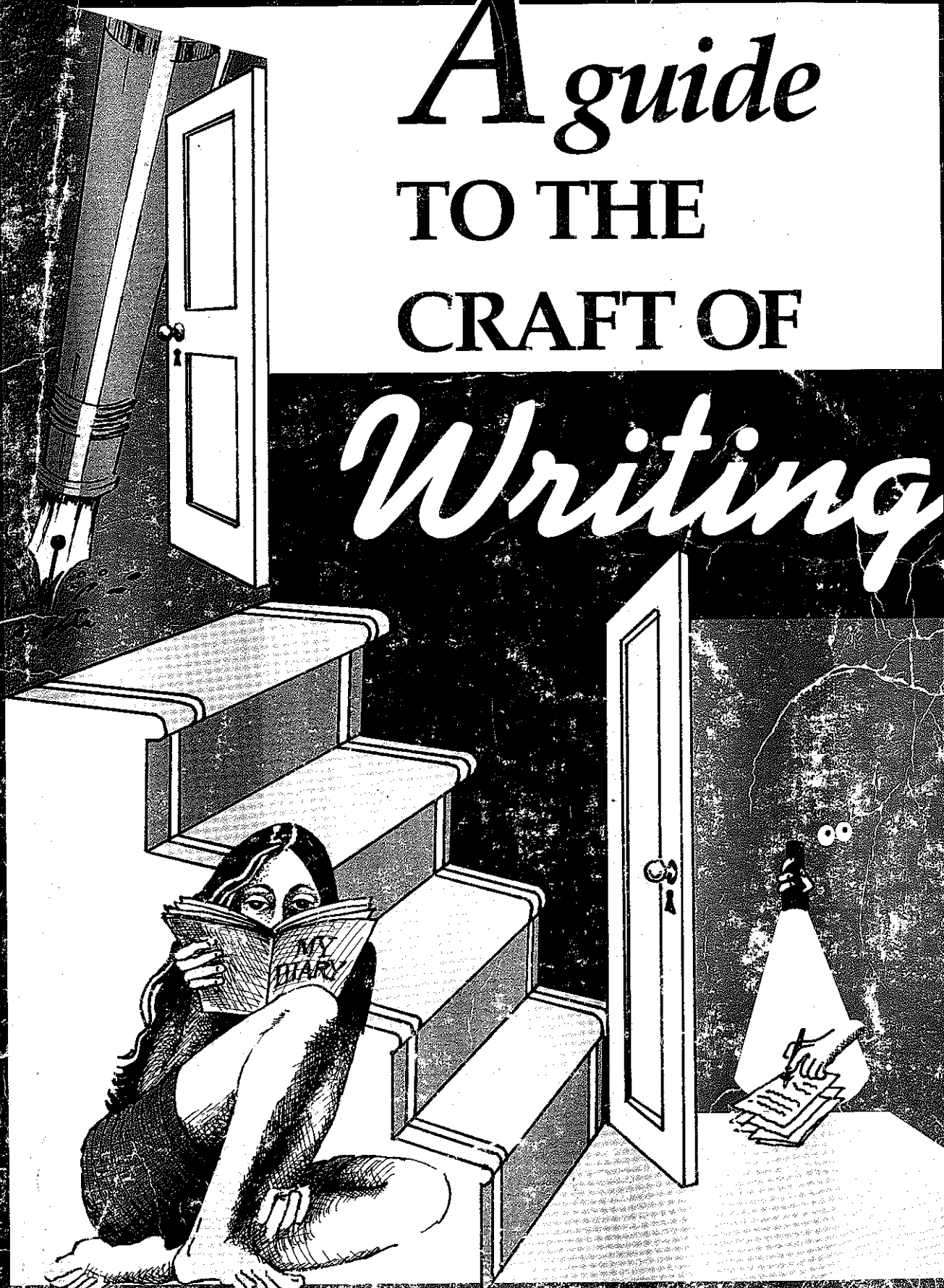


6 The diary of my secret life 9

A guide TO THE CRAFT OF

Writing



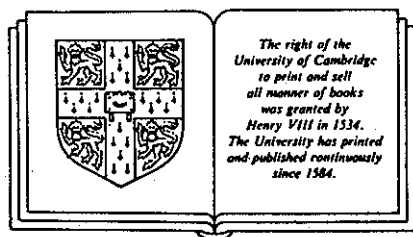
MICHAEL HYDE

Michael Hyde.
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The diary of my secret life

A GUIDE TO THE
CRAFT OF WRITING

Michael Hyde



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To my sons Shannon and Jesse and my daughter Rebecca who I have driven mad over the years by constantly asking them what they thought of what I had just written; who I recently discovered could put some fine sentences and words together themselves; who have watched my development as a writer throughout their lives; and who I love dearly.

BIG THANKYOUS Especially to Bill and Johnny, who were of inestimable value, and to all the teachers – particularly Liz, Ken, Bernie, Claude, Michael, Margaret and Peter – whom I have worked with over the last twenty years and who consequently had something to do with the development of this book . . . whether they knew it or not. Some I know, like Bronwyn, have continued to write: all power to them.

To Brunswick Technical Publications, the publisher of *The meat in the sandwich*, and to all the students for permission to reproduce their work in this book. Many thanks and sweet potatoes to Dorothy who typed the manuscript and offered suggestions. Heartfelt thanks are also due to the lateral-thinking illustrator, Paul Rovis.

A big hug and a kiss to Gabrielle, who read and re-read all the chapters and regularly gave me marks out of ten for my efforts. Thank you for your constant encouragement and for the concept of 'one last really great trick'.

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Dear teacher

This is not just another textbook. It is based on personal experience of teaching writing since 1970. The students have been primary and post-primary school students, illiterate teenagers and adults, women returning to study, unemployed people and other teachers. Consequently this book appeals to a wide age range.

The book is autobiographical and conversational in style. I wanted the students to be able to relate to it and learn from it. I wanted it to be easy to use and to take pressure off students and teachers, rather than put it on. Students can dip into any chapter. They don't have to start from page 1 and work through to the end, although I would encourage them to read chapter 1 'But nothing's happened in my life' and the introduction - 'Dear student'. The chapter titles are the most common questions, demands and statements I've heard from students, plus some of the problems I've encountered over the years while doing my own writing. Teachers can use any chapter as a lesson plan and/or a teacher-centred lesson, or chapters can be used as the basis for class discussion.

This book presumes that in one way or another you have some time set aside for your students to be writing their own material - whether it's writing folders, imaginative essays or writing workshops. By actually writing their own stories, plays, poems and essays our students become more skilled at writing. However, the process of writing means that we constantly confront difficulties. This book addresses these difficulties. Each chapter deals with a separate problem by talking about it and then presenting a few TRICKS (enjoyable exercises) for students to grapple with. If a student has a clear problem, for example with dialogue, you could suggest that they look at chapter 7. You will discover that there is some overlap between chapters. Some of the points raised in one chapter could well apply to other problems raised in other chapters. The inter-connectedness of the different writing skills will become apparent as students wend their way through the book.

Each chapter will take up 1-2 periods. The whole class can work on the same chapter or on separate chapters. Students can do one, two or all of the tricks associated with each chapter. Most of the tricks can easily be done at home as well as in class.

Finally, I would like to encourage you to do your own writing. There is a great deal of mystique (and nonsense) surrounding the craft of writing. Woodwork teachers are expected to know how to plane, join, cut, carve and turn. If we're expecting our students to write and to become competent in all forms of writing, our teaching will be more thorough, knowledgeable and enjoyable if we take up the pen ourselves.

I hope this book bears fruit for you and your students.

Michael Hyde

Dear student

I hope you have a good time with this book.

It contains what I've learnt about writing since I started. No doubt I have more to learn, but if I waited until I'd learnt everything, then I'd be dead and buried and this book wouldn't have been written.

You might be wondering why I've called the chapters things like 'But nothing's happened in my life' and 'What d'you reckon you're lookin' at?'. They are some of the comments and questions I remember from fifteen years of teaching writing. When I started to organise this book I used them to break it up into a number of parts, each dealing with one of the most common problems kids have when writing, like 'I've got nothin' to write' and 'I'm stuck'.

Whatever type of creative writing you've been doing, this book is for you. You can use it with the rest of your class, with your friends or on your own. Maybe you're having trouble with dialogue. You simply look up chapter 7 and do one or all of the TRICKS at the end. After that you'll probably find that dialogue comes more easily. However, even if you read through the whole book and do all the tricks it doesn't mean you'll automatically become a good writer. This book is not a magic pill. The real magic is doing your own writing. It's when you're writing your own stories, poems, plays, songs, even novels, that you learn most about writing.

Writing takes COURAGE. If you show a bit of courage and write out of your own life – about a painful experience, or a humorous one; about how you felt when you saw a beautiful sunset, or your delight when you caught your first fish – you'll probably discover that other people will love your story. People like stories that tell them something about other people and about life.

Writing about things that mean something to you means REFLECTING on your ideas and thoughts in order to develop them. And part of development is seeing how different parts of your story relate to each other. You'll notice that much of what I've written in the chapters seems to overlap. That's because all the different aspects of writing are connected to each other like a daisy chain. Dialogue, development, punctuation, beginnings, characterisation, whatever, all have to be dealt with in your writing. Creative writing helps you become more confident about all kinds of writing. You end up feeling as though you've got language by the throat instead of the other way round.

The main way you'll write better is by writing and continuing to write. Remember, your writing is owned by you. You're responsible for it, so be proud of it and enjoy it.

A writer is like a magician – you pick up the pen and the magic begins.

Michael Hyde

CHAPTER 1

6 But nothing's happened in my life 9

This chapter is about OUR EXPERIENCE. And by this term I mean the whole range of our experiences. Everything from dreams (have a look at chapter 5), what you overheard when you lay in bed one night, the earliest awful memory, the most interesting older person you know, an argument with your dad, running along the beach through waves where people fish for white salmon, you or someone you know nicking off from home (or school), being lost in the bush, fantasies, things you think about when you're on the way home or when you're working, your hopes, things that make you laugh out loud or cry really hard. That's what I mean by experience.

I remember that I often used to tell people all the funny things that happened to me when I was working for a friend of mine demolishing houses. When I started writing, I thought that one day I'd be able to include these experiences in a longer story. I was lying in bed one night and like a bolt out of the blue it came to me that that experience could be a story all on its own. The story I wrote was called 'Working for Tommy'.

Later on I was wondering what else I could write about. 'There must be something else', I thought. But what I hadn't been very observant about was that for ages I had been driving underneath the West Gate Bridge on the way to work. There wasn't a day that I didn't think about the day the bridge collapsed and the workers who had died building it. I also knew kids whose relatives had either died or had taken part in the rescue operations.

From thinking about this I eventually wrote a story about a boy whose father dies in the disaster and how



he tries to cope with this – all the things he does to try to understand and get over it as much as he can. It's not all true but the kernel of the story came from my experience – thoughts, people I knew, what I remembered about the day the bridge fell down, articles I'd read. My experience.

There are all kinds of faces, trucks, bush, puddles that you can use in your writing. An old mechanic who fixed up my van in the Otway Ranges featured in a story I wrote about an old man who wanted to be a pirate. I simply used his body and the way he talked and plonked him in my story because I needed an interesting-looking old man for my story. It's a bit like playing God. You can move the pieces around in your writing just like a jigsaw puzzle.

There are many experiences and parts of experiences that you can write about in many forms. Students I have known have written about a huge variety of things that come from their experience – writing about being alone, girlfriends and boyfriends, cubby houses, the death of their dad, arriving in this country as an immigrant . . .

I think writers learn more about the process of writing by shaping their own experiences. Because you know what happened so well, because you know the characters so well, because the story is so much a part of you, writing it becomes fairly easy. However, you do have to believe that other people will find your stuff interesting and you shouldn't become too embarrassed about it all.

One of my students wrote about two boys who fell in love with her at the same time. The two boys were mates and she only loved one of them. She expressed all the pain and joy the situation brought. She stretched out the story like a good piece of chewy, until she had written eighty pages. Now that was exceptional but it shows what can happen. Once you've started this process it's difficult to stop writing.

✓ TRICK 1

There is only one trick here, one trick with many suggestions. Write about:

- ▶ your earliest memory
- ▶ your saddest memory
- ▶ your happiest memory
- ▶ getting lost
- ▶ running away
- ▶ an argument
- ▶ a broken relationship
- ▶ an old friend
- ▶ an old person
- ▶ a job
- ▶ your favourite sport
- ▶ selling papers
- ▶ death
- ▶ changing schools
- ▶ someone you love
- ▶ someone you hate
- ▶ a place you go to when you want to think or just get away from it all
- ▶ a stretch of beach
- ▶ a memorable footy game
- ▶ a story your mum's told you
- ▶ something you love doing
- ▶ something you hate doing
- ▶ the place you hang out
- ▶ the dream you have for your future
- ▶ getting into trouble

- ▶ something you overheard when lying in bed at night
- ▶ someone you respect
- ▶ a really funny incident
- ▶ a teacher you hated
- ▶ a bully who gave you a hard time
- ▶ an act of cruelty
- ▶ wagging
- ▶ a difficult time in your life that you thought would never end
- ▶ the creek
- ▶ a cubby house
- ▶ a secret

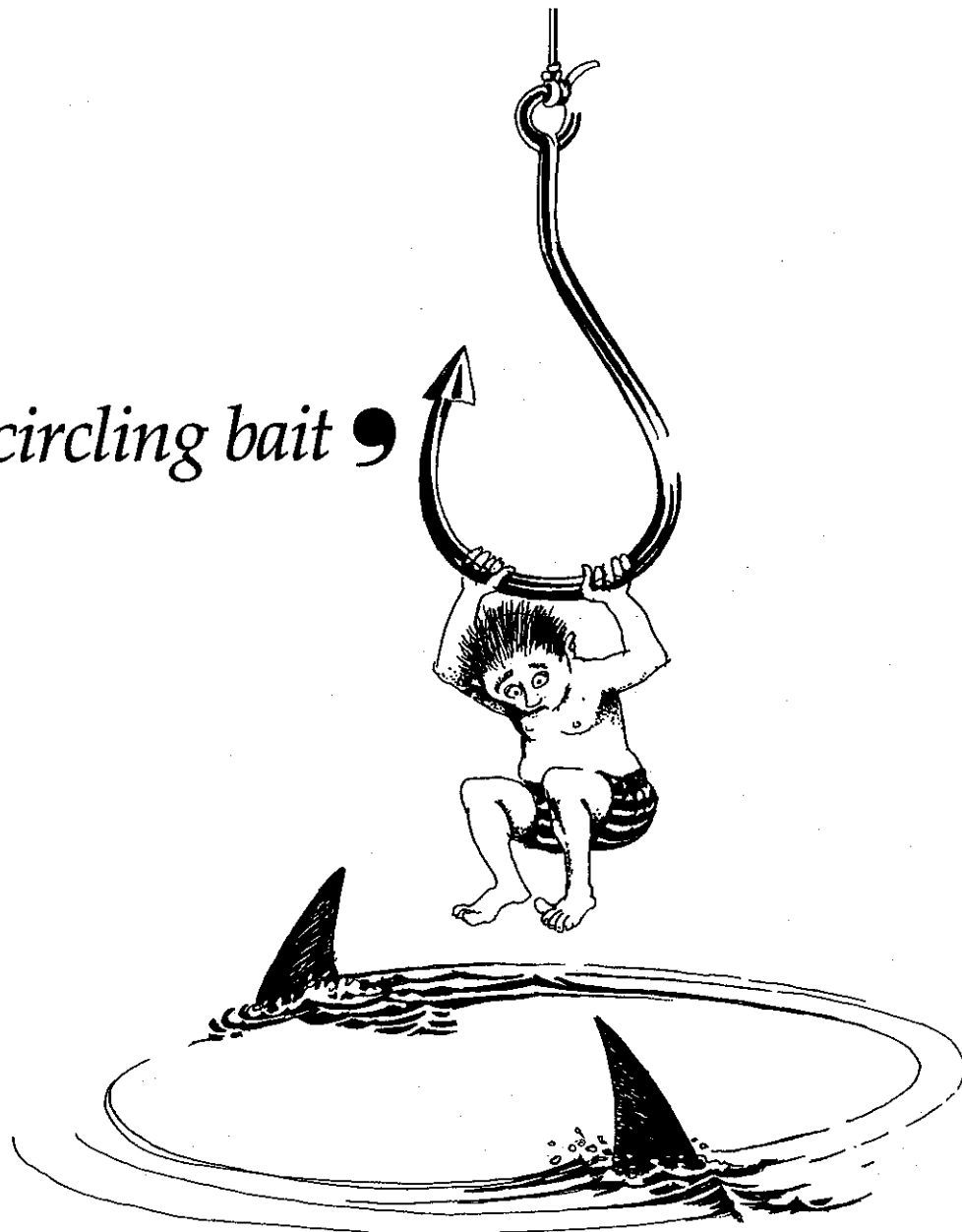
Choose all or one of the above and write all of it down, don't forget your emotions, and please don't tell me that nothing's happened in your life.

He rang me up early before.
 We didn't talk much.
 What was there to say?
 At least he's thinking of me.
 I'm going to see him in four days.
 I don't have to pay. They tell me to charge
 it to 'Offices of Corrective Services'. So I did.
 It takes three and a half hours to get there.
 But it's all worth the one hour I get
 to spend with him.
 At least they don't have the bars and
 telephones.
 Like . . . that other one.
 We'll talk about friends, relatives, the future.
 But not Christmas. I better remember not
 to bring it up. I hope I do remember.
 You see, he won't be with us.
 He'll be with them. God how I hate
 THEM.

BRONWYN McMANUS

CHAPTER 2

● Like a fish circling bait ●



READ THIS STORY OR I'LL MAKE YOU SORRY!!

I suppose if you started a story with this line you'd have some chance of somebody reading it. You might also turn people off. When you're starting off a story you have to be far more clever than the person who wrote that first sentence. Readers want you to grab their attention. This can be done gently, or amusingly, or dramatically, or with intrigue. There are many ways.

With long stories you generally have more time to capture the reader's interest. With shorter stories you've got less time. In both instances you've got to dangle attractive enough bait on the hook so the fish will think about having a nibble – if it's delicious enough, the fish just might want to take a big chomp and so be hooked!

You might think that this is a horrible way to look at your writing; nevertheless I think it's realistic. Nobody, except maybe your teacher and your closest friend, will want to read something that's dull and boring from the start. And if you begin in an interesting way then it will have a good effect on you because you'll feel proud of your ability.

Beginning a story is like the cover of a book – you tend to pick up a book that has an attractive cover. But choosing the right way to start is hard. Often it's hard because you're nervous about starting. There are many stories about famous writers and artists who did all kinds of things to get out of starting a painting or a piece of writing. So you're in good company when you're confronted by this problem.

One of the methods I've used is this: use the first *thought* you have about a story as your first line. Frequently it turns out to be a beauty. Sometimes I use a line out of my journal that is somehow connected to a story I'm writing. There have been times when I've begun a story and left the beginning till later on, or even till last.

As you can see, there are many methods. Any way you choose to begin is OK as long as you pay attention to it and think about it. Often as not, the way you begin your piece of writing sets the mood and determines your style and how good it's going to be.

There is no set way to begin a story. I've begun stories with dialogue, a joke, a description of an old bloke, a feeling. Sometimes I've told the reader about the whole story almost before I've properly begun – other times I've just let the story unfold.

But I don't start anything with 'One day' or 'Once upon a time'! It's like writing, 'And then my mum woke me up' at the end of a dream story. When people see these lines they start yawning before they've got past the first sentence.

✓ TRICK 1

Look at a story that's finished. It could be yours or someone else's. Read the beginning few lines or the first paragraph. Then read the whole piece of writing. Return to the beginning. Now write a *new* beginning paragraph for the story that you think is better than the original.

✓ TRICK 2

Have you an idea for a piece of writing? If you have, then think about it and write down the first idea that you have. Let that line be the start of your new story.

✓ TRICK 3

Make a list of the first couple of sentences from all the stories you've written. Draw three columns with the headings 'TERRIFIC', 'GOOD' and 'OK' then decide in what column each 'beginning' should go. Put them in the columns. Compare your decisions with somebody else's list.

✓ TRICK 4

Once again, look at the stories you or your class have written. Cross out, or cover with a ruler or your hand, the first two sentences or the first paragraph of each story. Write down the second paragraph or the third and fourth sentence. Let that be the start of the story. Which start was the best? Try to work out why.

✓ TRICK 5

Read through a piece of writing that you or somebody else has done. Work out a *title* for the story by using a *line* or a *sentence* or a *word* from the actual story. It could be 'Get Lost!', 'Captured by Robots', 'River Sunsets' or 'Meat in the Sandwich'. Select something that seems to sum up what the story is on about.

✓ TRICK 6

Never start a story with 'One day' or 'Once upon a time'. The only exception might be if you're writing a fairy story, and even then you don't have to.

✓ TRICK 7

Do TRICK 4 in chapter 3 – 'I've got nothin' to write'.

I was a great morning, the rain had gone the night before, the air was fresh, the sun was out, everything looked bright and new.

I felt great, I felt as if I could flap my hands up and down and fly off like a bird.

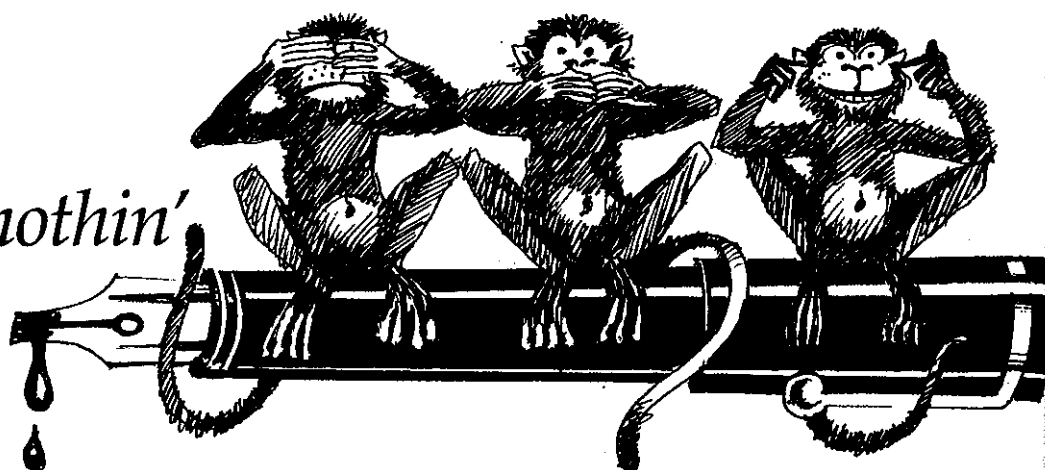
Yep, it was a nice day.

Well it was, until I saw Stone waiting for me at the school gate.

RICKY XANTHOPOULOS

CHAPTER 3

‘I’ve got nothin’ to write’



I must have heard students say this at least three thousand times. It's said because they don't feel like writing or because they've got writer's block or because they don't know what makes a good story – they don't know how to CHOOSE A TOPIC. After a bit of a chat these students often loosen up and realise that they do in fact have a story to tell.

When I first began to really get into writing I worried that I'd run out of things to write. Now I know that I'll go to my grave with many stories unwritten, simply because I'll have run out of time. In chapter 1 I talked about driving under the West Gate Bridge and realising that I had the basis of a story. From that moment on I don't think I've ever run out of something to write. I think I began to look at the world through the eyes of a writer – to develop the skill of choosing topics. Time, practice and thought made me more skilled. This is probably the way skill is acquired in any job, hobby, study, sport or craft. It's become such an obsession with me that since starting to write this chapter I've come up with ideas for three new stories.

Now I don't expect you to be as crazy about writing as I am, but rest assured that, even if you only write at school, you will get better at knowing what to write, as long as you stick at it.

Many years ago, at Footscray Technical School, there was a boy who always said, 'I've got nothin' to write'. I suspected that he wasn't very confident about writing. He had trouble with his spelling and he probably thought writing stories was a load of rubbish, that this writing business wasn't fair dinkum school work. He and I chatted for two or three writing classes. Then one day he was waiting for me. I couldn't

have stopped his excitement if I'd tried. 'Hey, sir,' he said. 'I've been coming to and from school past this paddock and I watch this bird, this hawk. Especially in the arvo, he just circles above the paddock and I just stand there and watch him. I stay there for ages. He just floats and wobbles looking down into the grass – looking for mice and lizards and stuff. I saw him swoop one time . . .'

'Do you love him?', I asked.

'Oh, yeah', he beamed. 'And I know what to write'.

It happens like that sometimes. As I've said, it's all a bit magical. When you get an idea, note it down in your folder or in a book – don't think you'll remember it, because more often than not you won't. You might be ready to write the story straight away or it might be like this book. I've been thinking on and off about writing this kind of book for about eight years. You might get an idea in Year 7 and not write about it until Year 10. Sometimes that might be because you haven't time, or perhaps the idea seems to be like a loaf of bread, baking in the warm oven of your brain. The idea should be taken out when you're ready to eat it.

Some of the best writing meetings I've ever had have been when I was doing yard duty and kids would chat away to me, often in a different way than they can in the classroom. The stories that come out of these chats are often entertaining, sometimes they make you think and often what emerges is a whole lot of TOPICS.

Now I know there's a great temptation for you to ask the teacher for a topic or a starting-off sentence, and there's nothing wrong with this – I've seen some great writing that came from kids choosing a topic from a long list. But try not to go for that option all the time. Think about what I've said in this chapter first.

✓ TRICK 1

So your mind's blank and you've got to write something. Try this. Sit up straight in your seat. Uncross your legs and place your hands comfortably in your lap. Close your eyes. Count every inward breath you make. Count ten breaths and then count one to ten again. Do this for five minutes. If you can get away by yourself, you may feel less self-conscious. As you do this, all kinds of thoughts will float in and out of your mind. After five minutes, write down the thought that sticks in your mind the most. Then build a story around this thought.

✓ TRICK 2

List a number of emotions like joy, sorrow, terror, hatred, jubilation, anger and peace. Then choose one of the emotional words and think of an experience that you associate with that word. Tell the story. A variation of this trick is to use all the same words but write them on slips of paper. Put them in a box and then you or your whole class could have a lucky dip, writing about the experience that's linked with the particular word you pull out.

✓ TRICK 3

Collect a heap of interesting/striking/awful pictures. Stick them down in an order that suits you and then tell a story that seems to fit the pictures. If you like, you could keep a collection of the 'picture stories' other students in your class have done. This will be helpful on other days when you've 'got nothin' to write'.

✓ TRICK 4

Collect:

- ▶ all the titles of stories written by your class
- ▶ the first two sentences of each story written by your class
- ▶ twenty song titles

Write them on separate slips of paper. Put them all in a box. Have a lucky dip. Keep on dipping until you find one that appeals to you. Write a story based on the title, sentences or song you have pulled out.

✓ TRICK 5

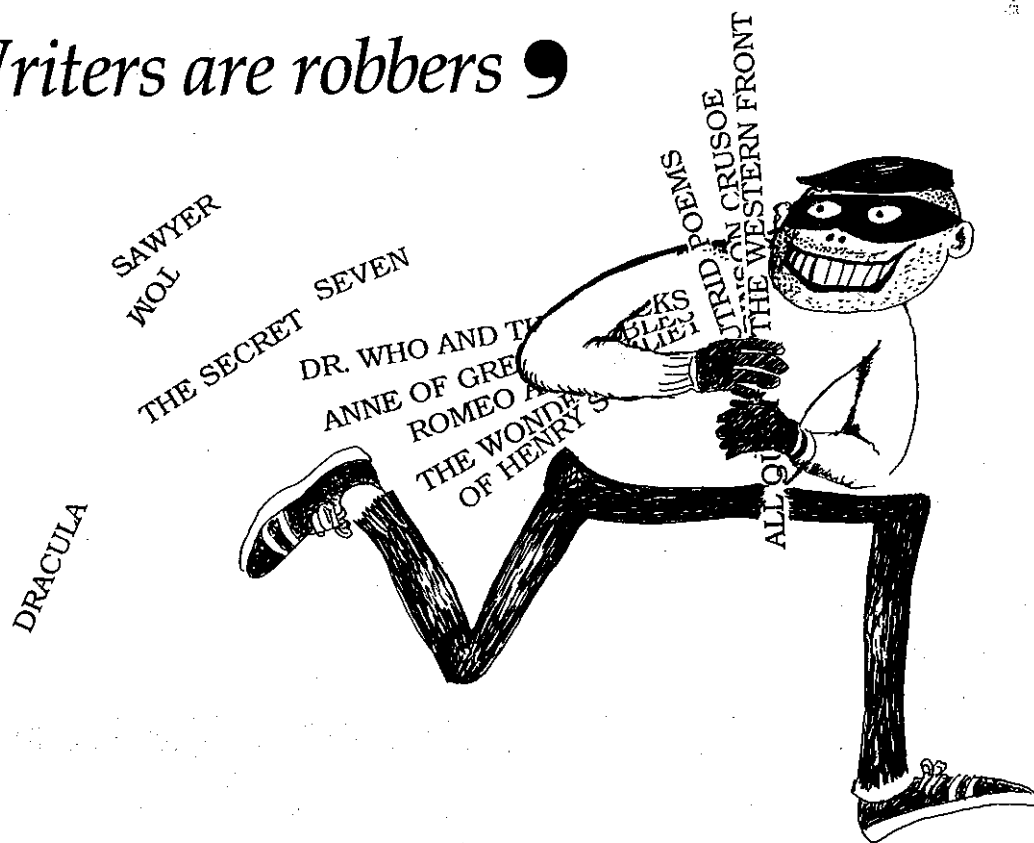
Read chapter 1 – 'But nothing's happened in my life'.

As I lie, I think about my Mum. She works from 10.00 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. He is always at the pub when my Mum comes home. She has a rest for a while, and then makes tea. She dishes ours out to us, then makes sure there is another plate left over. She fills the extra plate, and puts a tea towel over it. She places it on the bench. This is his tea and... BANG! the slamming of the back door signals his arrival. I lie in bed and hope and pray that he will not start another blue. Then it happens. He sees one of his records out of its cover and starts going on without remembering that he put it there himself. Mum tries to explain this to him, but he just refuses to hear her.

ANONYMOUS (from *The meat in the sandwich*)

CHAPTER 4

6 Writers are robbers 9



'Writers are robbers' doesn't mean that writers actually steal an idea or a story and then pretend that they wrote it. It means that by reading, a writer is likely to pick up ideas from other writers.

When I first began to do a lot of writing, I went and chatted with a great Australian writer called John Morrison. He told me that writers need to read because from reading you learn things about what topics people write about, how they might organise an essay, how they use punctuation and how they express themselves. You learn because you see all these things demonstrated in the other writers' stories. Increasingly, you pick up ideas as you *read as a writer*.

If you play a sport, you'll know that by watching others you are able to reflect on the way *they* play and the way *you* play the sport. Usually this process of learning is much more effective than simply being told how to do something.

On my desk I have a picture of Dylan Thomas, a Welsh writer, and Kurt Vonnegut, an American writer. If I had a picture of John Morrison that would be there too. They are there because I've picked up quite a few tips from those people.

Dylan Thomas helped me to experiment with *language*, to be more *poetic*. After reading some of Kurt Vonnegut's books, I wrote a story called 'Lies = Truth' where I experimented with a certain *style* he used. An Australian writer, Katherine Susannah Prichard, taught me a lot about how to develop *atmosphere*.

At the moment I'm trying to write a little kid's picture story, so I'm reading quite a few of my four-year-old daughter's books.

We can learn from how other writers have handled some aspect of writing. When we do this we are using these other writers as models.

That is why I gave some poetry books to two students who were beginning to write poetry.

To another student who wanted to write a 'private eye' story I gave a novel by Peter Corris, an Australian writer of private detective novels.

And to another student who had problems writing a political thriller, I suggested some exciting accounts of workers on strike.

From these models, the students learnt much more than I could ever have taught them by writing instructions on the board. Seeing *how* others do it is a great way to learn. And the more you write yourself, the more you'll read as a writer.

✓ TRICK 1

Choose a piece of writing. It can be a novel, a friend's story, a poem from a class publication, a car manual, an essay or whatever. Read it. Write down *one* thing that you learnt about writing from the writing you read. Share this with other people in your class.

✓ TRICK 2

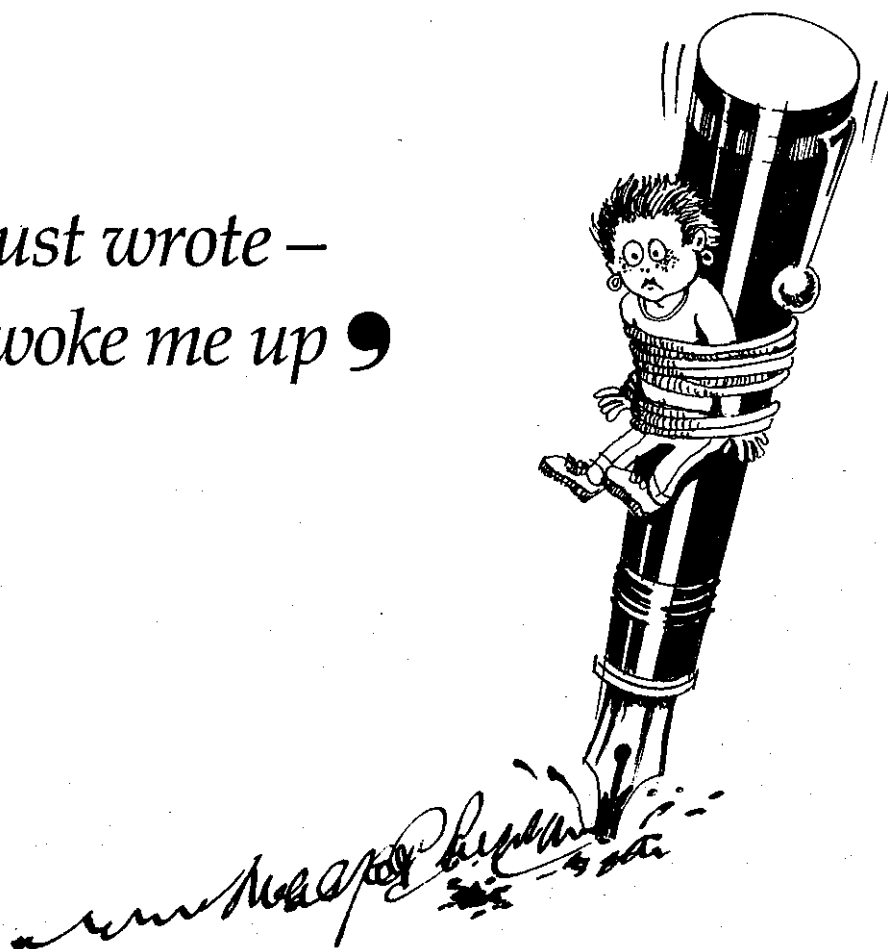
READ!

The pigsties were at the far end of the yard. We walked towards them, Gwilym dressed in minister's black, though it was a weekday morning, and me in a serge suit with a darned bottom, past three hens scrabbling the muddy cobbles and a collie with one eye, sleeping with it open. The ramshackle outhouses had tumbling, rotten roofs, jagged holes in their sides, broken shutters, and peeling whitewash; rusty screws ripped out from the dangling, crooked boards; the lean cat of the night before sat snugly between the splintered jaws of bottles, cleaning its face, on the tip of the rubbish pile that rose triangular and smelling sweet and strong to the level of the riddled cart-house roof. There was nowhere like that farm-yard in all the slapdash county, nowhere so poor and grand and dirty as that square of mud and rubbish and bad wood and falling stone, where a bucketful of old and bedraggled hens scratched and laid small eggs. A duck quacked out of the trough in one deserted sty. Now a young man and a curly boy stood staring and sniffing over a wall at a sow, with its tits on the mud, giving suck.

DYLAN THOMAS
(from *Portrait of the artist as a young dog*)

CHAPTER 5

6 *My pen – it just wrote – then my mum woke me up* 9



- There are so many things that go on in our mind that are hard to make sense of.
- Einstein said that we only used 15 per cent of our brains.
- When I was a boy, my father and I used to do mental telepathy, ESP, communicating thoughts or a word to each other by thinking hard about them.
- Sometimes our dreams, even though a bit crazy, help us to work out problems in our life – or at least give us a few good stories to tell.

The ideas above are all difficult to handle, difficult to explain and difficult to understand. They are to do with STREAMS OF CONSCIOUSNESS and DREAMS. They are unconnected thoughts where you aren't exactly sure where they came from.

To use those ideas for your writing and to actually write about them is to go into what people often call fantasy. There were times in my writing life when I thought fantasy wasn't as good as writing about real things – things that you could see, touch, feel, hear and taste. Fantasy, dreams and such like are often put down because they aren't 'real'. But many wonderful ideas, inventions, thoughts and books have come out of people taking notice of things like weird thoughts and dreams.

Think of how often your mind wanders, how often you think of things when you see something else although the two things aren't really connected, or how you have a dream that you remember really clearly and somehow seems interesting, or how one thought is not completely connected to another thought but they appear to be connected.

I've had students who have written terrific pieces using these kinds of thoughts.

Tony, a Year 7 student, wrote the most fantastic prehistoric stories based on an idea he got one day walking down the street and imagining what that street must have looked like a million years ago.

Kim, a Year 10 girl, wrote poetry based on thoughts, noises and images she had while drifting off to sleep – that's hers on the opposite page.

Of course, you might be a person who doesn't have these kinds of thoughts. That's fine, because I can assure you that you will if you get into these tricks below, and they'll probably give you a good laugh.

✓ TRICK 1

Get a piece of lined paper. Get a pen. Now write whatever you want to write. Anything that's in your mind. Anything you see. Anything! There are three rules here:

- ▶ One, you must write and not stop writing, even if it's nonsense. You can't take your pen off the paper for ten minutes.
- ▶ Two, you must not take time off to think.
- ▶ Three, you can't talk!

Now, I dare you all to read out what you wrote.

✓ TRICK 2

Write what you've thought about in the last five or ten minutes – or at least what you can remember. Remember, it doesn't have to be logical.

✓ TRICK 3

Look at objects or people in the room till you see something that reminds you of something, someone, an event or whatever, from your life. Write down how they're connected to each other, how one made you think of the other. And remember, it doesn't have to make sense.

✓ TRICK 4

Leave a pen and paper next to your bed. If you have a dream or dreams that you remember, write them down as soon as you wake up – even if it's in the middle of the night. Put down every detail. Colour, black and white, the people; whether you were frightened; if there was a boat, was it a rowing boat, a cargo ship or a canoe; what was said and was it whispered or screamed? Could everybody hear what was said or was it only you? Did you know any of the people or places in the dream? Did it mean anything to you? Then with those notes you can maybe write out a more cohesive form of the dream. Or use them to write a poem. But please, do me a favour, don't finish off any of the writing with 'and then my mum woke me up'. It must have been written 2 000 000 times before.

In bed at night
The T.V. still goes
Dynasty babbling on.
My sister flicks the pages
of New Idea.
My Dad snores
like he's going to croak it.
My little brother walks around
Saucy grin
Jumping into my sister's bed.

In bed at night
Cars rushing on the highway.
The T.V. still goes
My Dad still snores like he's going
to croak it.
Soon I hope.

Finally my Mum climbs into
bed.
The T.V. off
my sister sleepily goes
to bed
everything's suddenly gone
all quiet.

Counting sheep gradually falling
ASLEEP
ASLEEP

KIM GUSSENHOVEN

CHAPTER 6

6 The tip looked like a tip – seen one, seen 'em all 9

This chapter is about DESCRIPTION. It is closely related to the one on atmosphere. If you haven't looked at that one already, check it out after you've had a go at this one.

There are a number of times when you have to spend time in describing a person, an event or a thing. It's so the reader can build up the picture in the video in his or her head. They might be small occurrences or big. It might be the face of the old woman who owns the milk bar on the corner that you've been buying milk from all these years. Or the tinkle of the bell on the door as you go into the shop. Maybe it's the way the saliva drooled down the purple lips of the Doberman as it leapt at your throat. It could be the way your girlfriend's or boyfriend's kisses taste like a lemon and strawberry gelati. Quite possibly you might be in the middle of a story that has a car driving through the pelting storm, the rain smashing like sledgehammers on the thin roof.

Writing's a funny thing. Sometimes you're not sure just what works, but you do have to think about description. You have to be more observant of people, streets, moods, skin, colours, feelings, size, arguments – even ants.

A friend and I used to go to the bush many years ago and I remember he was part of my education about the bush and the powers of observation. He once showed me a bullant crawling up a tree with peeling bark. There were the colours of the bark, the way the ant moved, the insects and bits and pieces under the bark. It seems that life and writing becomes much fuller when you observe.

I once wrote a story early in my writing life called 'Will Ya Shutup about Spiritmen?' It was all about these kids getting lost in the bush and Aboriginal spirituality. But I didn't only write it for that. I wrote it partly because I needed practice in descriptive writing.

✓ TRICK 1

A toilet roll works best but you can get a similar effect by making a hole with your fingers and hand. Describe everything that exists and is going on in that small circle. Of course it depends on how close you are to your subject. But describe everything.



✓ TRICK 2

If you can go outside, have a look at a garbage bin. If you're inside, look at a rubbish bin. Write about it once. Then have another look. Write about it again. Repeat this another couple of times. Don't forget shapes, smells, memories, inside, outside. When I do this, I often find that the third try is the best. But then again, sometimes it's the first. What's yours?

✓ TRICK 3

Choose an object, a thing. It could be in the room now, or in your bedroom, or in your memory. If I was doing this I'd describe the shell next to my bed, with rainbow bands of yellow, blue-green and orange. The sun, sea and sand. Describe your object – and think of a story, poem or song that your description makes you think of. What was my shell doing 10 000 years ago? What civilisation sang and danced on the beach where I found it? I'm possibly not the first human who held it. What was that glow around the edges of the shell? Write your story, based on your object.

I t was scary at night. The wind was howling and the leaves off the trees crunched under our feet as we walked. Suddenly we heard someone scream. We all ran, Tim couldn't stop talking because he was so scared.

We got to the creek, Jason was leading. Our torches were flashing over the trees as we were running. We finally got there. The cubby house looked spooky by torchlight. It was right on the bank of the creek. A bit of it was hanging over the edge, it was made of dead trees and branches with hessian sacks lining the inside of it. All we could hear was the sound of the trees.

BAKHOUS SEMAAN

CHAPTER 7

6 *What d'you reckon you're lookin' at?* 9
6 *Not you, that's for sure!* 9

This is all about the way people actually talk to each other. It's all about DIALOGUE. When you're writing you generally can't put in all the 'um's' and 'ah's' that go on in general conversation, but you've got to be able to capture the flavour of a conversation. You need to get a feel for the way people say things, what they do when they're listening, whether they talk through their nose or look down their nose, if they speak with an Italian accent or a broad Australian accent, are nervous, aggressive, tragic, a bit mad, are sad because their dad just died or sad because their footy team lost the game.

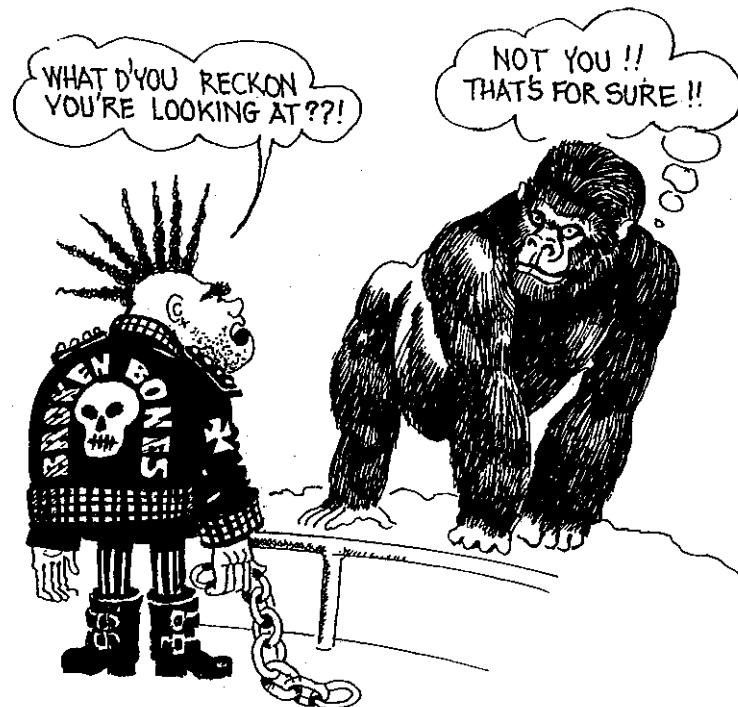
You can train yourself to listen to all these things and a lot more – on trams and in trains, in bed, in shops and in classrooms.

Terry, a twelve-year-old student of mine, became very interested in how people spoke to each other. After listening to people in a bank one day, he told me that they often talk about yesterday or the past and that they frequently continue on with their stories and rarely respond to their friends' comments.

This is the kind of thing you begin to realise when you keep your ears open.

Sometimes this same student would talk to himself and have wonderful ideas walking through his head. He made a habit of writing these down, and they produced some very interesting writing. You could try listening to yourself when you're talking to yourself, out loud or just in your head. Sometimes it can be a bit hard to work out whether you have said something or just thought it. Listening to yourself is particularly good for those bits in stories when you say, 'She thought to herself, "What's he doing here?"' or when it's a good idea to let the reader know what's going on in one of your characters' minds.

Listening not only to what people say but also to how they say it helps to stop your dialogue from becoming wooden, dead and boring. I once wrote a story where I became too concerned about *what* I wanted the characters to say and almost completely ignored *how* they said it. Consequently I and my readers got a bit bored with my dialogue. In that story I should have had more fun with the way my characters spoke, because although you create your own characters, to some extent they have a life of their own too. If you have a pretty good idea of what your character's like, then sometimes the words seem to just flow from their mouths. The people in your story want you to breathe a bit of life into them. Sounds a bit like magic doesn't it? But then, good writing is magic.



✓ TRICK 1

What's gone on in your mind over the last ten minutes? The girl across the room? Last night's argument? A possible detention? Getting grounded? The netball game at lunchtime? Christmas? This book? Hating school? Loving school? Loving life? A problem won't leave you alone? Getting your licence? Skating at the Half-Pipe? Your bike's stolen? Who knows? Only you know what's gone on in your head in the last ten minutes. Write all of it down, as much as you can remember.

✓ TRICK 2

If you're allowed out of school, go down to the shops. Cake shops and banks are very good value for this trick. Stand next to some of the people in the shop and listen to what they say and observe how they say it. Put it down exactly as they talk. You might have to ask permission from the owner or the manager – especially in banks – otherwise they might think that you're up to no good.

✓ TRICK 3

You could do TRICK 2 at home for homework by listening to friends and relatives chatting in the kitchen and lounge room. Maybe you'll discover that people talk differently in different locations as well as changing the way they talk according to who they're talking to.

I could hear Sarah saying, 'Should I wear the red dress or the black dress? I reckon the black dress looks better. What do you think Megan? Oh, no, the red dress looks better. No, the red dress makes me look fat. Oh, but the black dress makes me look about 11 months pregnant.'

'Will you just shut-up!' yelled Megan. 'The black dress looks better.'

'Thanks, Megan,' said Sarah changing into the black dress. 'Should I wear red lipstick or pink lipstick?'

'I think the pink lipstick looks better, it'll go nice with your ear-rings,' answered Megan.

'Yeh, you're right, I wonder whether guys go through this, 'What will I wear?' 'Does anything clash?' All the things that girls worry about?'

LAURENE DAVIDSON

CHAPTER 8

● He's marked the ball 30 metres out from goal – directly in front. The siren's sounded!! ●

On the way to school my thirteen-year-old son was waiting for his bus. He had woken up to a misty morning. The mist had crept up from the river that sleeps at the bottom of our street. He pulled out his journal and began to write about it. You see, he was on the spot and he wanted to record his impressions. He was on LOCATION, which is what this chapter is about.

There are times when being on the spot helps you to write about things accurately. I taught a boy once who not only had difficulty in writing, he had not put pen to paper for a few months. One morning we went down to an old iron foundry where the sparks flew and lit up the ancient factory, exposing the grime-encrusted floor and the leaky tin roof that let in the rain in winter. We peered into the fiery furnaces and saw the white-blue heat that scorched our cheeks and dried our eyes. And all the time we were there, John wrote and wrote and wrote. He produced two pages of writing, full of images that leapt from the page.

A teacher friend of mine often took kids out on location writing. He would take them to places like the football ground and get them to sit in the seats and say the kind of thing that this chapter is called. They would sit there, scribbling away, poetry often being the end result.

A favourite of mine was to take students up on the roof of the school. From that vantage point they could see all the bridges and steeples and trains and houses and shops that lay within a ten kilometre radius. Sitting there watching this panorama from the eye of an eagle, there was no one who couldn't write about something they saw or felt or thought about.

On other occasions we would hop in the mini bus and travel a short distance to the Maribyrnong River where a hermit had lived for ten years. We would chat to the gummy old hermit and then, with our feet dangling over the edge of his jetty, we would write about the river and the cormorants perched on dead trees, drying out their wings. Or we would write poetry about the hermit's rain-barrel home, or (secretly) about the hermit's amazing blue eyes that lay deep in his face and reminded us of dried-out river gullies.



✓ TRICK 1

Ask your teacher if you could help him or her organise an excursion to some location that you think would be good to write about. I've already given you heaps of examples above. Or maybe your school allows unaccompanied excursions. One girl at our school negotiated with her teacher to take a day off and go down to her favourite stretch of beach. She returned the next day with two poems and some extra jottings.

Other places we went to were brick factories, creeks, milk bars, school boiler rooms, the local haunted house, ovals, shelter sheds and canteens. The sky's the limit.

The reason for all this roaming about the countryside can best be explained by what a famous French writer said to his nephew, when the nephew told his uncle that he wanted to become a good writer:

I want you to go down to Moulrier Avenue. I want you to write about Moulrier Avenue so that even if I didn't know the name of the street, I would know that it was Moulrier Avenue and no other. Because you will write about the smells, the sights, the memories, the thoughts that it makes you have. All this will help you to make your writing more real, it will goad you on when you don't think you've anything to write and it will help you write when you are stuck in a room and writing about far off places.

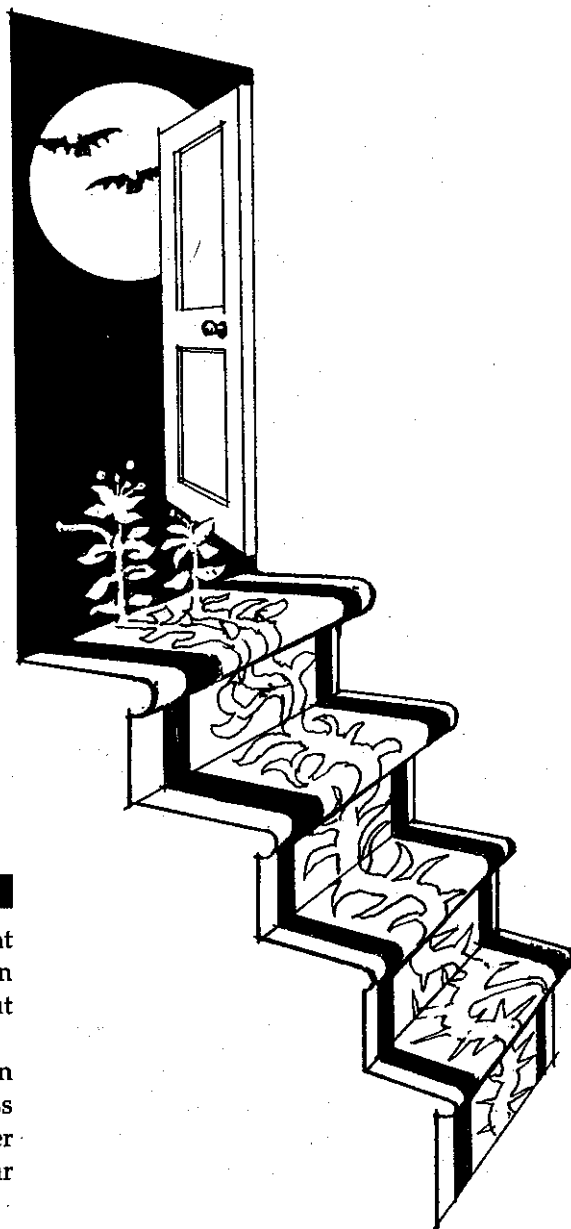
The mist was not like creamy white mist, but much darker, rich cream, white. You could only see, at the most, 100 feet.

The weird thing about the fog was that when I got to the next suburb there wasn't any more fog, it was clear and sunny. But when you turned your head slowly around and looked at where you had just come from, it was a dark, white, city.

SHANNON HYDE

CHAPTER 9

- 6 *It was a spooky house* 9
- 6 *The sun was shining* 9
- 6 *She was an old woman* 9
- 6 *The water was blue* 9



This chapter is a bit like chapter 16 – ‘But the accident only took a couple of seconds . . .’ and chapter 6 on description, except that here I want you to think about **ATMOSPHERE**.

Whether you’re writing about a haunted house, an old lady, a beautiful day, an eagle or the roll and toss of the ocean, you have to work out how the reader is going to be able to actually feel, see, touch, hear and smell what you’re talking about.

If an important part of your story is dealing with something like a spooky house then you and the reader have to think of the house as real – fair dinkum.

You would have to put in things like the cobwebs that brush across your face, the scuttle of rats' feet, the broken beer bottles, the wind that scurries under the doors, the room at the top of the stairs with a locked door, the stained glass that throws an eerie, shattered light on the couch that sits in front of the tired old fireplace.

Once you get into the habit, you just get better and better. You become a better writer.

✓ TRICK 1

Think of a house, building, room, hut, shop, cave, or cubby house that sticks out in your mind. It doesn't have to be special. You only have to know it. Describe one of these in detail. Leave nothing out. If there are dirty socks lying in the corner of the room, put them in.

✓ TRICK 2

Most people have seen and been in water at some stage of their lives. Choose a river, stream, ocean, beach, sea, wave, gutter, stormwater drain, flood, lake, waterfall, thunderstorm, shower of rain, swimming pool or spa. Describe it and don't forget the colours, sound and coolness.

✓ TRICK 3

Have you ever known or seen an old person? Do you have a grandpa or grandma? What about that interesting old woman who lives alone in the flat or house near you? I want you to describe one of those faces. Make up what you can't remember. And if you really don't know anybody with an old face, then imagine what your teacher or friend might look like when they get old. Remember the wrinkles and creases, the yellowy-white hair, the memories in their eyes and the hairs in their nose. Everything.

Autumn feeds into Winter, the cold and frosty season.

The rain will fall upon you, without a single reason.

The wind will howl, the thunder will roar,

The lightning will crack and the rain will pour.

JOANNE COURT

6 I've got this idea . . . 9

A good idea for a story pops into your head one day. It might be something that's always fascinated you or it might be something you've just remembered. But when you come to write it, it seems that you don't have enough to say.

When this happens to me I put it down in my journal, which is like planting a seed in the ground. After a period of time and sun and rain, it germinates. The time of germination might be half an hour or a few years. It just has to be in my brain long enough for it to blossom.

Now all this sounds like 'gobbledegook' but I'm sure that's just what a lot of good ideas need – time. Your brain just has to have time to work on them. However, there are steps you can take to hurry this process along. A bit like adding fertiliser to your garden.

I had wanted to write a pirate story for a long time, so I eventually sat down and started to scribble down some ideas. As often happens, one idea led to another. And when I was stumped I'd ask myself a WHO, WHAT, WHERE, HOW, or WHY question. I ended up with a page filled with ideas:

- ▶ he lives in Yarraville
- ▶ he's 75 years old
- ▶ he's always wanted to be a pirate
- ▶ he wants to achieve this ambition before he dies
- ▶ only he and the kid next door know what he's going to do
- ▶ the bloke could look and talk like an old mechanic I met up the bush – he talks like Dracula
- ▶ he could build his own boat
- ▶ where does he hide it? – in a creek that runs under the West Gate Bridge
- ▶ what ships does he attack?
- ▶ is he successful or a miserable failure?
- ▶ what else does he have to organise before he becomes a pirate? – eye patches, planks (as in 'walking the plank!') and a parrot

- ▶ he's not successful but his failures are funny – like, in his little boat he attacks a large ocean-going liner, and it doesn't even see him
- ▶ his friend Stanislav is a religious maniac who thinks what Joe (that's the pirate's name) is doing is stupid and immoral

I ended up with many ideas and thoughts, some of which I got rid of because they weren't good enough. However, *just writing them down helped me to think*. I also saw how some ideas were connected to others. I then left them and had a good think.

When I returned to my list I started to rearrange the parts like the pieces in a jigsaw puzzle. Then I began to do a story map. Finally I began to write, 'The Marauding Pirate of Maribyrnong'.

Another story I wrote called 'Eagle' began one day when I saw an eagle in the city suburb of South Melbourne. I thought to myself, 'Now that would make a good yarn'. I didn't know where to start. I realised I didn't know enough, that I needed to do some investigations. I needed to do some RESEARCH. So I contacted some kids at the local school who told me stories about the eagle, and gave me some names of people who'd fed the eagle every day. I went and saw these people. They had a scrapbook of newspaper articles about the eagle. I discovered that some people hated the eagle living in South Melbourne. And obviously, some people loved it. I drove around the area that the eagle flew over and took notes. I came across a really interesting old seven-storey building and wondered how I could use it in my story. The curator of birds at the Melbourne Zoo told me heaps about eagles. I sat and watched eagles for a long time.

One thing led to another. I felt like a detective gathering information – and all the time the story line, the plot, developed in my brain, until I reached a point where I knew I was ready to begin.

Development and research generally takes a bit of time but the work is worth it. By the time you're ready to start, the story feels as though it's a part of you and is easier to write. It's like preparing yourself to run a marathon. Training, sleep, good food and exercises are necessary if you're going to complete the distance.

✓ TRICK 1

Do you have an idea for a story? If you have, do this. Write the idea at the top of the page. Ask yourself these questions and write down your answers:

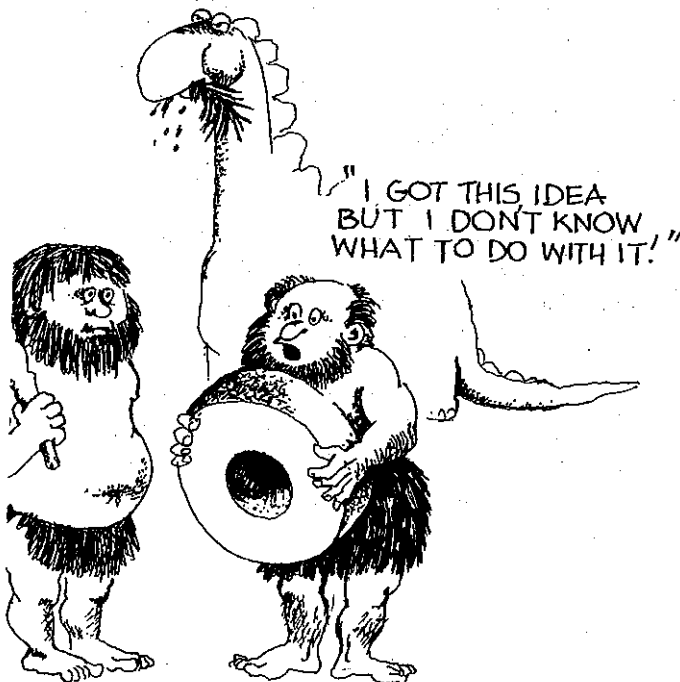
- a Why is the idea interesting to you?
- b What characters do you want in your story?
- c What kinds of personalities do your characters have? What are they like?
- d Who are the important characters?
- e How are the characters related to each other?
- f Where's the story going to take place?
- g What are the important places?
- h What's going to happen in your story?
- i Do you need some more bits and pieces to make your story more interesting? What are they?
- j Do you need to know more about something in your story? If so, how are you going to get this information?

Show your answers to somebody else and see if they've got any ideas to add. Have a long look at your answers and then arrange them in the order that you want your story to take shape. Perhaps at this stage you should read chapter 11 on 'Story maps'. Then start writing.

✓ TRICK 2

This one is for the people who didn't have an idea for a story. With this trick I want you to ask yourself all the questions (a-j) that appear in TRICK 1. However, this time I'll be kind and give you some ideas to work with:

- ▶ A seal that lost its way and was found swimming up a river.
- ▶ A school camp where lots of strange/funny/dangerous/bad things happened.



- ▶ Walking to the end of a beach, you come across a cave that you've never seen before.
- ▶ Two groups of kids at school who don't get along with each other.
- ▶ Friday night in your town.

✓ TRICK 3

Below are six *ingredients* for one story. The ingredients tell you 'what', 'where' and 'who' but don't include the 'how' and the 'why' of the story. You'll have to work them out:

- a a dead body
- b a hermit
- c fish frying on a campfire
- d an empty rowing boat
- e a deserted hut
- f a dumb teacher

Now, write your story and remember you can arrange the ingredients in any order you wish. You can add to them if you want to. Just make sure that all the above ingredients (a-f) appear in your story in some way.

But Charlie was one thing I'd never seen from the window. Not even through the telescope on a clear day when you could see right across the blue waters. From the start, Charlie was something completely different for me in my life.

I remember pressing my face as close to the glass as I could, my nose squashed flat, watching the eagle rise and fall round about and down the face of his new Park Towers mountain.

One minute he'd fall, like a lead weight dropped out the window – then, when you thought he'd been shot and was about to splatter on the concrete path, you'd see an effortless flick, flick, flick of those mighty wings and he'd slide sideways and then catch an updraught of warm air. In a matter of seconds he'd have risen seventeen floors and be back up near my window again.

MICHAEL HYDE (from *Eagle*)

CHAPTER 11

What happened then? Where did you go? 9

A number of writers use story maps. Story maps help you get a clear picture of where your story is heading, get your thoughts in order, and work out plot, characters and setting. Basically you see what happens and when it happens. Maps show the main stages of your story. You see how it's going to progress, who the major and minor characters are and what places are central to the story.

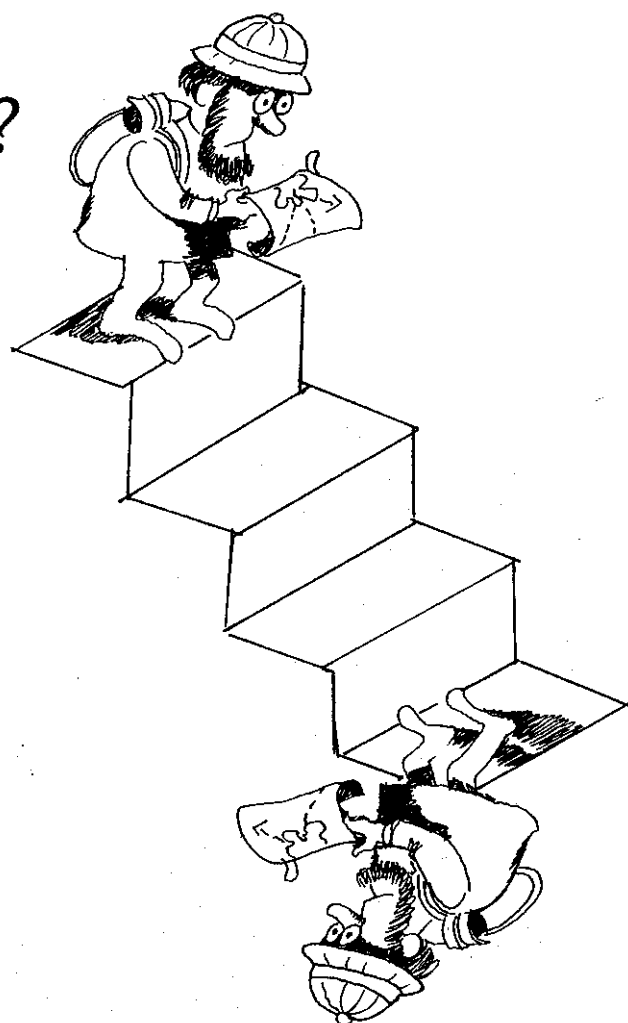
They also help you pace your story. Stories go up and down and sideways. At one point there might be a lot of drama, then some humour, maybe some sadness, absolute joy, possibly some relief. If there is some variation in your story it helps to maintain interest and keeps it all moving along.

I'm sure you've read stories that seem to get bogged down or boring in places. Sometimes that's because you're reading a part of the story that doesn't interest you at the moment, it might be because the reader is thinking about something more important to them at the moment, but it might be because the writer didn't pace the story very well.

Story maps help you reflect, or think about your story in a creative way. At the end of each major stage of a story, something else begins to happen. It's a bit like seeing your writing in chapters.

If you have done a story map you will realise that the different stages can occur in a different order. And you will also realise that at every stage there are a number of different alternatives for you to choose from.

For example, with some students the other day I was working out on the blackboard a map for a story about two kids who run away from home. The first part was an argument at home between a girl and her parents and the girl storming out of the house. The second point was her coming back later, having another argument, going to bed and then sneaking out



at 2 am to her friend's place. But then the students had a discussion as to whether this should be the second point or whether it wouldn't be better for the kid not to come home. Instead she could go straight over to her friend's place and from there decide to run away.

We had a number of arguments and discussions all the way through doing this map. Like whether they'd go to Sydney or sleep at the creek, whether they'd hitch-hike or catch a train, at what stage they would be picked up by the police, would they get into trouble? As I said, it helps you think creatively. You feel like a builder, a painter and an explorer all rolled into one.

When you've completed your map it certainly doesn't mean you're stuck with that plan. If you want to change it around once you've started writing, then that's fine. Often, once you get into a story, it begins to come to life. It's as if your plot and characters and settings work off each other. They become dynamic.

At times things happen in your story that you didn't really mean to happen. They were not part of your plan. Don't worry about this. If what is happening in your story seems good, then change your maps, don't change your story.

Perhaps the best argument in favour of story maps is that they stop you from getting stuck.

✓ TRICK 1

Have a good look at Vince's map. Select a story that you want to write. Then do your own story map using Vince's as an example. Only write down the important stages, including the important and semi-important characters and places. If you are stuck, ask yourself, 'What happens next?'

✓ TRICK 2

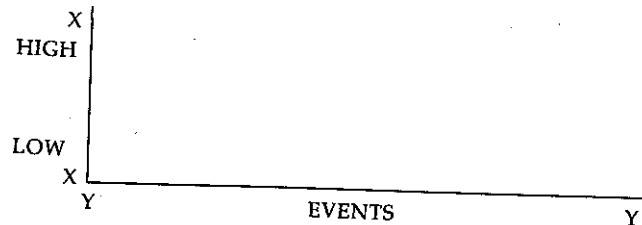
With a group of students or your whole class, select a topic that appeals to the majority of the class. Then do a class story map. After you've finished it, you all might like to write the story and see what variations you all come up with.

✓ TRICK 3

Do the same as in TRICK 2. Choose the same topic, but don't develop a map together. Do it separately or in pairs and then compare the end products.

✓ TRICK 4 (This one might need the help of your teacher)

On a whole page or double page draw a graph like this:



Write *high* and *low* on the X axis. Then in order, write the main stages/events along the bottom of the Y axis. Look at each event you've written down and decide whether it's a high or low point in your story. Make a dot above each event along the X axis, then join the dots with straight lines. From this you will get an idea of the movement or pace of your story.

Remember, you decide what's a high point and what's a low point in your story. In the 'Running Away' story map, for example, you might decide that the first argument was high and the second argument was a bit lower. Or maybe you decide that the second argument was more intense, and so it would be higher on the high-low axis. It's up to you.

And once you've finished the graph, you may decide to change the events in your story around a bit.

STORY MAP FOR JUST PLAIN SCARED

Back at school - THE BULLY - frightened - the dream

My sister in trouble with another girl - bully takes the other girl's side - almost a fight - fear

New school - mates of the bully - bully at new school! - fight, sister helps - new school backs me

Next day - Sharon (bully's girlfriend) an old friend - bully sees me and Sharon and gets the wrong idea - the setup

Trouble with Vice-Principal - bully expelled - 'Let's kill Vince' (the gang) - two weeks of uncertainty - thinking about another school (friend Vito)

Footy game - bully in my team - the game - the handball - 'Well done, mate!'

VINCE GODINO

6 Ladies and gentlemen and bald-headed babies 9

When I began writing this book I knew the general way it was to be organised because I'd been 'pre-writing' it in my head for years. But I couldn't work out the *STYLE* of it. I knew the *content* of what I wanted to say but I wasn't sure of the *way* in which I wanted to say it.

After a lot of thinking and chatting with other people I realised that I was writing a book that was based on my experiences of teaching writing to all kinds and all ages of students. I also realised that this book would be read by many students who were similar to all the students I had taught and who would have similar questions concerning writing. You people reading this right now would be my audience.

Once this was clear, my style for this book was clear as well. I would write it in the way I spoke to people in my classes. This would be my 'voice' for this particular piece of writing.

So your AUDIENCE is a big factor in determining how you will write a piece.

If you are writing a letter to an employer applying for a job, then your audience is that prospective employer. The letter would be full of 'would be possibles' and 'pleases' and 'thankyous' and you wouldn't experiment so much with language. You would adopt a more formal style – and it would be completely different from, say, a love letter.

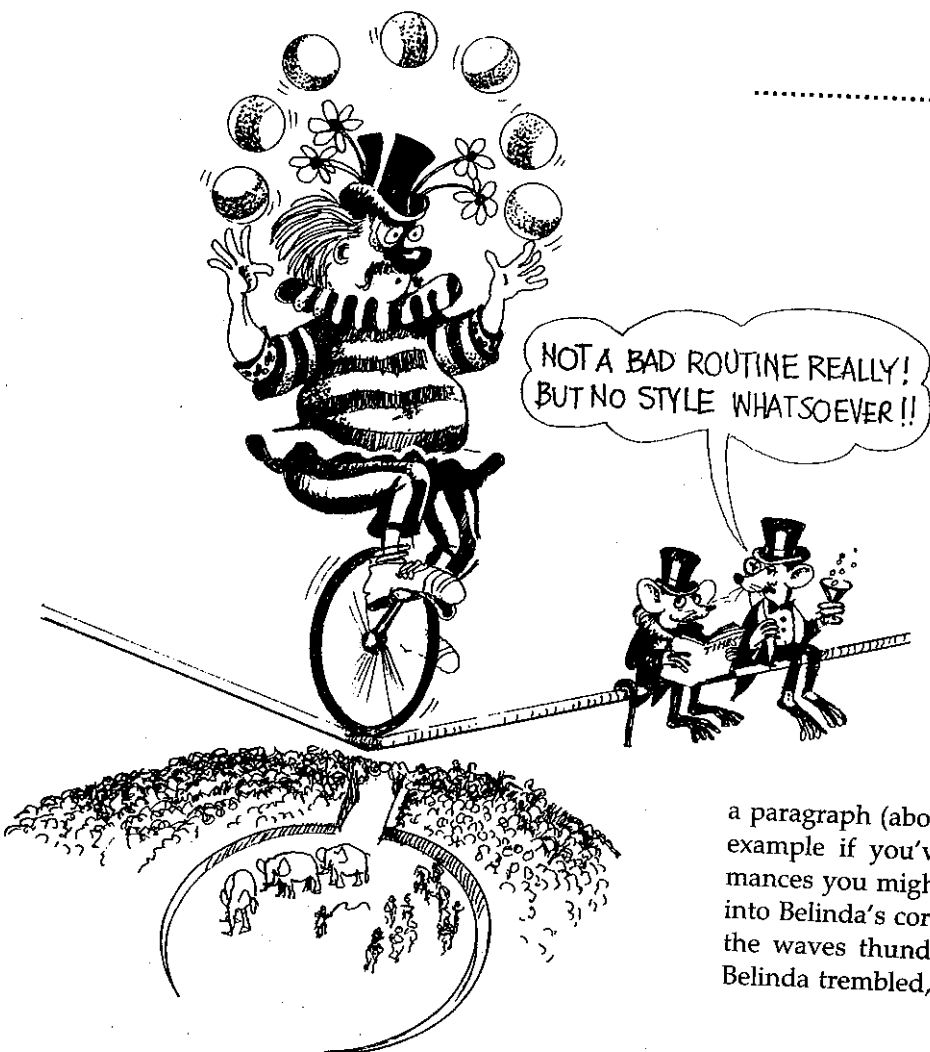
The content, what's in your piece of writing, also often affects your style. If you have a note from home to your teacher about the fact that you've had a bad case of rabies for two days and so couldn't attend school, then the style is probably going to be very straightforward and only concerned with giving some basic information to your teacher. (It will also be written hurriedly in the morning and be covered with milk, coffee and jam stains – which I suppose has its own style!)

However, the most important aspect or style is not your audience nor the content, but more importantly, your voice. Your style, your own voice, your way of expression usually emerges the more you write and the more confident you become. Some writers change their style and their voice, as they change and develop as writers. This has a lot to do with the way you see the world, your sense of humour, whether you're an optimist or a pessimist, shy or extroverted. Everything that goes to make up 'you' helps to determine what kind of style you have in your writing.

This voice will probably come out in letters, notes passed around the classroom and even in job applications. It is something that readers recognise in certain writers. It's quite common for readers to recognise a style and therefore know who wrote a particular piece, simply because they've read other writings by the same author.

It's very similar to your friends knowing your voice – not only because of the *sound* of your voice but also because of the manner in which you speak – your style.

As I said, your own style tends to grow the more you write. It's almost impossible for you to set out to have a 'style'. Your style will blossom especially well if you try, in your writing, to express the way you see and understand the world around you.



a paragraph (about anything) in the same 'style'. For example if you've read a few 'Sweet Dreams' romances you might begin writing: 'Scott looked deep into Belinda's cornflower blue eyes. They could hear the waves thundering. Scott stood tall and strong. Belinda trembled, fearing she would faint!' Yuk!

✓ TRICK 1

Write a letter to a prospective employer applying for a job (any job will do). Remember to include details about your education, your experience and why you want that particular job. When you've done that, put all that 'hard' information into a poem to the same prospective employer, for example:

*I am writing you a letter
For the job you advertise
It'll make me feel much better
Cause I can cease with all these lies.*

PS - Don't send it!!

✓ TRICK 2

In a small group (or with your whole class), each member reads out a piece of their own writing. Now collect a second piece of writing from each member, mix them up, and then one person reads out the collected pieces. Try to guess who wrote what piece, using the style of each piece as your guide.

✓ TRICK 3

Select a book you have read recently. Spend some time reading through bits and pieces of that book. Think about the style of your author. Now try to write

It seems to me that I am beginning to lose my mind, but because my symptoms are both subtle and insidious, there is nothing in my deportment or appearance to alert those who are my nearest and dearest. Although I feel anxiety, I do not show it. My eyes and my complexion are clear. My hair and my teeth shine. Therefore my family (which consists of one small seven-year-old boy, one medium-sized 12-year-old girl, one tall 30-year-old man, one large 11-year-old tabby cat) remains unaware of my present predicament. And yet it isn't as if they haven't been warned. At suitable intervals during this past week I have confided in each of them in turn.

Since I am mindful of my grandmother's advice not to aggravate a man before he eats (she has no admonition as to his care afterwards), I wait until my husband has finished his dinner and both children have gone about their respective affairs before I tell him.

'I think I'm going crazy', I say without preamble. 'Who isn't?' David agrees morosely. 'It's a wonder how any of us stay sane.'

SHARON CHAMINGS

CHAPTER 13

6 What do you mean, 'water tastes like water'? 9

You have a character in a story who's been lost in the bush. Her legs ache from tiredness, she has no shoes, her feet are cut and bruised and there's a bad graze down the side of her face from when she slipped and fell on a dried-up river bed.

The worst thing, however, is that she hasn't had water for two days. Pushing her way through a small forest of reeds she suddenly comes across a puddle of water. She throws herself down on her stomach, pushes her face into the water and gulps down huge mouthfuls. She slurps it down, feeling the coolness of the liquid rushing through the heat of her body - as if it was a mountain stream tearing down the gullies, finding a lake and filling it to the brim with blue icy water.

Nothing of the above could be written without some knowledge of the SENSES. Senses are what you use to *see, touch, taste, smell* and *hear*. They are important to us as human beings and therefore are important to characters in a story.

You as the story-teller should have some idea of the senses so your story can be more vivid, more real.

Writing that pays no attention to the senses is a bit like bones without flesh.

The lost girl at the start of this chapter experiences many things through her senses. She is scratched, bruised, she listens for the sound of rescuers, she looks desperately for something that is recognisable, she is terrified of noises in the bush around her, but the main thing is that she's thirsty.

I had to give you an idea of just how thirsty she was by describing how it *felt* for the water to be pouring into her body.

I paid attention to the senses.

Just imagine how boring writing a love story would be if you couldn't write well about the first kiss. Sometimes you can almost make the reader drift off into their own world of memories and experiences because you've done a beautiful description of an act of the senses - a kiss, a fall, an ache, a good meal.

Recently I was camping on the Murray River in the Barmah Forest with my kids and some friends. One night, the frogs were croaking, the cod were snatching and leaping on the night lines and the fire was crackling. We opened a block of milk chocolate, and as we all ate I asked everyone to tell me what chocolate tasted like, without using the word 'chocolate'. Words like 'smooth', 'elegant', 'creamy', 'yummy' and 'fun' emerged.

The sky's the limit with this little exercise, which brings me to . . .

✓ TRICK 1

As we did when we were camping, take a piece of chocolate and pop it into your mouth (you never know, your teacher might buy you a block). Now describe the taste without using the word chocolate. You can repeat the experiment with bread, or a dim sim, or something you don't normally eat, like a rock or even water.

✓ TRICK 2

Remember a physical pain you have had in your life – a cut, a scratch, a bruise, a carked leg, glass in your foot, a bee sting, a burn, a prickle, a punch, a whack on your bottom. Write what happened, how it happened, how the pain or injury felt and what it looked like. This trick might be your chance to become all gory and revolting.

✓ TRICK 3

Play a favourite piece of music. If you can do this in class, that's fine, but if you can't, do it for homework. Write about what the music makes you think of – memories, happy times, people, places, whatever.

✓ TRICK 4

At some time in your school life you've heard a buzzer, bell, siren or music that tells you that school's started or ended or that you should go to class. Think of that sound. Write about what it sounds like, what it makes you feel. Does it have a particular effect on some part of your body? Write about that sound. And if that doesn't appeal to you, then think of another sound and write about that.



WELL, WHAT DOES IT TASTE LIKE ??

I could hear my sister calling me, but I didn't answer. I was in another world. All my problems didn't seem to be there, although they were. My sister called again. I still ignored her. A duck was floating along the water dunking its head in every couple of minutes or so. The breeze was getting colder and colder. The evening had set in. My tummy rumbled. I took a deep breath and sighed. The air was much cleaner up here. I thought back to my problems. It was the usual teenage problem.

LAURENE DAVIDSON

6 'Rickle-tickle' . . . not bad, eh?

I made it up 9

When I was a little boy I asked my father if there had been any new words invented since I was born. I had an idea that the English language stayed still – that all the words read, written and used had been with us, right from the start. That was the way it was and always would be.

But my dad said 'Yes'. I asked him for an example. He said, 'heliport'.

When I thought about it, it seemed obvious. Hundreds of years ago, even twenty years before I asked that question, there were no real helicopters that actually worked. In 1872 a French writer came up with the French word 'hélicoptère'. He probably invented that word from two Greek words, 'helix', meaning 'spiral', and 'pteron' meaning 'wing'. So 'helicopter' means 'spiral wing'. Eventually a Polish man called Sikorsky developed a helicopter that worked and so helicopters began to be used much more after World War II.

What's all this got to do with NEW WORDS? Well, a word like 'heliport' only came into existence when helicopters came into existence. 'Heliports' are what helicopters land and take off from. In the last twenty years the word 'helipad' is more commonly used.

I'm telling you all this to show that our language, any language, is constantly changing. Language changes because of new inventions, because of migration, because of trade or wars between countries or maybe due to a writer inventing a word because there was no word that was quite right for whatever they were writing about. The word 'pizza' was hardly around in the English language when I was a kid. Now every man, woman, child and dog knows the word 'pizza'. It's part of our everyday language.

Years ago, when I sat in a wooden desk with ink-stains on my hand, I was told by teachers never to begin a sentence with 'and' or 'but'. But you can find that rule being broken tons of times in many novels these days. It's still probably not a good idea to do it when you're writing a formal essay or applying for a job, but if it helps your writing in other areas, if it makes the writing more interesting or powerful, why not use 'and' or 'but' or 'or' at the beginning of a sentence?

Our language is a living, breathing animal. Once I realised this, I became more adventurous when I wrote.

Writing a story called 'Will Ya Shutup about Spirit-men?', I was describing the way a creek ran under a small bridge and ran over multi-coloured stones. I couldn't quite get it right. I knew the sound of the creek I was writing about. I wanted to use words that conjured up the right sound and the right atmosphere. I mucked around with a few words on paper and eventually I came up with the word 'rickle-tickle': . . . the adult voices were tiny echoes and seemed to blend into the tumbling rickle-tickle of the river next to the track'. In that story I also invented the word 'sqrarck-sqrarcking' to capture the cries of cockies and 'sqreek-sqreek' to describe the sound of bats.

After that I began to find many examples of other writers using the language in an inventive way. Sonya Hartnett, a sixteen-year-old Australian author, in her book 'Trouble All the Way', had a cat going YYYYYOOOOOWWWWWLLLLL A wonderful Welsh writer called Dylan Thomas was constantly having fun with language, for example, 'The gentle seaslides of saying . . .'. Dylan Thomas was also good at combining words in an unusual way. For example, ' . . . a black and white patch of girls grew playing' (from a poem called 'Once it was the colour of saying'). Another example is ' . . . a young man and a curly boy . . .' (taken from a short story, 'The Peaches').



All this encouraged me to try something different in a poem I wrote when I was camping with a mate next to the Murray River:

*listen to the fire humming
listen to the mist curling
listen to the sun lowing
listen to the grey mauving . . .*

These examples simply combine sets of words in ways that we're not used to. Doing this helps to build pictures in the readers' minds – it helps 'imagery', see chapter 21.

So why muck around inventing words and making unusual combinations? I think the answer is: to be *expressive*, to say it as it *really* is, to say it as it *seems* to you – and FOR FUN!

✓ TRICK 1

In this chapter I talked about a poet called Dylan Thomas. I used a line from one poem called 'Once it was the colour of saying' and another line from a story called 'The Peaches'. I also used some lines of a poem I wrote when I was camping by the Murray River. Find those lines in the chapter above and write them down. Have a look at the lines. Then write down what you think is *unusual* about them. Clue: Have you ever seen a patch of girls growing? Have you ever heard a fire humming?

✓ TRICK 2

Write your own *unusual* description or combinations of words about:

- ▶ a little girl or boy
- ▶ a campfire (or any fire)
- ▶ a mist

✓ TRICK 3

Write down five words for describing a girl or a boy you think is good-looking. Now *invent* a word of your own that means good-looking.

✓ TRICK 4

Every generation seems to have its own way of describing happiness or having a good time. In the Sixties, we used the word 'stoked'. Ask your guardian, mother, father or any person older than you for the words they used when they were young to describe being happy or excited. Make a list of these words and compare them with other students' lists.

Great jaws consume the metal doomed.
Wrecked and condensed to make more room.
The conveyor belt that rises from the ground.
Reaches into the sky without a sound.

With it go the cars
to the fire to heal their scars.
How they'll end up, no one knows.
But I guess that's how a car's life goes.

GRANT CARLSON

6 But the accident only took a couple of seconds . . . 9

I was talking to a Year 8 boy who wasn't sure what he could write about. The day before, an accident had happened just outside our school. The boy had taken a great interest in it and had chatted about all the gory details of the crash. So he decided to write about it.

After fifteen minutes he presented six lines describing the accident. I wondered why he had only written six lines when he'd been able to gabble on about it for ages. He wondered how you write about something for longer than six lines when the actual thing only took a couple of seconds to happen.

So we talked about TIME.

We talked about the splintering glass, the bumper bars curling, bending and crunching, the buckling wheels, the smoking rubber. They all happened at once. All those minute details tumbling in on top of one another. They only took a short space of time but that doesn't mean that we have to deal with them in only a few lines.

Remember those movies that go into slow motion to show a basketball going through the ring, a punch being thrown, a runner falling over just before the finishing line? The director of the movie does the scene in slow motion because she or he wants to make an impression on the viewer. The director wants the scene to remain in our minds.

It's the same in writing. You are the boss. You make things take as long as you like. Whatever's necessary for your story.

So too with moving events around in your writing. Just because one event happened before another event, doesn't mean that you have to write about them in sequence.

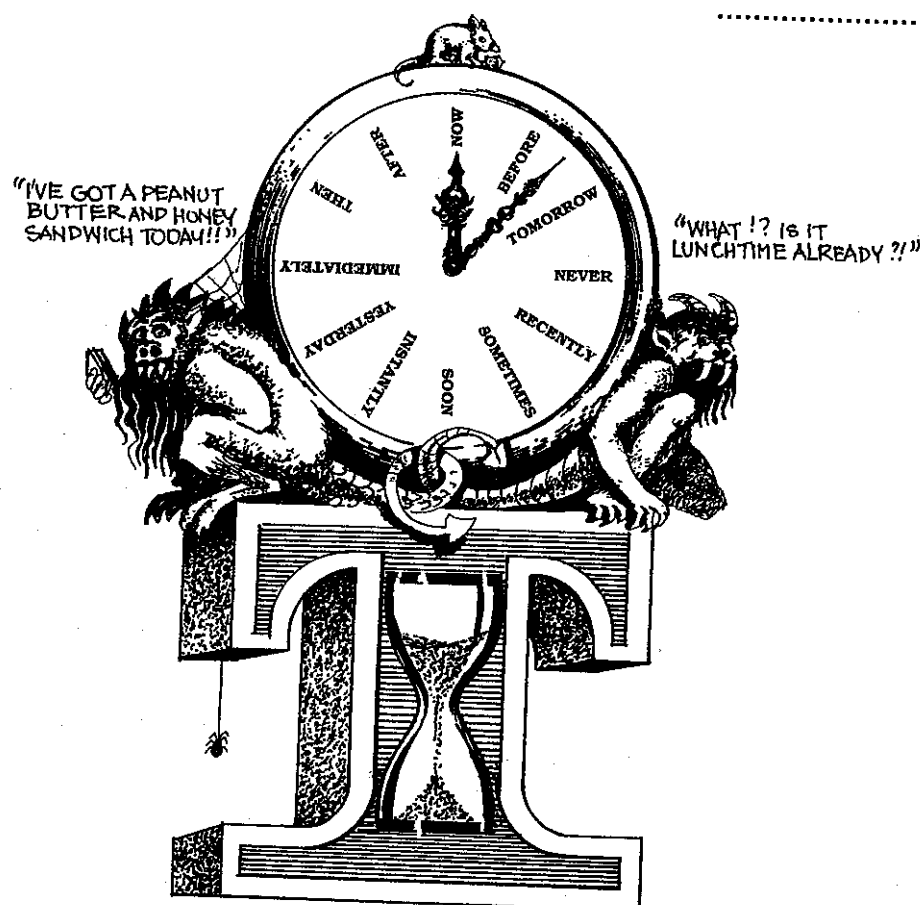
Again it's like the movies. Sometimes they have flashbacks to what a character might have done when they were a child. Or they might start when a person is ten years old and then the next thing you know, you're watching the same character twenty years later. All the in-between stuff wasn't shown because it wasn't necessary or maybe because the director wanted to keep you guessing as to what happened during that time.

There are many reasons why a writer mucks around with time. Often when you write you pretend to know what has happened in lots of places at the one time, or even what's gone on in a certain character's head. You play God.

So too with time. You are in charge. People die, say things, are happy or hurt, stand on their head, anything goes – and it all happens when you say so. You can move things around in your story clock like pieces in a jigsaw.

✓ TRICK 1

Think of an accident you had once. Maybe you fell out of a tree or twisted an ankle. Write about every moment, every movement, every thought, every sound, every scrape and pain. Make up what you've forgotten, but before you say you can't remember close your eyes and picture the accident on the video screen in your brain. Let your imagination go!



✓ TRICK 2

What was your earliest memory? Start to write about it. When you've written three sentences, leave a couple of lines and begin to write about what's happening in your life now (no matter how boring it might be). After three sentences of this, leave another couple of lines and go back and continue your earliest memory story. Keep doing this, swapping backwards and forwards between the two stories, till you've either finished your earliest memory story or you become sick of doing it. But you aren't allowed to become sick of doing it until you've done the three sentences trick at least a few times.

✓ TRICK 3

You go to bed at night and have a long, deep sleep. It is daylight. You wake up. There is no sound. You are alone in the house. You have an uncomfortable feeling. How long have you really been sleeping? Somehow, things seem different. Has it been minutes, hours, years? You don't know what day it is, what time it is, what year it is. You set out to discover the truth. How long have you been asleep? What happened when you were asleep? Has anything changed? Write about your efforts to find out the truth. The truth might be simple but, then again, it might be mind-boggling.

As I was coming home bombs were going off in my head, every step was like trying to walk with lead weights attached to my feet. I didn't want to go home. Life was so confusing. I had no idea where I was going. Now I was on my way home from school, drudgery, except for one thing, that one thing being English, not so much the subject, but the teacher.

Every subject had gone down the drain, I didn't care less for any of them, but somehow my English teacher gave me hope. She was the only human being who made me feel alright, she gave me confidence, not only academically, but personally; somehow she made me feel like a decent human being. Alas, that part of my life had finished: the school day done, and it was time to enter the real and sickening part. It was time to go 'home'. I walked down my street, my heart sank. Dad would be there, then in about an hour they both would be, Mum & Dad.

As I approached my house, I rummaged around in search of my keys, I found them and paused before the door, and stood there so dispirited, the lead weights I was dragging became mountains, and I could barely move my body.

LUPE BLACK

CHAPTER 16

6 I'm stuck 9

This chapter is about a monster, an ogre. It's about a ghost, a spectre that haunts desks and seats and brains. It's about the troll who lives under the bridge, waiting to eat up innocent stories, strolling along. In short, it's about 'writer's block'.

This is when you can't get started, can't continue, or when you've come across a difficult part in your story and you don't know how to climb over the hump. I have heard that some people use 'writer's block' as an excuse for not writing. But I'm obviously talking to people who'd never use that excuse.

It can happen when you feel good, feel bad, feel dried up or when you're really feeling like writing.

However, good things can come out of 'writer's block'. For instance, I decided to write this chapter when I was experiencing a block. The way I got over it was to say to my friend 'I think I'll do some writing in a minute'. I said it about five times over an hour. I also thought about what I'd write. Then I put on some interesting music and forced myself to write the first line.

Now I know that usually we can't spare all that time. Especially in class time – it's a pity, but never mind. So we should investigate quick ways to overcome it. Like closing your eyes and forgetting about everything for five minutes OR reading through what you've done so far OR reading another person's piece of writing OR discussing with your teacher or someone else what part you're having difficulty with OR forcing yourself to write for at least six lines. This last one I learnt from my old dad. I think the way it works is that forcing yourself to write gets the brain going, the creative juices flowing.

If you're at home you could always have a cup of coffee, read a book for a bit, play a tape (some people work better with music), talk to your mum or brother or friend, go for a run, put your model together, make your bed. But don't let whatever you're doing stop you from returning to your writing.

When you get over a serious attack of 'I'm stuck-itis', it's a great experience. Because then you know you can get over it again. I bet you you're glad I got over my block and wrote this chapter, aren't you? . . . Well, aren't you??

✓ TRICK 1

Ask a teacher or a student to give you an idea or title for a story. No discussion, just one title for a story. Think for a few minutes then write, for five minutes, the opening paragraph of that story. Who knows, you may want to go on with it – or at least put it away in your folder, to continue it another day.

✓ TRICK 2

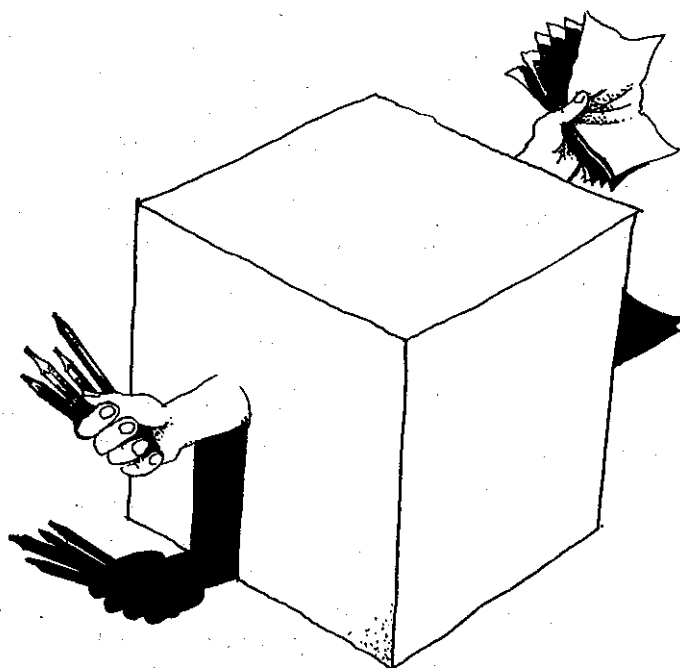
Make a list of the kinds of things that people in your class do when they experience writer's block. Perhaps you could put them in order of how successful each idea is.

✓ TRICK 3

Find an unfinished story or unused idea in your writing folder. If you aren't ready to continue with it, try to get over the block by using one of the millions of ideas in this chapter. Or maybe after all this raving about writer's block, you'll never get it again.

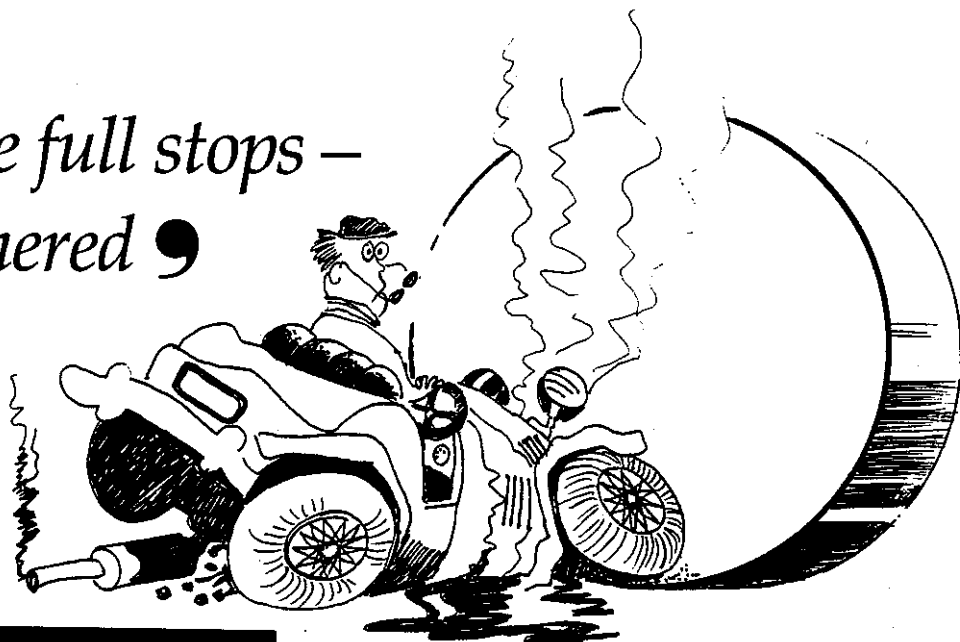
✓ TRICK 4

Do TRICK 1 in chapter 5 – 'My pen – it just wrote'. This is almost a surefire one for me – as well as playing the right music.



CHAPTER 17

“I don’t use full stops – can’t be bothered”



I took a long time before I began writing this chapter because I have bad memories of learning about punctuation and syntax at school. I remember endless lessons and exercises that dealt with subjects, predicates, clauses, full stops, commas, question marks, exclamation marks, inverted commas (talking marks), colons and semi-colons. I suppose the exercises helped me a bit but unfortunately I wasn’t told why all these bits and pieces were so important.

As far as I can tell, there is one major reason for knowing how to use PUNCTUATION, SENTENCES and PARAGRAPHS, and that is *to give meaning to what you have written*. It’s all there to help your writing make sense – so that it has the effect that you want it to.

Punctuation, sentences and paragraphs exist to help you marshal and organise your thoughts and ideas. You could write the best story in the world but if you didn’t know how to use things like full stops, exclamation marks and paragraphs you might as well throw the story away. It would be like going into battle with troops, weapons and ammunition, and being completely disorganised.

So you do have to worry about all of it. The best way to learn it is to work on your own writing. You generally know what you want to say, so you have to make sure that your reader understands as well.

Punctuation also helps to bring atmosphere to your story. When you punctuate, you’re telling the reader how you want your writing to be read. When musicians read music, the music actually has directions as to how it should be played. Like musical directions, punctuation directs reading to be fast, slow, short, long, loud or soft.

Whether the reader is reading out aloud or to him or herself and whether he or she knows it or not, the reader takes notice of the punctuation and gets a feel for your story. Some stories and books have been published without any punctuation or paragraphs and when you get used to it you can generally understand what’s going on. However, as a rule, the skills of punctuation and syntax help to give meaning to your writing, whether you’re writing a letter, a job application or a short story.

I used to teach a girl who was only semi-literate. I worked with her when she was writing a story about a stay in hospital and I helped her with dialogue. I showed her how to do talking marks, commas and capital letters. A year later I was teaching her again and she needed to do some dialogue in another story. I began to repeat what I had told her a year earlier. She stopped me and told me that she knew all about that stuff and proceeded to show me. The lesson on dialogue had remained in her head because it was important for what she wanted to say in her own writing.

One last point I want to make in this chapter is that reading other authors’ works is a good way to become better at punctuation and syntax. Reading stories shows you how other writers use it and how they experiment with it. If I hadn’t done this I wouldn’t have known that one sentence can be a paragraph or that a dash (–) can be used like a semi-colon (;), or that a line of dots (. . .) can sometimes signify a pause in a conversation.

PUNCTUATION, SENTENCES AND PARAGRAPHS

Sometimes you read a piece of writing where the writer has used punctuation like you did in one of your own pieces. And this always makes you feel good – like a 'real writer'!

✓ TRICK 1

For this one you can work in pairs. Select a piece of your own writing – no more than a paragraph. Write it out again and leave out all of the punctuation, including capital letters. Then give it to your partner and ask them to punctuate it. Compare their punctuation with yours. Are there differences? Are they the same? Is there a right and a wrong way to punctuate your piece of writing?

✓ TRICK 2

Write an imaginary conversation between two people but only use the word 'blah'. Make the conversation about half a page long, for example:

'Blah blah blah blah.'

'Blah blah blah?'

'Blah!'

'Blah blah blah blah blah blah, blah blah, blah!'

'... blah ... blah ...'

'BLAH BLAH!'

Warning: This trick won't improve your vocabulary!

✓ TRICK 3

Punctuate and/or make sentences or paragraphs of the following piece of writing so that people who read it can make sense of it. Remember, there are probably a number of ways that it can be treated.

just as they were to leave the beach the man heard a shout Michael there there see the eagle the sea eagle above you he looked up at the drizzling sky in time to catch the flick flick of the upturned wings scree went the eagle scree the man looked across at the woman who had shouted fantastic he said and dived back into the water

Compare your effort with others.

✓ TRICK 4

Make sentences, paragraphs and punctuate the following to try to make it as spooky as possible. This is using punctuation and syntax to produce atmosphere.

from somewhere in the old ramshackle farmhouse came a noise whoooo an open window a crack in the floorboards an animal a creature wheezing through its mouth Shannon took a step he took another holding the lit match in his cold fingers ouch the bloody match quick give us another hurry up the sound came again Shannon edged forward whoooo he reached for the door knob slowly he gripped it slowly slowly he turned it opening the door of what he thought would be a room a room that's a laugh

Anyway, when he was out I put my chewy gum on his chair. Oh, I mean, what a laugh eh? He came back and sat on it. We laughed so much he asked, 'Who did it?' Everyone looked at me and pointed. I said, 'Some friends you are!'

Mr Wobbly gave me another detention. I went home and gave Mum the detention note.

'Again? I thought you said you weren't going to get a detention.'

'I forgot to bring my diary.'

Mum said, 'You'll never learn. Go to your room! Wait till your father gets home!'

I said to myself, 'I just can't wait. Mum, just can't wait.'

LINDA

6 He said, she replied ... how d'you stop using them all the time? 9

This question is probably the most common question asked by students. The interesting aspect of this question is that people have many more words tucked away in their brains than they think they have.

Recently I was in a Year 7 class and the teacher was brainstorming with the students. They came up with 48 different words for 'said' and 'replied'. You'll find this list in TRICK 1 of this chapter.

Why should we be concerned about using different words?

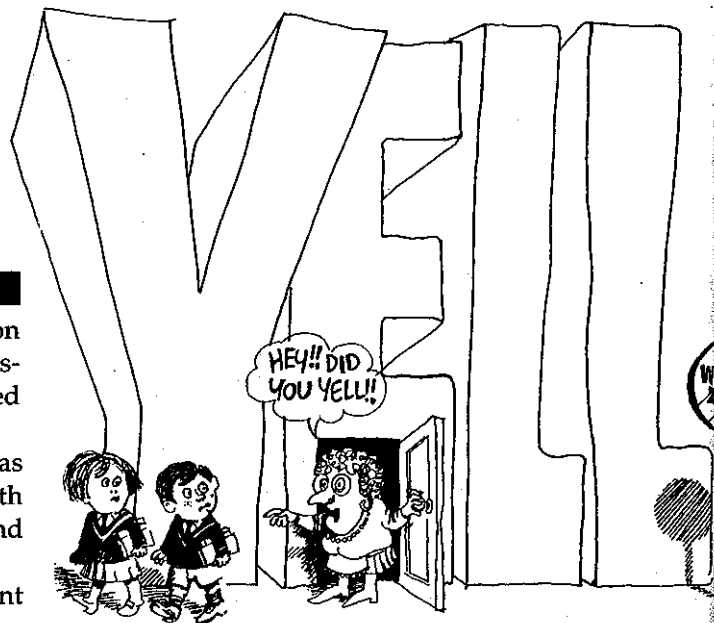
First, it adds a bit of pizzazz to your writing. If you've ever read some writing that only uses 'said' and 'replied' you'll understand why people try to get away from them.

Second, it helps to make dialogue more meaningful. If a character is angry in a story and you have her saying things like, 'Get out of here you dirty rat' it's stupid to only say 'she said'. It's more likely that the character would say it 'angrily' or 'with venom in her voice' or 'coldly', or 'hotly'. The list is endless.

Third, using the right word explains more about the particular character. It tells us more about the personality and the mood.

Fourth, looking around for a word that fits the dialogue explains the situation. It assists in the development of atmosphere. If two kids are alone in a house and they hear a noise in the middle of the night they might say 'Did you hear that?' or 'What was that?' or 'Tania! Are you awake?' Wouldn't it be ridiculous to just say 'she said', 'he replied'? To develop atmosphere you'd have the characters 'whispering', or 'talking in a whisper' or 'fearfully' or 'with a trembling voice' or 'with a tremble in their voice'.

You'll notice in the last paragraph that I showed you a couple of ways that you can use the words



'whisper' and 'tremble'. When a person is talking you don't have to use only one word to show the way the words are spoken. Imagine a conversation where one of the characters is happy. She could talk 'happily', or have a 'happy note in her voice', or 'with a twinkle in her eye' or 'with happiness' or 'joyously' or 'laughingly', 'really happily' and so on.

Another clever way of showing the manner in which a person has spoken is to describe their actions. Let's take two people having a loud argument. Normally you'd write the dialogue by using words like 'yelled', 'screamed', 'nastily' and 'shouted'. But by having the characters *doing* something, readers can see and hear how the words are being spoken.

Let me show you:

The two friends sat staring icily at each other. One of them sat with her arms tightly folded over her chest. She was the first one to speak. 'But you said, you promised that you wouldn't tell anyone . . . and you did!'

The other friend turned away sharply and then looked back glaring at her friend. 'So what. You've broken promises before'. She stood up, banging her glass on the table.

SCREAMED, YELLED, WHISPERED

Get the picture?

Sometimes the words the character is saying are enough to convey to the reader the mood of the character and nature of the words. If a person in a story gets up in the morning and starts singing in the shower, 'I'm a happy little Vegemite', it's hardly necessary to tell the reader that these words were sung 'happily'!

The main point to remember is that if it's important to your story, then work out some way to describe or explain the way in which words are spoken by your characters.

✓ TRICK 1

Here's the list I promised you. You'll see that there are many different forms. Some of the words describe the word 'said'.

sarcastically	moaned	weirdly
angrily	stuttered	wickedly
whispered	nasally	croaked like a frog
mumbled	softly	roared like a lion
whinged	with astonish-	asked
muttered	ment	aggressively
yelled	with surprise	sadly
called	with happiness	mysteriously
screamed	with a voice like	squealed
explained	lightning	faithfully
shouted	croakily	fearfully
cried	squeakily	fiercely
mentioned	thundering	groaned
remarked	sincerely	courageously
confidently	thought out loud	tearfully
answered	friendly way	joyfully
continued	threateningly	

Add six more of your own. You might like to use a thesaurus (see chapter 20), work in groups, ask your friends, or check out some stories to dig up more words to go on the list. A chart of all the words your class has come up with could be put up in your classroom.

✓ TRICK 2

Make a list of short descriptions of people, situations and actions that would show that a character is saying something 'happily', for example:

He spoke with a grin from ear to ear.

When he spoke, the birds sang and the bees buzzed.

✓ TRICK 3

Think of the million and one ways of saying 'Yes'. Make a list like this:

'Yes!!!'

'Yes', she replied with a shy grin.

'Yes', she yelled.

✓ TRICK 4

Do the same as in TRICK 3, but this time, use the word 'No'!

✓ TRICK 5

Read chapter 7 on dialogue.

✓ TRICK 6

Have fun but try not to overdo it.

Yes, Sir,' she said briskly.
'Get me Gonzales and tell him to make a roll call to find out how many escaped, before he reports to me.'
'Right away, Sir,' she replied.
Minutes later, Assistant Warden Joseph Gonzales entered Smith's office.
'You called for me, Sir?' enquired Gonzales.
'Of course I did, you silly fool. How many escaped and who was it?'
'Only one escaped, Sir, John Fields.' At that point Gonzales' voice began to tremble, and rightly so.
'You blundering fools, all of you. I gave specific orders to have him under heavy guard. He's the last one I want on the loose. I want that man dead or alive. Anyway, is he off this planet yet?' asked Smith.
'Yes he is, Sir, he stole a Star Cruiser,' said Gonzales, who now was visibly shaking.
'Get out of here,' roared Smith. He was clearly sickened by the sight of Gonzales.
Gonzales quickly hurried from the office. Smith then pressed the intercom line directly linked with the central base of the Planet's Military Unit.
'Commander White?' enquired Smith.
'No,' was the reply. 'This is Captain Vernon and may I ask who this is?'

G. APOSTOL

CHAPTER 19

● I cried,
you cried,
she cried,
we cried,
they all cried ●



A decision that writers often have to make is, in what PERSON am I going to write this piece? First, second and third person is a fancy way of saying 'I' (or we), 'you' and 'she' (or they). So the decision is whether the writer will write 'I stood in the exercise yard', 'You stood in the exercise yard' or 'She stood in the exercise yard!'

Another way of asking the above question is 'Whose shoes am I in when I'm writing?' or 'Who am I, when I'm writing this story? Is it me, you or her?'

Sometimes you make a choice based on whatever makes you feel most comfortable. Other times it's based on what impact you want to make on your readers. The reasons for your choice are endless.

The first story I wrote that I was quite pleased with, I wrote in the first person. So it was full of 'I thought', 'he said to me' and 'I can tell you, I was worried'. The teller of the story was a fifteen-year-old boy who was unemployed. I pretended to be that boy and so wrote it in the first person.

Many prefer to write in the third person. If I had chosen this way, my story would have been full of 'he thought', 'she said to him' and 'he could tell that she was worried'.

Choosing the third person can mean that the writer has a more God-like view of what's happening. The writer is the story-teller writing about what's happened to other people, how *they* felt, what *they* said and so on.

FIRST, SECOND AND THIRD PERSON

Writers who choose to write in the third person may have actually themselves experienced what they're writing about, but they prefer to create a character (or some characters) and tell the story from that angle. They may feel that they can tell the story better by using 'he' or 'they'.

I chose to write this book in the first person because I wanted to talk to you as directly as I could. I figured it would seem more real if you felt that 'a writer' was talking to all you 'other writers' about what I'd understood about this process called writing.

As far as the 'second person' is concerned, I have rarely seen writing full of 'you are standing in the exercise yard'. One exception is Peter Kocan's two novels, 'The Treatment' and 'The Cure'. In these wonderful books, Peter Kocan uses 'you'. It makes me feel rather strange reading it. Partly because I'm not used to it and partly because it made me feel as though everything that was happening was happening to me.

Of course, plenty of writers have used 'I' and 'she' or 'he' to achieve the same effect of making the reader feel as though it was happening to them.

Like most aspects of writing, there is no black and white rule regarding whether you should use 'I', 'you', 'he' or 'she'. It's up to you, so experimentation helps. Most writers have used both first and third person in their stories. Some prefer one to the other. It's your choice.

✓ TRICK 1

Look at three stories. Work out what person you think they are written in.

✓ TRICK 2

Write a beginning paragraph for a story using 'I' (first person). Now rewrite the same paragraph using the third person she or he. For example:

I walked down the dimly lit street. I could feel my heart pounding.

He walked down the dimly lit street. He could feel his heart pounding.

You end up fighting
But not cause you want to.
You have to put on a show
To keep your friends satisfied.
So your friends won't call you
Weak
So your friends won't call you
A Dog.
You have to risk your head
To keep the friends you have.

KERRY EDELSTEN

6 *It was a hot fire.*
That's what it was.
It was hot 9

The word THESAURUS, which this chapter is about, comes from the Greek word 'thesaurus' which means 'treasure'. And that's exactly what thesauruses are – treasure chests full of words.

Sometimes when we're writing, we turn to the person next to us and say, 'What's the word . . . another word for . . . you know . . .'. Sound familiar? Of course it does. When we're writing we are making hundreds of decisions and a big part of all that is choosing the right word. Think of all the nouns, verbs and adjectives you use in any piece of writing – hot, mountain, ugly, beautiful, deep, scream, smile, narrow, cool, push, round, muddy, kick, laughter . . .

Now maybe the word you use is the one you want. But sometimes it isn't quite right. And that is where the thesaurus comes in. A thesaurus is a book a bit like a dictionary except that it doesn't give you definitions of words.

Say you've used a word like 'hot' or 'mountain' and you realise that it doesn't express the mood, atmosphere or meaning that you were trying to develop. You would then look up that particular word in the thesaurus and it will give you a list of words that are close in meaning to the one you've chosen. Not only does this help your writing sound heaps better, it also improves your vocabulary out of sight and will probably impress your friends.

Students often become interested in thesauruses when writing poetry or songs. I suspect that this is because in those forms of writing you use fewer words and the right word becomes absolutely crucial in developing a mood.

Some people go crazy over thesauruses and start changing every second word or always choose the longest word. This is not a terribly good idea, but it's good fun to go crazy over something new and the madness tends to die down after a while.

Some thesauruses are easier to use than others, but the best one is Roget's. I never write without one sitting next to me.

✓ TRICK 1

Return to an old piece of writing, something you've written, and choose a couple of paragraphs. Go through and underline about six words that you would now like to change. Select a similar word for each of them from the thesaurus. Just by using slightly different words you will see how the mood of your writing can change.



✓ TRICK 2

The old hermit laughed. His brown face broke into a grin. You could see the creases in his face were dry and deep from years of living through tearing wind and intense heat. But his watery blue eyes still twinkled and danced.

Use the thesaurus to select different words for those words underlined.

✓ TRICK 3

Think of your favourite food. Is it a steaming hot dog, tender roast chicken, luscious souvlaki, delicious brussels sprouts, crisp salad, or cool, creamy ice-cream? Write down all the yummy words that you associate with your favourite food. Then find similar words for your list, using the thesaurus.

Meanwhile three million kilometres away, Fields quietly chuckling to himself. He was set to fly out of the galaxy, the computer was nearly finished plotting his desired light-speed course. Now, for the first time, he felt safe.

Suddenly the ship was rocked violently by the blast of a laser bolt. Fields looked dazed as he tried to comprehend what was going on about him. He looked in the rear view screen: behind him were three Super long-range Fighters. But there was something more than that, he could sense it. It was a sort of fearful hate that was directed at him, it was as if the person feared the consequences of not capturing him, and thus hated him. It was a familiar hate, although he couldn't quite place it at the moment.

'Shoot him out of the sky,' yelled Smith. 'You must get him before he makes his move.'

G. APOSTOL

6 *The night rose like an ocean but the currawong kept flying, helter-skelter, into the black cave of the storm* 9

When you write something like, 'The night rose like an ocean', you are using a SIMILE. When you use a concrete example – a thing, an animal, a colour, a building – to represent an idea, you are using SYMBOLISM.

Writers often use other things to represent ideas, or to help build up a wonderful picture in the reader's mind, or to make us sit up and take notice, or to see things differently or to see something as something else.

It's all to do with IMAGERY – painting pictures with words. Sometimes it's so important and intense in your story, it is as if a painter has come and sat next to you and is slapping paint strokes all over your sentence. That's how I felt when I wrote the title of this chapter.

Imagery is so powerful sometimes. It has an effect whether you're aware of it or not.

I read a story with a Secretarial English class. One of the main buildings in the story was the farmhouse surrounded by hectares of cleared paddocks with one or two gum trees left standing on the hills. Half-way through the novel I asked the class to do a simple sketch of what the farmhouse and the farmyard looked like.

There had been some description of the house and yard but not a lot, so what the students drew was quite remarkable. Although there were many differ-

ent pictures, the image of the house, fences, steps, the colour of the gravel, were all clear and strong. All the students said they had a clear *mental* picture of these things, even though some of the things they drew had never been described and a few never even mentioned.

The farmhouse was a symbol of the lonely isolated lives of the people in the book. When you have strong images in your story, the reader takes notice of them and those pictures link up with the memories and experiences of the reader.

All this happens in our talking too. We often use similes or metaphors, images, when we insult or compliment people. 'You walk like an elephant', 'You've got a face like you ran into a bus', 'He's a pig', 'You've got a smile like a rainbow', 'Her skin is like peaches', 'You turkey!', 'Your hair's like steel wool' – you hear them every day. They bring colour and meaning to our talk and our writing.

I'm in the middle of writing a teenage novel. I wanted a symbol of life as opposed to death, that would pop up in the story from time to time. I ended up writing about a grey-billed still white heron that stood next to a discarded old white stove, looking for fish and insects in a creek that was desperately in need of a good clean-up.

Incidentally, I came across that heron when I was walking along a dirty creek – a part of my personal experience (see chapter 1).

Of course you can go too far with this imagery stuff. Sometimes you'll see sentences on flowers, waterfalls, cars, even cows, and they won't represent anything else other than what they are – flowers, waterfalls, cars and cows.

And sometimes you don't have to use it. Choose your times carefully. But imagery can be a hell of a lot of fun.



✓ TRICK 1

Choose six of the following and write what they're like. For example, 'The canoe was like a black marlin' or 'His face reminded me of a forest'.

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------|
| a friend | a loved teacher |
| a smile | a hated teacher |
| the ocean | a waterfall |
| your favourite bird | your school |
| mag wheels | your pet |
| a favourite car | a hamburger |
| your bed | a canoe |
| a face | |

✓ TRICK 2

List about six objects or people or animals or plants – or a mixture of all of these. Then choose a feeling or something that goes with each one. Write what each word represents to you, for example:

- | | |
|------------------|-----------------------------|
| a boiling kettle | : anger (or frustration) |
| a priest | : seriousness (or calmness) |
| a rabbit | : terror (or happiness) |
| a wattle tree | : smiling (or sneezing) |
| a tramp | : loneliness (or freedom) |

Remember, it's what these words make you feel. Not what I feel or your friend feels.

✓ TRICK 3

Read the title of this chapter. Draw or write what kind of storm you see the currawong flying through. Draw or write what you think (or know) a currawong looks like. Draw or write how you think the bird is flying through the storm. Write how you think the currawong feels.

We walked on and on through the thick green forest. Sometimes we would have to cut branches out of our way. I was carried by one of my brothers. I don't know which one but I think it was my oldest brother. It was fun. I felt like a king and I imagined that my brother was an elephant.

THAVISACK BOUHASAVANH

CHAPTER 22

● You've got to be able to reach out and touch them ●

Spiro trudged along the street. The autumn wind blew cold. He pulled the collar of his leather coat up around his neck and yanked the zipper up. 'Stuff it! Who cares!' He kicked a can and it rattled and echoed up the street. Leaves fell and blew around his boots. 'Leaves! All autumn is, is leaves!'

Spiro reached his mate's house and banged on the door. Gary opened it. 'Geez, Spiro! Let's hope you haven't woken up me old man. What's wrong with ya? You look like you slept in the park.'

Spiro looked at his friend. 'What're you wearin' a dressing gown for? You look like a dag.'

Gary tightened up the cord of the dressing gown. 'Keeps me warm . . . what of it? In any case . . . what're you here for?'

The boy at the door dragged his hand through his hair and looked back into the night. 'Didn't have anything better to do.'

Gary grinned. 'Oh, I get it! She dropped ya! . . . Come in.'

With 'Spiro' I tried to show you that he was a street-wise bloke who acted as though he was tough. He's a character who hides his true feelings. But Gary, his mate, is a bit of a dag who isn't very sure of himself – he's probably a bit timid.

Now how did I do this? How did I give the reader an idea of what these two were like?

We know that Spiro isn't in high spirits because he 'trudged' along the street. We know he's angry because he 'yanked' the zipper up. He says things like, 'Stuff it. Who cares!' when it's quite clear that he does care about something that's going on in his life. We also know that everything seems pretty awful to him at the moment because he's even annoyed by the autumn leaves. Spiro is also going to see his friend whose door he 'bangs' on. And when Gary asks him



why he's come round, Spiro says he 'didn't have any thing better to do' which we all know is a big cover up for why he's come to see his mate – the real reason is that a girl has just dropped him.

I won't tell you how I gave you an impression of what Gary's like because I want to save that for one of the tricks at the end.

When I wrote this piece I paid close attention to CHARACTERISATION, which is a fancy word for what the writer does to let the reader know what his or her characters are like. I tried to make the characters of Spiro and Gary come alive in the imagination of the reader. I wanted people to have a *sense* of the characters, to believe that they were *real*, to let the readers feel as though they *knew* a bit about Spiro and Gary.

If I hadn't thought about this and just had Spiro walking over to his friend's house and knocking on the door, then Spiro and Gary would have been like skeletons. By thinking about how Spiro would walk along the street or what Gary would wear, I put flesh on those skeletons and made them more believable.

Characterisation lets the reader know something about the characters' moods, personalities and reactions. And it helps if you've got an idea of what your characters are like before you start writing. However you don't have to do this with all your characters. Generally you only have to do it for your major and semi-major characters in your writing.

I think there's a slightly weird thing that occurs with characterisation. If you do it well enough, what you write about your character comes alive in the mind of the reader and becomes mixed up with the reader's own personal experience. Then the reader's own imagination takes over and the character is developed further in the mind of the reader.

Pretty weird, eh?!

A second thing that happens is that the characters become more real in the writer's mind as well. When this happens your writing becomes better, you become more confident and your story and characters may seem as though they've got a life of their own.

One last point: you don't have to let the readers know everything about your characters as soon as they enter your story. You can inform the readers about their clothes, their personality, their confidence, their shyness, their aggressiveness and so on, in dribs and drabs, in bits and pieces as your story moves on.

After you've done it in a few pieces of writing your characterisation becomes less artificial and begins to flow more easily.

✓ TRICK 1

Read the piece about Spiro and Gary. Write down what kind of person Gary might be. Then make a list of the things I wrote in that piece that showed you what Gary was like. It might help you if you read again what I wrote about Spiro to make him more believable.

✓ TRICK 2

Write about a person you know and describe the clothes they wear so that we can get an idea of their personality, for example, 'Michelle walked into the room. She wore some flowers in her hair, a long, light floral skirt and a T-shirt with "Save the Amazon" printed on the front'.

✓ TRICK 3

Describe the way each of the characters below would drink a cup of coffee:

- ▶ a tough boy or girl
- ▶ a priest
- ▶ a nervous teacher

✓ TRICK 4

Write some dialogue for each of the characters in TRICK 3. They can be talking with other people or with each other but the dialogue must show what they are like and must make them more believable, for example:

'Now Michelle', said the priest, 'you must not go down this road. This road leads to hellfire and damnation. I'm pleading with you to not be so easily led. You're too smart to be doing this kind of thing.'

✓ TRICK 5

Write your own piece about Spiro and Gary but reverse the roles. Let them have the same personalities, but in your piece have Gary walking along the street to Spiro's house, just after Gary's been dropped by his girlfriend. Pay attention to clothes, walking, and dialogue.

I took a short cut and tapped on the door. 'It's Little Red Riding Hood,' I said in a cute voice.

'Come in, ya mug!' said a gruff voice.

When I opened the door, I saw the sweetest sight: a little old lady was sitting up in bed, a cigarette hanging out of her mouth, and a can of Fosters on the side table, and a meat pie in her hand. She was wearing an Essendon beanie, and watching the Richmond and Carlton footy replay. Funny thing was, she had a North Melbourne banner hanging over her bed. She was chewing a piece of bubble gum while looking through all of her football cards and picking out the Ron Barassi ones and drawing funny teeth and moustaches on them and occasionally looking up at the T.V.

GAYLE CHAMINGS

6 Six pages and all that work and now I can't finish it 9

Writing this kind of book is interesting and slightly different from writing a story, poem, play or song.

Why?

Well, I've been able to choose whatever chapter I was interested in at the moment and then write it. I was able to hop all over the place and do whatever gave me satisfaction. However, even though I had this luxury, I still had to think of a satisfactory ending for each chapter.

Sometimes I would just summarise what I had been saying in the chapter. Other times I would try to write something that would urge you on, encourage you to have a go. Maybe I'd just come up with my best point about the topic. Perhaps it was a reminder or a joke. But at all times I attempted to leave the reader with something lingering in his or her mind.

That 'something' might be a smile at the corner of your mouth, a thoughtful silence, a loud laugh, an idea that gives you a buzz, a gentle sadness, a defiant cry. The something can be almost anything, but there has to be some thought put into your ending and it has to flow out of the rest of the story – the ending has to be connected in some way to ideas, characters and plot. You have to leave the reader with something that affects them. You might make the reader angry, sad, joyful or thoughtful.

But no matter what you do with an ending you will *always* find one person who doesn't like it. People sometimes don't like endings because of the way you've made them feel or they may think that you haven't answered all the questions that have cropped up in their mind while reading your piece of writing.

That's OK. Listen to others' opinions and try to sort out what you agree or disagree with – which is not always easy. You have to get it pretty clear what you are trying to accomplish with your ending.

Most important of all, you must not wreck a good story with a weak, rushed or clichéd ending. By clichéd, I mean endings like 'and then my mum woke me up' or 'and they all lived happily ever after'. Maybe sometimes you can get away with these types of endings, but hardly ever.

If you've worked well on some writing then it deserves a good ending. But good endings are sometimes hard to find. When I wrote a novel called *Eagle*, I got lucky. I knew what the ending was going to be and actually wrote the last six lines of the story when I was only half-way through writing it.

In another story called 'On the Dole' I was decidedly unlucky. I wrote the story to half-way through the last chapter – and then a big blank. I had no good idea for the ending. I asked friends, other writers, students I taught, but nothing happened. Four months later I was telling somebody about a rally on unemployment that I'd been to. When I'd finished talking, the ending for 'On the Dole' had been born and in the next few days I finished it.

Of course, waiting around for that long can sometimes be frustrating and maybe you don't have the time to wait. That's fair enough, but here I want to put a very large warning sign. I have seen many pieces of writing severely damaged because of *rushing*.

There is often a huge urge to finish a story, whether because you have to finish a certain number of pieces or because a publisher is demanding your manuscript or because you want to have that good feeling that comes from completing something. Whatever you do *resist that urge*. Have a chat to your friend or teacher about how to end it. Or put it back in your folder and read a book or somebody else's writing. Reread your writing. Write something else.

But don't rush your ending. A rushed ending is always obvious and nearly always wrecks your story.

✓ TRICK 1

What did you think of my ending for this chapter? Write your own ending for this chapter.

✓ TRICK 2

Look at a story that's finished – yours or somebody else's. Read the ending or the last paragraph. Then read the whole story. Return to the ending. Now write a *new* ending for the story that you think is better than the original.

✓ TRICK 3

Have you an idea for a piece of writing? Think about it, then write the last paragraph or the last bit of that story. (You may have to do a story map or plan the story before you write the ending.)

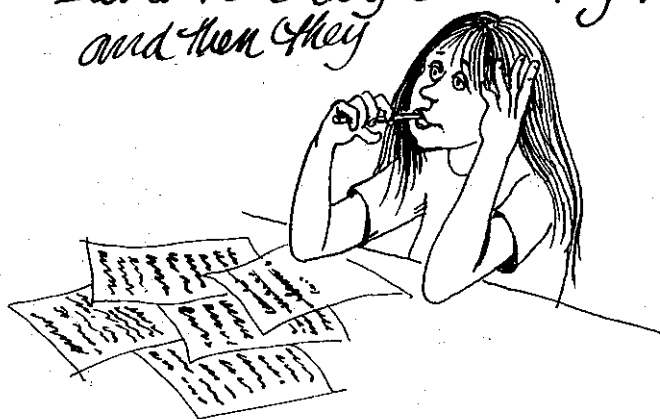
✓ TRICK 4

Make a list of all the endings (maybe the last few sentences) from all the stories you've written. Draw three columns with the headings of 'TERRIFIC', 'GOOD', and 'OK'. Then decide in what column each ending should go. Put them in the columns. Compare your decisions with somebody else's list.

✓ TRICK 5

Each person in the class (or a small group) writes down three endings for a story or a poem. The endings might be two sentences, a paragraph, one sentence or two words. Put them all together and then each person chooses one of the endings and writes a story or a poem that will finish with that ending.

*and then they went away fore
and then he took her in her arm
and then they left and went tog
and then they left in the sunset
and then they went happily away
and they lived happily always
and then they lived together alar
and then they*

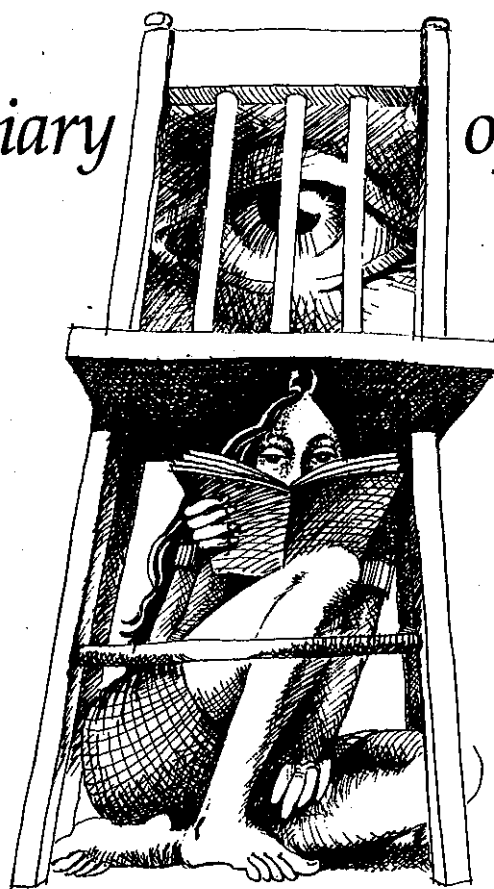


Sitting near the window, looking straight through the window, I felt the vibration of the plane and the floor moving. The trees, the grass and the buildings were going by. Faster and faster it went, I felt good. Then suddenly I felt the plane was going up. I didn't breathe for a few seconds. My ear started to get blocked. Everything was silent around me. I didn't take any notice of anyone around me. I was concentrating on the feeling. It felt WONDERFUL. As the plane got higher and higher, the feeling was getting greater and greater. Looking down to the small world, a cloud of dark black smoke appeared from a dried up bush. It was a small fire, but looking at it, it reminded me of the war.

THAVISACK BOUHASAVANH

CHAPTER 24

6 The diary of my secret life 9



I have just looked over my journals and notebooks of the last few years. In these I found descriptions of bullants, a description of how depressed I felt, things my own kids said to me, my reflections on advice friends gave, something I remembered my mum saying, letters from dad stuck into the book, a discussion I had with friends in Mallacoota, what a piece of music made me think of, whether I was shy or not, something that happened to me in 1969, a memory of a bad class I'd had that day, jealousy, a poem, a description of a fire, what I think about my children, things I want put into a story that I'd already written, ideas for stories, poems, film scripts, a description of a sea eagle's flight, memories of being in the Murray River Canoe Marathon, dreams, what I thought when I saw a rich person driving a Porsche, a daydream, an unemployed teenager, something I read in a book, a good one-liner . . .

It's really quite a huge treasure-trove of ideas and writing practice. Once you get going with keeping a journal, there soon becomes no limit to what you write in it. Anything goes because it's your secret cave, your hidden garden, your camouflaged tree-house.

It's your secret life.

There are some subjects in my journal that I'd share with you. There are others that only a few see. There are other bits and pieces that only I see. The range of subject matter is vast. And it is up to me what goes in there and who reads it.

Of course, journals can be used for many different reasons. This is what my journal is for me:

- ▶ practice for writing
- ▶ for getting my ideas straight
- ▶ so I won't forget
- ▶ for amusement
- ▶ ideas for a story
- ▶ parts to be included in other writing
- ▶ to feel better
- ▶ to understand things
- ▶ a record of events

Journals also help you get over *the fear of the blank page*. All writers have had this fear. It's almost as if when you make a mark on the page, it's going to be set in concrete and never be changed. Sometimes you look at the blank page and feel that if you write something on it, then your whole life might be judged by that piece of writing.

That's why I talked about writing and COURAGE in my letter, 'Dear Student'.

Did you know that many writers, no matter how much they love writing, sometimes hate the idea of sitting down to write? A journal is great for these times, even if you only read through it.

If you keep journals for long enough, they're like a record of your life. By reading through your journal you'll discover how rich your life is.

You might even realise that you're not such a strange person after all, or maybe you might think you are peculiar. And if you're lucky enough to read one of your friends' entries in their journal, you might understand how common some of our experiences are and how we are all peculiar.

No matter how ordinary your entry might seem to be, it's still yours, you own it, it really is your secret life.

✓ TRICK 1

Buy a notebook. One that looks good. One you can imagine being your journal. Start writing – even drawing – even doodling. Don't overdo the drawing and doodling. Journals are mainly for *writing*.

✓ TRICK 2

Keep a journal.

✓ TRICK 3

Keep a journal going.

✓ TRICK 4

Keep going.

✓ TRICK 5

What's a journal? (See TRICK 1).

✓ TRICK 6

What's another name for 'The diary of my secret life'? (See TRICK 5.)

We left Refuge Cove in a steady south west wind which was right behind us so it was pushing us along nicely. When we got to the entrance at Port Albert it was a strong breeze. We were trying to work out what all the buoys meant but they were all arse about. Meanwhile we were heading straight for a buoy and Dave the Skipper couldn't work out which side we had to go on. The buoys were big solid things and if we had hit one it would have ripped off one of the side fixtures. Well, we were about ten metres away from it and we couldn't turn the boat and just when we were about to hit we turned. We ended up missing it by no more than six inches. Anyway soon after that we nearly ran aground on a beach, so we said, 'Stuff Port Albert' and we went all the way to Eden in a five metre swell and 34 knots of wind. When we got to the mouth of the bay . . .

KANE CUNNINGHAM

One last really great trick.

All writing usually involves many aspects, as can be seen by looking at this book.

Pieces of writing are complex little creations involving everything from brainstorming, thinking and reflection to description, clarity and dialogue.

The dimensions of writing merge and intermingle, often bouncing off each other. When you write, you don't just write the story and then make sure dimensions like atmosphere and imagery are stuck in there. It often happens at the same time, all tumbling and rolling over each other.

However, *The Diary of My Secret Life* has pulled out different concerns of writing to make you more aware of the JOYS (and some of the difficulties) of writing.

A writer is never equally fantastic in every aspect of writing. Sometimes you might write a piece that's superb in its characterisation but its beginning and ending is hopeless. Becoming a better writer depends on many things (like how you feel at the moment), and those things go up and down all the time. There is nothing you can do about this process, it just is.

So you may as well embrace it and enjoy it.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE LAST REALLY GREAT TRICK

On pages 54-5 you will see three columns under the headings of SETTING, INSTRUCTION and EXAMPLE. Before you continue reading the rest of these instructions please read through the three columns and then continue on with these instructions.

The SETTING explains in the simplest, barest way, the setting of the story. It shows a little bit of *who* does *what*, *where* they are and *what* happens. It is a skeleton for a piece of writing.

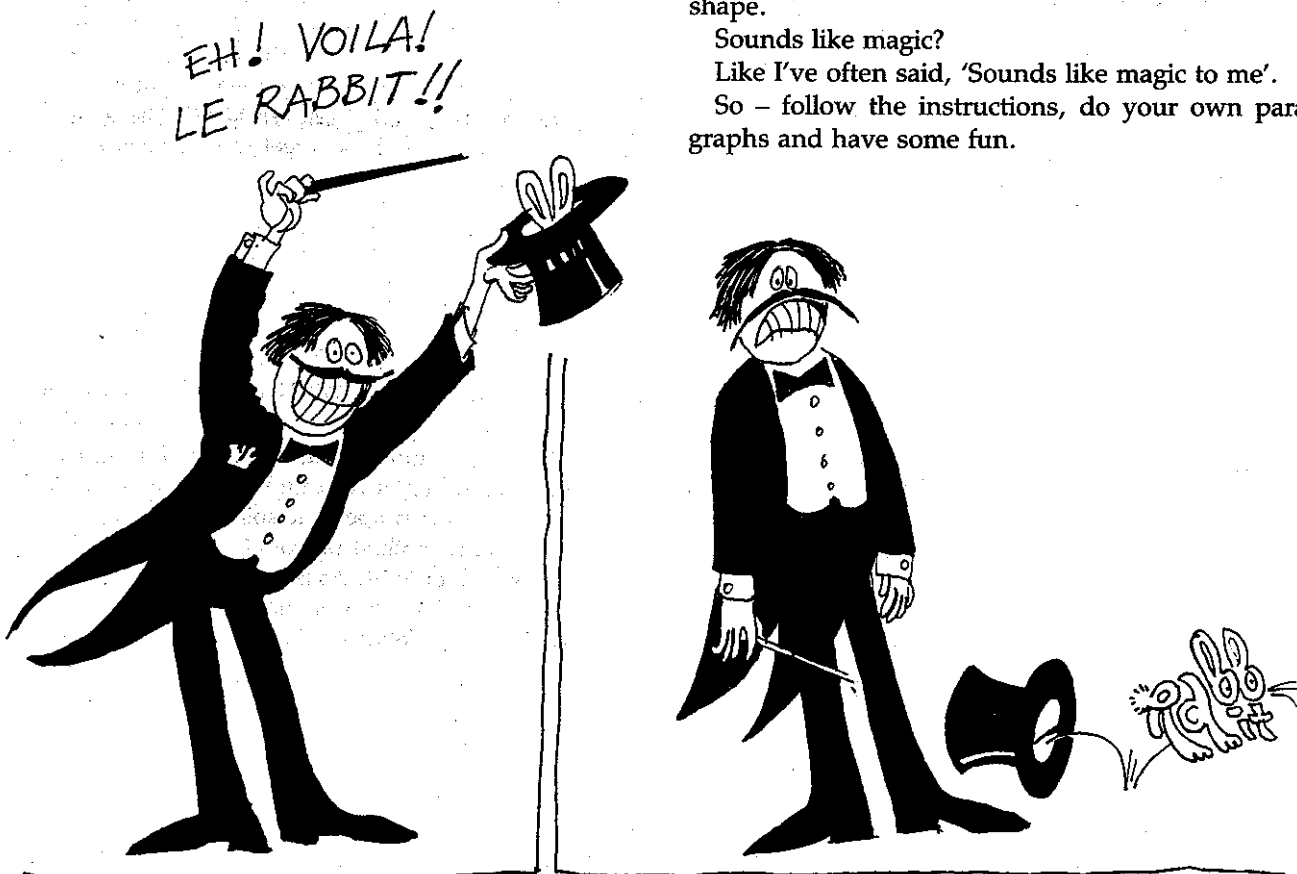
The INSTRUCTION tells you to put flesh on the skeleton. You have to write *one paragraph for each instruction*. Remember, a paragraph can be one word or a thousand.

The EXAMPLE is my attempt at what I'm asking you to do. I did it to see if I could do it and to see just how hard it was. One of the difficulties I found with following the instructions was that they restricted me a bit. Which only goes to show how all the pieces that go to make up your writing do, in fact, tumble in on top of each other and in doing this, affect each other's shape.

Sounds like magic?

Like I've often said, 'Sounds like magic to me'.

So - follow the instructions, do your own paragraphs and have some fun.



SETTING	INSTRUCTION	EXAMPLE (MY ATTEMPT)
1 A person (male or female, of any age) is walking.	Carefully describe what this person looks like.	Sam walked along the street, his leather jacket zipped up against the cold. His long face was drawn and pale. His big eyes were as black as the jeans he wore. He walked in a fast, striding motion.
2 The person is walking along a street.	Describe the street but make it a street that <i>you know</i> .	The street ran from Heidelberg Road down to the Yarra River, which lay at the end of the street, snaking its yellow way to the bay. Plane trees' last leaves clung to the branches. The crisp tan leaves that had fallen lay in the deep gutters, waiting for the rains.
3 Wind blows down the street.	Write about this wind so that some <i>atmosphere</i> is created.	An autumn wind, a chill wind, a cut-through-your-jacket-and-jumper-wind, knifed its way down the street, making the telephone wires whistle and hum. The wind waited for no one. No one could hide from this wind. The wind was emperor and the street was its palace.
4 She or he continues to walk. She or he sees an animal in the street.	Choose an animal. Describe it and what it does in such a way that it helps to develop the atmosphere you want to create.	There was a movement, a rustle, a furtive scurry in a mound of leaves caught up in the entrance to a small drainpipe. The solid grey-black rump of a yellow-toothed rat could be seen under the orange street light. As Sam passed, the rat neither moved nor trembled. But it watched, watched and followed Sam with its sewer-black eyes.

SETTING

INSTRUCTION

EXAMPLE (MY ATTEMPT)

5 The person reaches a house and walks up to the door. She or he knocks (or rings a bell or pushes a buzzer).

Write about how the person knocks, rings or buzzes. Use words and punctuation in an inventive manner.

Sam reached his friend's house, climbed the steps and crashed on the double glass doors with his fist. 'Thump! Thump! Thump!' 'C'mon Nick! Be home for Christ's sake!' He grabbed hold of the door handle, icy, chill and dead in his hand. The rattle echoed in the hall inside. 'Stuff it Nick . . . not now . . . be home now . . . What will I DO!!?' 'BANG - BANG - BANG!!'

6 Another person answers the door. The two people talk to each other.

Write what they say and how they say it.

'All right. All right. Don't get your knickers in a twist.' Nick opened the door to a boy who looked like his mate Sam. 'What's up with you? I heard you the first time.' 'Where've you been?' Sam's voice was as strained and icy as the wind in the street. 'I was watching telly. Out the back. Geez . . . you look stuffed . . .' Nick's voice trailed away. 'You wanna come in?' Sam stared. His eyes had lost their focus. 'C'mon mate. Come in.'

7 The visitor enters the house. They both go into the kitchen and have a drink.

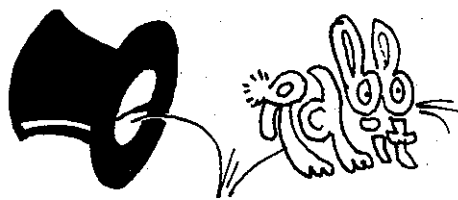
Describe this action but pay attention to the way in which they have a drink so that we understand what kind of characters/personalities they are.

Sam stepped into the hall. It didn't seem much better, cold-wise, than being outside. He followed Nick into the kitchen and slumped onto a kitchen chair, banging into the kitchen table. Nick threw him a can. Sam ripped the tab and began emptying it down his throat. Nick sipped from his can, eyeing Sam over the rim. 'So what's up Sam?' Nick slid the can onto the table. 'Bang!' Sam crashed his empty can onto the laminex top and stood up, knocking his chair over. He headed for the door.

8 They finish their drink, get up, walk to the door and the visitor leaves.

This is the last paragraph, the end of the story. Write about how they part from each other, whether they say something, how they might say it and how they might feel.

Nick grabbed hold of his own can, making sure not to lose any of the contents. 'Hey wait up, Sam! What's your rush? You just got here y' crazy bastard!' Sam was halfway out the door. 'Sam!' Nick yelled. Sam turned, wiping the back of his hand across his eyes. 'Nobody gives a damn, Nick! Not even you. Our best mate gone. Gone! Dead. Never coming back! . . . and nobody gives a stuff!'



Tricks to do after completing 'one last really great trick'

✓ **TRICK 1**

For this trick you will work in small groups of three or four people. Your group will work better if you have a spokesperson, a note-taker and a time-watcher (to keep you moving along).

Each group member should read out their eight paragraphs, from one to eight, to their group. Was there anything of interest that you might have noticed while doing the 'last really great trick?' Have a 10-15 minute discussion about these things you noticed. Then each group's spokesperson can report back to the whole class on your group's discoveries.

✓ **TRICK 2**

Look at your own eight paragraphs. Read them through. Do the paragraphs flow from one to the other? Do they seem as though they belong to the same piece of writing? Do the paragraphs hang together?

If your eight paragraphs don't run smoothly, then maybe you might be able to do something to fix them up. You might only have to add a few words or sentences here and there. Or you might want to rewrite the whole lot of them so that they read better.

Whatever you have to do, do it, so that the paragraphs emerge as a polished piece of writing.

Share your pieces.

✓ **TRICK 3**

You will need a leader for this trick. The leader can be the teacher or a student. The leader reads each setting and its instruction out to the whole class. Then she or he will point to a member of the class and ask that person to come up with a couple of sentences for that particular setting. The leader will do this for each setting, 1-8.

For example Josie reads out the setting for number 1. Then she reads out the instruction for number 1. She points at Nick and he has to try to do what the instruction says. Then Josie reads setting number 2, and so on.

✓ **TRICK 4**

Make up your own columns of SETTINGS and INSTRUCTIONS and ask your class or group to try them out. And remember, 'Enjoy yourself!'

Afterword

Throughout this book I have told you the main way to learn to write is to do it yourself. This book helps you along that path. Here are some examples of the writing of people like you who have followed this advice.

RISKING YOUR HEAD

*Have an argument
Threaten to fight
Arrange a place
And go for your life.*

*Kids crowd around
Waiting to see
Must give it your best shot
Or you look like a pee wee.*

*Once you've started
You must see it out
To back down now
would be cowardly*

*You end up fighting
But not cause you want to.
You have to put on a show
To keep your friends satisfied.*

*So your friends won't call you
Weak
So your friends won't call you
A Dog.*

*You have to risk your head
To keep the friends you have.*

KERRY EDELSTEN

MY COUSIN STEVE

We were going to the church for my cousin's funeral. We were in my uncle's van because there were a lot of people. Everyone was sad, everyone was crying. It was a feeling I thought I would never have to experience.

Everyone was in black. Nobody looked at each

How do you go about writing? It is an combination of skills, persistence and motivation.

The Diary of my Secret Life, a guide to the craft of writing teaches skills, aids persistence and provides motivation. You will learn the process of writing in a new, "user-friendly" manner. This book will improve the quality of your English skills by building on your interests, emotions and experiences, making writing easier and more enjoyable. Along with the humorous diagrams and examples of writing by students is something very unusual—Michael Hyde writes honestly about the ways writing works for him and how to do it better.

Michael Hyde has spent 18 years in the classroom encouraging students from diverse backgrounds to find pleasure and pride in writing. He is currently Policy Analyst to the State Board of Education, Victoria, and is developing the Literacy Strategy for Years 7-10. He has been involved in numerous literacy committees and has run workshops around Victoria with English teachers. He has written a teenage novel, *Eagle*, and was editor of *The Meat in the Sandwich*, an anthology of student writing.

This is a beautiful book and an irresistible invitation to write. Michael's notion of writing guides me every page and the enthusiasm he has is infectious. Grounds of this book further, he has known later the pages and show what can be achieved when given the opportunity to write their story. I will treasure my copy, read, share it, enjoy it and learn from it — always.

Peta Heywood

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