

Writing – Tips and Tricks Handout

PowerTalk Zoom Meeting – Thursday 28 November 2019

Presenter: Carolyn Lankow

Aim: To inspire and encourage participation in the NZ Region Writing Contest. (Details at the bottom of the handout)

A. The Writing Process: [used for fiction; non-fiction; speeches]

1. Prewriting - Think about it!

Think about a topic

Make a writing plan

Gather ideas and thoughts

Collect information /research

2. Drafting Write It Down

Put thoughts, feelings, and ideas down on paper.

Don't worry about spelling, grammar, or punctuation.

3. Revising - Make It Better (A.R.M.S.)

ADD – What does the reader need to know?

REMOVE – What unnecessary information needs to be taken out?

MOVE AROUND – Is the information in logical order?

SUBSTITUTE – What words or details can be replaced to make it clearer or more vivid?

4. Editing - Make It Correct

Spelling

Capitalization

Punctuation

Grammar

Sentence Structure

Word Usage

5. Publishing - Share It with Others

Read –aloud

Bind it into a book

Blog it

Record it (phone/tape)

Video it (camera/phone)

Join a writing group

B. Ideas

Where do Story Ideas Come From?

No matter what you are writing, a story, a nonfiction piece, a poem or even a memo, you first need to have an idea.

Where do you get that idea? Just look around you.

An idea can come from you and your family - a photograph, a picture postcard, parties, memories of times gone, incidents, work, holidays, letters & diary's.

From a newspaper article; overheard conversations; put yourself in someone else's shoes.

Something you know about that you want to share with others.

C. Storytelling

Made up of -beginning (1/4); middle (1/2); end (1/4) (where are we going, what's happening, how it was resolved/concluded)

Take the reader on a journey

Make it realistic – even scifi or fantasy –

Important: readers need to be able to find something they can relate to so they can associate with their own experiences or things they know about.

D. Get Started

Let it Flow:

1. **Set the Stage:** the lead sentence should encourage the reader to continue.
2. **Gain Attention:** have about 20 seconds to interest the reader.
3. **Start Right In:** Vary the length of sentences and paragraphs.
4. **Alternative Words:** - Use everyday words – ‘talking’ words rather than ‘writing’ words

Be Consistent:

Before you start to write make several decisions so the results will have unity.

Are you writing in the first (I, we) second (you), or third (he, they) person?

Which will be more effective for your story, present or past tense?

What mood will put across the meaning?

If the mood, viewpoint, tense or tone isn't right, **switch** to see if another tone is better. If so, rewrite the first part. The end product should be consistent, from start to finish.

That goes for spelling as well – the use of Mother, mother, mum and Mum in the same document for the same person can be confusing – use the same spelling/term all the way through.

Punctuation Matters

Some forms of punctuation have become a personal preference e.g. Oxford comma

Use the exclamation point sparingly.

Fullstops, colons and semicolons bring the reader to a halt. Be sure that's what you want to do.

The dash - can be used instead of commas or semicolons. The dash encourages - doesn't stop the reader.

The same is true of dots ...

Read your work aloud to hear where the punctuation should go.

E. Writing Toolbox

Show - Don't tell

Choose a viewpoint character: Experience the scene as one character.

Use the senses: Write a list of what your character sees, hears, feels, touches and tastes. Then write about it without using the words see, hear, feel, touch and taste.

Be specific: The more specific you are with your descriptions and actions the easier it will become to show.

E.G. Don't write: *There was a bird outside the room.*

Do write: *A chaffinch perched on the windowsill.*

E.G. Don't write: *She spoke in an angry manner.*

Do write: *She shouted.*

Try to avoid 'telling' words: is, are, was, were, have, had. Avoid adjectives. Use verbs. Adjectives tell. Verbs show.

Quote: Good writing is supposed to evoke sensation in the reader – not the fact that it is raining, but the feeling of being rained upon. – E.L. Doctorow

Use Dialogue

One of the simplest tools to use. The moment your characters start talking, showing becomes easier.

1): Angus seemed distracted as he walked along the road.

2): Angus paused in the road. A car's brakes screamed. 'Hey, watch out!' He jumped at the sound of the angry driver's voice. 'Why don't you look where you're going?'

In fiction: The moment your characters start talking to each other you have an action scene that engages a reader.

Use Active Voice

Make your writing more vigorous and direct. Put the verb in your sentence up front so that it pulls along the rest of the words.

Passive: Dick was slapped by Jane.

Active: Jane slapped Dick.

Repetitive words and Redundancies

Favourite words that appear all the time in our writing – go back and change the words but keep the meaning. Think about showing not telling.

- The farmhouse house showed signs of age.
- The Friends Club met at their clubhouse to discuss the club speech contest and which club members would compete.

Words that mean the same thing can be redundant – e.g. if you sit, do you need to add the word down? E.G. “After she sat down she put the cup down on the small table.”

Character Development

Creating a believable character is part of writing a good narrative.

Make each character distinct and different, with a clear impression of that character's uniqueness.

Writing Body Language

Use body language to add depth to dialogue.

Use it to show how your character's emotions affect his or her actions.

Use it to help you show rather than tell

Use it in moderation.

Plot Development

The story is how you get to the ending

Something's got to happen. Conflict is what makes it happen.

Scenes: how you show your plot.

What would force your character to do something he or she is really uncomfortable with?

Start with a catchy first paragraph

Build to the crisis

Have a plan? Or write and see where it takes you.

Start Well and Finishing strong

Tips to get started:

Before you start writing, ask yourself why you are writing – your purpose, and what you want to say – your message.

Put your main ideas into words put them on paper (or computer/tablet).

Edit and Revise

Few writers can produce what they are after on the first try.

Revising is an integral part of writing. After reading your final draft of an article or text, ask yourself:

Does this writing sound logical, are the main ideas developed adequately, are the ideas in logical order?

Is the purpose of the article/speech clear?

Are there any unnecessary words in the writing, does every word carry meaning?

Is the ending logical and satisfying, does it wrap up the article successfully?

Exercises to get into writing:

Exercise 1:

Let's brainstorm some story ideas.

Take 5 minutes to write down some ideas for a story or speech – what type (fiction/nonfiction/to inform or entertain etc)

What was your inspiration?

Bullet point your ideas to develop later.

Exercise 2:

Find alternative everyday words for the following –

I **anticipate** trouble.

We will have to **ascertain** the strength of this structure.

In the event that a fire should break out you must **comply** with my instructions.

The truck **failed to** turn at the bend causing it to terminate in the ditch.

Exercise 3:

Add punctuation where you feel it should go.

From 'Whiter than the Lily' by Alys Clare (Medieval crime fiction)

standing beside galiena as she sat on her horse he sensed her nervousness do not fear my lady he

said quietly for her alone to hear they are good people at hawkenlye and will do their best to help

you but if I should fail she said her voice anguished do not dwell on that he advised keep hope

strong for often that is the way to bring about what it is you desire

Exercise 4:

Change or remove the repetitive word in the following but keep the meaning –

1. It was a nice day when Bill and I decided to go on a nice bike ride down the nice valley. The sun was shining nicely and we felt nice as we set off. First we went through the nice settlement of Duley and through the nice piece of bus down to the nice beach with the nice sand and nice sea. We ate our nice lunch then headed back to our nice home.

2. It had rained hard all night and Betty had slept uncomfortably on the hard bed. She propped herself against the hard headboard. It was going to be a hard day – a hard essay to write and a hard professor who always demanded hard work from his students.

Writing Tips

1. Keep a notebook.
2. Write on a regular, daily basis— even if you don't feel like it.
3. Collect stories from everyone you meet. Put them in your notebook - to use later.
4. Read, Read, Read

Further information found on the internet:

www.WritersWrite.co.za – Writer's Write (South Africa)

<http://www.aerogrammestudio.com/> - Aerogramme Writer's Studio

TED talks - <https://www.inc.com/tanya-hall/stuck-on-a-big-writing-project-watch-these-five-t-talks.html>

Pixars 22 rules of storytelling:

These rules were originally tweeted by Emma Coats, Pixar's Story Artist.

<http://www.aerogrammestudio.com/2013/03/07/pixars-22-rules-of-storytelling/>

PowerTalk NZ Writing Contest:

Details on submitting your entry, refer Board email sent out via the ELO's on 24 Nov 2019.

Email included the Writing Contest Rules 2019-2020, and eligibility form.

DEADLINE DATE for 2019-2020 Writing Contest entries is MARCH 1 2020

Members of clubs in good standing and Members at Large send in entries with eligibility statement to the Writing Contest Chairman.

Writing Contest Chair – Carolyn Lankow

Email: caro.orange@xtra.co.nz (preferred method of sending)

Postal: PO. Box 40555
 Upper Hutt 4140

Phone: 021-1686354

If you have sent your entry and have not had a receipt email acknowledging the entry within 3 days, please text or email to check it has been received.

Note: If you send your entry by email you do not have to post it as well.