)
4. The role of the character in your story
  - a. What are character's goals?
  - b. What are character's motivations?
  - c. What is the character's conflict?
  - d. How will the conflict stop the character from reaching his goal?
  - e. What is he going to do to overcome the conflict?
  - f. What problems will crop up during the story?
  - g. How will those problems get worse?
  - h. What will the character do to overcome those problems?
  - i. How will he resolve the conflict?
  - j. How will your character's background influence how he behaves in your story?
  - k. What is the relationship with other characters, if any, in your story?
5. Physical Descriptions
  - a. Height
  - b. Eye color
  - c. Hair color
  - d. Hairstyle
  - e. Hair length
  - f. Complexion
  - g. Shape of face
  - h. Body type
  - i. Weight
6. How does his expression change when...
  - a. He's with a loved one
  - b. He's with someone he dislikes
  - c. He's with his boss
  - d. He's with a colleague
7. Personality
  - a. Type? (shy, outgoing, insecure, dominant etc)

- b. Distinguishable traits?
  - c. Mental scars? (Complexes etc)
  - d. Ambitions?
  - e. Sense of humor?
  - f. Fears?
  - g. Anxieties?
  - h. Phobias?
  - i. Overall personality?
  - j. How does his personality change when he's experiencing different emotions?
  - k. How does he act when he feels confident?
  - l. How does he act when he feels inadequate?
  - m. What gestures does he use when he talks and thinks?
  - n. How does he walk? With confidence? Does he slouch or stride?
  - o. What mannerisms does he have? (Does he fold his arms? Does he flick his hair?)
  - p. How does he speak? (Clearly, mumble, confidently, drawl etc.)
  - q. His voice? (Rich, loud, soft, etc)
  - r. His vocabulary? (Casual, formal, illiterate etc)
  - s. What does he think when he's alone?
  - t. Does he have any secrets he hasn't disclosed to anyone?
  - u. His prejudices?
  - v. Dominant motives?
  - w. Values most?
  - x. Desires most?
  - y. How does he treat those around him? (children, superiors, etc)
  - z. Any vices or virtues?
8. Likes and dislikes
- a. Favorite color, food, etc
  - b. Favorite music?
  - c. Taste in clothing?
  - d. Does character like something in particular?
  - e. Does character dislike something in particular?
9. Lifestyle
- a. Where does the character live (country, city)?
  - b. Does character live in a house, apartment etc
  - c. Does character like where he lives?
  - d. Does where he lives reflect what kind of person he is?
  - e. Does he have a favorite room? (Or a piece of furniture or other object etc)
  - f. Does he have a car? What type? Does the car reflect the person he is?
  - g. Any hobbies? Personal habits (neat, sloppy etc)
10. Background
- a. Parents names
  - b. Parents occupations
  - c. Describe relationship with parents
  - d. Any siblings?
  - e. Describe relationship with siblings
  - f. What kind of childhood did the character have?
  - g. What kind of adolescence did the character have?

- h. What kind of schooling did character undergo? (Private or public? Has this shaped who he is?)
- i. What was the highest-level achieved in school?
- j. Citizenship/Ethnic Origin?
- k. In which country does he currently live?
- l. If the country he lives in is not where he was born, why does he live there?

11.Character's current position

- a. Any friends?
- b. Any enemies?
- c. Acquaintances?
- d. Has character been married before?
- e. Has the character been engaged before?
- f. Any children?
- g. Most meaningful experience?
- h. Any disappointments?
- i. What is the character's goal in life?
- j. Attitude towards the opposite sex?
- k. Attitude towards life?

12.Employment

- a. What kind of job does character currently have?
- b. What kind of jobs has the character had previously?
- c. Is character content in current employment?
- d. If not, what would be their dream job?

13.What do you feel for this character?

- a. Admire
- b. Love
- c. Hate
- d. Dislike
- e. Like
- f. Pity
- g. Envy

Whatever you feel for this character, your emotions must be strong. If they are not, either build on this further or begin building another character altogether.

**About The Author**

Besides his passion for writing, Nick Vernon runs an online gift site where you will find gift information, articles and readers' funny stories.

Visit <http://www.we-recommend.com>

## **6. Have You Plotted Your Story Before Writing It?**

**by: Nick Vernon**

Creative Writing Tips –

The writer, who doesn't have the time to plot, always finds the time to rewrite.

Sound familiar?

I've been guilty of this too, back in the early days of my writing apprenticeship. I was so eager to get stuck into writing my story that I wouldn't bother with plotting.

Plotting gives you a sense of direction. It's your map, which will lead you to write your story. Leaping into the unknown rarely works. Without a plot several things can happen....

- Our stories aren't focused
- We lose our way
- Our characters don't come to life because we don't take the time to develop them
- We get stuck
- The story strays from us

And all this happens when we haven't figured everything out first.

Your plot is the foundation of your story. It's the skeleton, which will hold your story together. Your plot is there to work everything out first – to see if it can be worked out, and then flesh out that skeleton with other elements that make a story.

Plotting is the difference between writing a story for yourself and writing one for an audience. Writing for ourselves doesn't require too much strain because we only have ourselves to please. It's when we have to please our readers that the hard work begins.

If you are aiming to sell your stories, plotting is a must.

Have you plotted your story before writing it?

### **About The Author**

Besides his passion for writing, Nick Vernon runs an online gift site where you will find gift information, articles and readers' funny stories.

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## 7. Have You Tested Your Plot? by: Nick Vernon

Creative Writing Tips –

Our plotting stage is our testing area.

Everything in the plot should be tested for its effectiveness before we put in into our stories. If you believe something in your plot could be better, make it better.

Figuring everything out in your plot will save you time rewriting later.

So how do you test your plot?

Start with everything that has gone into it.

For example...

- Are the events interesting?
- Does your plot contain problems for the character to solve?
- Have you given your character a goal?
- Is the conflict strong?
- Is the resolution of the conflict interesting?
- Is the character interesting?
- Is the setting of the story interesting?
- Will the incident or situation be interesting to your readers?
- Etc

Make a list of what your plot contains. Comb through it carefully and tick off each item. If you find that some things need to be worked on some more, work on them.

I know to some this might be tedious work, but...

“Every one-minute you spend in planning  
will save you at least three minutes in execution.”

Crawford Greenwald

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## 8. Have You Tested Your Theme Against Your Plot?

by: Nick Vernon

Creative Writing Tips –

How we usually begin the preparation stage in the writing process is...

- We think of an idea for a story
- We think of a suitable theme
- We plot

Once we come up with a theme and we begin plotting, we have to see how the theme and the plot match up. Sometimes as we plot we find that the theme we had initially chosen won't do.

For example...

'Winning The Lottery Makes Your Life Easier'

Plotting with this theme in mind, we have our characters pay off all their debts, go on endless shopping sprees, go on holidays, etc. We find though that this won't make a very interesting story. So we spice it up, adding to the theme or coming up with a different one.

"Winning The Lottery Makes Your Life Easier But Everything Has Its Price."

We can show the characters living the life of the rich for a while before they realize that being wealthy has its problems too...

- They now fear for their safety
- Their friends and relatives are constantly harping at their door asking for assistance
- Etc

This second scenario creates more problems for the characters, so it's more interesting for us readers.

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The preparation stage is there to prepare before you write. It's our workbench where we figure everything out. We test our theme, we test our plot and once everything passes the test, then we begin writing.

You can change the theme as many times as you feel it needs changing, while you are in the preparation stage.

The main thing is to make your story interesting.

It's not a good idea to keep changing the theme when writing the story because then you will have to keep changing the story. This means rewriting.

Figure everything out then write.

Have you tested your theme against your plot?

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## 9. Hooks, Lines & Sinkers

by: Sue Kendrick

Hands up if the title to this article made you think that you'd strayed into a fishing feature?

Perhaps you didn't quite go that far, but hopefully you were puzzled or curious enough to wonder what on earth those three angling associated words have to do with writing. The answer of course is nothing at all if you are thinking of metal barbs, yards of tangled nylon and blobs of lead weights.

Think, however, of the good opening lines used to begin most successful short stories, novels and articles then the "hook" in our title takes on a whole new range of meanings and equates very well with the world of creative writing.

What most beginners fail to understand when they first begin writing, and this applies as much to articles as it does to short stories and novels, is that when they submit their work to an editor, competition judge or publisher there is only a brief moment to impress which is why a lot of attention needs to be paid to that first opening sentence.

Hooking your reader with a good beginning isn't a guarantee to success, but it will serve to focus attention and make the judge, publisher or editor take more notice of the rest of the article, story etc. If nothing else, it presses an subconscious alert button in the reader's mind that marks up the writer as a professional who knows his or her craft.

This in turn builds expectation and again focuses attention. As long as the rest of the piece lives up to its early promise, you can be sure that your effort will at the very least receive close inspection and hopefully much more!

So, just how do you come up with a good hook? It would be nice if I could say that there was some magic formula available but unfortunately I haven't found it even if it does exist! Still there are several things that you can do to get things moving.

First of all don't sit staring at your screen trying to think of a good opening line when you have a mind boiling with ideas struggling to spread themselves over the page! All this will do is make you tense up with frustration and dam your creativity.

Instead, start hitting the keys and slap those ideas across the screen! Once you have the basic outline down then you can start the editing process, including the opening sentence. If at this stage you are still stuck, try leaving the work for a few days, there's a good chance you'll come up with something when you're mind is focused on something else and the first flush of enthusiasm has cleared from your brain.

Analogy, such as I've used to the fishing world, often provides a good hook. In the case of this article I used it in the title but hooks are used just as often or more so in the opening sentence. My actual opening "hook" made use of a question, which again is a very good way to start, as questions by their very nature demand a response from the reader, even if it is only to read to the end of the sentence!

I took this a step further by demanding physical action, "hands up", which of course is a ridiculous thing to expect a reader to do when there is no way of knowing whether they have complied or not! It is this stupidity that hopefully grabs attention and carries on from where the title left off. PR writers are well aware of this process and often mis-spell words to create a similar effect .

Quotations and deliberate mis-quotations also make good hooks either from songs, proverbs or other literary works, but also try putting together unusual combinations of words.

For instance, you wouldn't think that brussel sprouts could possibly have any effect on good or evil and I'm sure they haven't! One of my son's however has different ideas and his annual grumble during our recent Christmas meal gave me a marvellous opening line, or hook, for what will be a festive article

taking a close look at this, in my opinion, much maligned vegetable!

What was it? Oh yes, when faced with a heap of those shiny green gems he muttered murderously, "If it wasn't for brussel sprouts there'd be no evil in the world ..." now is that a hook or what?

Which brings me on to another point. Hooks, I've found seem to have a power in their own right and often serve as a catalyst to the story or article itself which is why you should be on the alert for when they occur.

The brussel sprout incident is a prime example. Writing in any shape or form was the furthest thing from my mind, but the startled looks and laughter from the rest of the family were enough to confirm what I'd immediately thought, here was a hook begging for exploitation and with a enough power of its own to begin generating several lines of thought.

Being aware of hooks and the power they have on the reader is something every writer has to get to grips with if they want to achieve success so it is a good idea to train yourself to both generate hooks and be on the alert for them by listening to what other people say.

Having a small notebook handy makes a lot of sense, but reading what other people have done before you will also pay dividends. Try this quiz of opening lines to famous novels. It's not easy, but don't worry about your score, the real benefit of the quiz is seeing what worked for the author.

1. The scent of slaughter, some believe, can linger in a place for years.
2. When Mr Bilbo Baggins of Bag End announced that he would shortly be celebrating his eleventy-first birthday ...
3. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth ...
4. Scarlett O'Hara was not beautiful, but men seldom realized it when caught by her charm as the Tarleton twins were.
5. The stranger came early in February one wintry day, through a biting wind and a driving snow ...
6. "The marvellous thing is that it's painless," he said. "That's how you know when it starts."
7. Last night I dreamed of Mandalay ...
8. A wide plain, where the broadening Floss hurries on between its green banks to the sea, and the loving tide rushing to meet it ...
9. Mr Jones, of the Manor Farm, had locked the hen-house for the night, but was too drunk to remember to shut the pop-holes.
10. "Tom!"

Well, what did you think? Some were definitely intriguing but others in my opinion left a lot to be desired which just goes to show that the proof of the pudding is in the eat... er reading so don't fall into the trap of thinking that the beginning is the be all and end all!

Oh and before you ask, I haven't forgotten the lines and sinkers either, call those plots and twist endings and to find out more sign up for the WriteLink Short Story Writing Workshop, it's free!

[www.writebytes.co.uk](http://www.writebytes.co.uk)

ANSWERS:

1. The Loop by Nicholas Evans
2. The Lord of the Rings by J R R Tolkein
3. The Bible
4. Gone with the Wind by Margaret Mitchell
5. The Invisible Man by H G Wells
6. The Snows of Kilimanjaro by Ernest Hemingway

7. Rebecca by Daphne De Maurier
8. The Mill on the Floss by George Elliot
9. Animal Farm by George Orwell
10. The Adventures of Tom Sawyer by Mark Twain

### **About The Author**

Sue Kendrick is a freelance writer and graphic designer living in the English Midlands. She writes regular news items for her regional newspaper, has had many articles published in special interest magazines and won prizes in several short story contests. She is now the editor and publisher of [www.writelink.co.uk](http://www.writelink.co.uk) one of the UK's premier writing websites and monthly newsletter. She has written several ebooks including READ ALL ABOUT IT! The WriteLink to Newspaper Writing [www.writelink.dabsol.co.uk/Newspaper\\_Book/newspaper\\_book.html](http://www.writelink.dabsol.co.uk/Newspaper_Book/newspaper_book.html) and Poetry For Profit, four reports on how to make money from writing poetry. [www.writelink.dabsol.co.uk/Poetry\\_for\\_profit/poetry\\_for\\_profit.html](http://www.writelink.dabsol.co.uk/Poetry_for_profit/poetry_for_profit.html)

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## 10. How Are You Plotting?

by: Nick Vernon

Creative Writing Tips –

Writing is a creative process and how every writer chooses to create, is individual to them. Likewise, with plotting, every writer plots at a level they are comfortable with.

Some just plot the bare essentials. They have a firm idea of the story they want to write and have a good memory to be able to memorize everything.

Others go into more detail. These writers prefer to figure everything out before they write the story.

How you plot will also depend on your level of experience. For the beginner, it's recommended to plot thoroughly.

Before writing, think of every possible situation. Plot events thoroughly, plot scenes to the last detail and generally leave no questions unasked or unanswered. This way you will always know where you're going.

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### Are You Using The 'What If' Technique When Plotting?

Your short story of 500, 2,000, 10,000 words or whatever word length you choose to write, will spring from a single idea - Perhaps a one-sentence idea.

So when you are still in that one sentence stage, using the 'What If,' technique is a good way of generating ideas to build on that initial story idea.

While you are in the plotting stage, experiment. Your aim should be to write the best story you can. Experiment to see what bits and pieces you can put together to write the best story ever.

So using 'What If,' ask yourself questions then answer them...

1. What if the character was like this?
2. What if this happened to him?
3. What if I placed him in this situation? How would he react?
4. What if I took this away from him?
5. What if his worst fear came true?
6. What if he doesn't get what he wants? What will he do?
7. What if I placed this obstacle in his path? What will he do?

You'll be surprised what you come up with, if you take the time to experiment.

## **11. How to Have an Effective Reading Group**

**by: Stephen Earley Jordan, II**

Writing leads to reading. Therefore, it's only fair to supply my readers with sufficient information on creating an effective reading group, since the last article was based on writing groups.

You'll notice that some of the information is quite repetitive from the "How to Have an Effective Writing Group" article simply for the fact that when you work with peer groups, there are similarities in the guidelines to which we must adhere to make the group truly successful.

Moreover, if Oprah could have a book club, so can you, right? It may not be as glamorous as hers, but let's pretend it is. And, with that mindset, we'll only have success, success, success! But the catch is to not only have a reading group, but to have an EFFECTIVE reading group.

Allow this to be a guide to reinforce your already-found knowledge and love for literature. And, more importantly, let this assist you in finding some fellow readers.

**Number of Members Limited.** I've found that if you purchase a hallmark card, (or if you're computer savvy create a card on your computer) and cordially invite members. Give potential members a deadline to RSVP their spot in this "exclusive" reading group. If potential members feel that this will be professional, beneficial, and exclusive they will probably join.

A common trend is to maintain limited membership, and have a back-up list of potential recruits. Make a verbal agreement amongst yourselves that members must attend x-amount of group meetings or the member will be asked to resign their position with the group. Sounds harsh? Nah, don't think of it like that—view it as a professional group and each member must carry his own weight.

**Meetings.** Meetings must revolve around the members' schedules. As such, give members about a month to read the text and develop an analysis of it. The last weekend (perhaps a Sunday? Saturday?) could be ideal. Don't let these meetings drag into the late hours of the night. Set aside an hour or two, during a brunch, and allow someone to be the time-keeper, making sure your group doesn't go overboard with the discussion. Why should there be limits? If members see that these sessions are lasting longer than they anticipated, there is sure to be obvious conflict and many members will decide to leave the group. Allow members to know up-front (when they accept the invitation to join) that the sessions will last no more than x-amount of hours.

**Genre.** Perhaps your group would like to simply explore fiction written by and/or about Black or Japanese authors. If this is the case—make that known from the beginning when the group is organized and members are invited to join it. Some topics of interest members could appreciate include: Religion, Regional, Multicultural, Juvenile, Feminism, Gay/Lesbian, Adventure, Fantasy just to name a few. Of course, these categories can get more specific. It is a definite must, though, to ensure fresh material within these categories.

**Length.** You don't want to read "Gone with the Wind." Just the thought, alone, makes it a formidable task! Keep work schedules and personal lives in consideration when thinking of the text's length. As a reference, works by Virginia Woolf, Joyce Carol Oates, Jean Rhys, and Toni Morrison are generally excellent material for book clubs.

**The Critique.** Ah, we mustn't forget about the important part—the critique. When critiquing text, encourage members to discuss all aspects of the book such as: the time it was written, the author's biographical information, any sociopolitical undertones, and the list goes on. Allow each member about 7-10 minutes to discuss the text, with no interruptions. Upon completion of the individual critiques, allow members to discuss (as a group) how their interpretations differ and why they agree and/or disagree with other members.

The Discussion. During the discussion, encourage members to be active participants. Or else, what's the point of being in this reading group, right? What were some of the good things in the text? Was it the plot? Was it the development of characters? Or, perhaps it was the symbolism? What were some of the negative aspects of the text? Perhaps the climax didn't reach the peak you expected. Has anyone in the group read any of the author's earlier work? If so, allow them to discuss how this compares to the previous text. Questions posed during the discussion can be unlimited. But, so this doesn't drag on for hours and hours, set a time limit for the discussion. Once again, most of the members probably have hectic lives beyond this social group. If you play your cards right and with some advance planning, it's possible to find a local author to attend your meeting and read portions of their text the same month you discuss their works.

If members can't keep up with reading that much work each month, then find shorter text. Above all, reading groups should be a relaxed environment—away from your significant other, your children, and your job. Let this be a time where you hone your reading and analytical skills with the assistance of others who simply seek the same thing.

### **About The Author**

Stephen Jordan has five years experience within the educational publishing industry. Stephen was a freelance editor with such educational foundations as Princeton Review, The College Board, New York University, and Columbia University. Away from the office, Stephen promotes his creative writing with his home-freelance business Out Stretch Publications and his artwork. Stephen holds two Bachelor of Arts degrees in writing and literature from Alderson-Broaddus College of Philippi, West Virginia

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## 12. How to Have an Effective Writing Group

by: Stephen Earley Jordan, II

The works you've written are numerous, ranging from short stories to even the novel, hidden in a storage bin (under the bed) collecting dust. But there comes a time when you must wipe away that dust, regain your pride, and prepare your babies for publication! But, how do you get such a critical, unbiased eye to analyze your works, offering both praise and criticism?

It's simple—start a writing group!

Creating a writing group is the easy part, but creating a functioning and beneficial writing group can be quite a task.

Writing groups are age-old sessions where writers obtain helpful evaluations for their works.

Nowadays, though, writing groups seem to be a fad, and for many a status symbol reassuring them of their writerdom. Don't create a writing group simply for the sake of saying, "I belong to a writing group". Create or join a group because of the numerous benefits that come along with them.

1. **Keep Number of Members Limited.** You don't want just one other person in this group. So shoot for 3 or more members. On the other hand, you don't want to have 30 people in the group either. Try approximately 8-10 members. If one person leaves the group, replace that person with a new recruit. Keep the same standards for all members. Make it standard that members can only join by an invite. Allowing your group to be very exclusive brings the group more pride.
2. **Select Randomly.** It's okay to have a friend in this group, but you chose to create this writing group for unbiased opinions. So don't allow ALL the members to be your best friends in which you see on a daily basis. Perhaps one member is 18 yrs old, while the other is 35. Keeping age, sex, ethnicity, and educational levels of your group will allow a diverse critique—which is ultimately what you're seeking. A diverse group will only make you and the group much stronger.
3. **Meetings.** We're all struggling writers, so most often the other members of the group will have jobs to attend. So finding an appropriate time for a meeting is crucial. I've found that one Sunday per month, after 2 p.m. is great. Make it an odd time. Creating times such as 2:07 p.m. will stand out and allow members to remember. Where are these meetings held? Keep switching locations. Allow the members to rotate the location to each of their homes. If homes are not available, then a select person should discuss where they choose the next meeting should be held. This is the reason membership should be limited to a few members. It's much easier to meet with just a few people.
4. **Text.** Focus your group on either poetry or prose—try not to mingle the two. If the text is prose, and the writer wants his novel critiqued, suggest that the novel be submitted on a "per chapter" (or two) basis. Don't overwhelm the members with too much to read at one time—or you'll end up with no members. The month before your work is critiqued, each writer should submit photocopies of their manuscript to each member.
5. **Know your intentions.** Make sure that, for the most part, members have similar goals: to be published or for sheer enjoyment of writing. This will eliminate time wasted if you know this upfront.
6. **Critiquing.** When critiquing the text, encourage the members to speak as if the writer isn't present. In the meanwhile, the author can sit back, take notes, and write down questions the critics may have posed. Encourage the critics to write on their versions of the text before

meeting. Allow approximately 20 minutes to discuss each member's work. Upon completion of the critique, critics should give the author their "corrected" versions. Complete the critique by allowing the author to explain any unanswered questions and to thank the critics.

If members can't keep up with reading that much work per month, then divide it up. Four writers submit one month, while the remaining four submit the following month. Above all, writing groups should be a relaxed environment—away from your significant other, your children, and your job. Let this be a time where you hone your writing skills with the assistance of others who simply seek the same thing.

### **About The Author**

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