



Writing Right Newsletter

BREAKING NEWS

Jill Millburn - congratulations on the launch of her book on January 6th. *Broken Swallow* by J. J. Burn. I've never seen so many books sold so fast at a launch! Awesome book, awesome party!

Nicholas Fourikis – more applause for his book *Hollywood, Amarroo* which will be launched by Federal Member for Adelaide Kate Ellis on February 4th in the SA Writers' Centre at 2.30pm – **members are invited to the launch so let's have a party.** Another great book and this will be another awesome party!

Helen Chilcott – the accolades continue as Helen signs her third contract in six months. Maridgras has contracted her latest erotic romance, *Morning Glory* for publication this year. This will make five books in two years for Helen. The Wow factor!

Astrid Cooper – Christina Carlisle – Look up Amazon.com to check out these members latest books. Astrid Cooper (Gillian) has three books up on Amazon and Chrtina (Chris Ostermann) has two books up. Both have more books contracted in 2007. Chris is presently working on the 2nd book in a three-book contract

Romona Hilliger - two more books contracted for this year.

We are losing count – so many successes for January already. Please let us know about all your successes – we can't report unless we know.

Last year members published more than 30 books – this year it looks as though they will beat their record! Everyone can get published this year – just polish your short stories and poetry for the Anthology – we are now taking entries.

NEW WRITING RIGHT ANTHOLOGY FOR 2007
 “*UNCENSORED*” SHORT STORIES AND POETRY
 ENTRIES ACCEPTED UNTIL APRIL 1ST.
 FOR MORE INFORMATION EMAIL kerrina23@bigpond.com

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Critique Session on
SATURDAY
FEBRUARY 3rd
 at 12 Sandford St,
 Kensington Gdns
 (in cottage at rear)
 Ph: 8332 6085
 at 2.00pm

Next Meeting on
FRIDAY
FEBRUARY 16th
 in the SA Writers' Cen-
 tre
 Rundle St,
 2nd floor above
 Cafe Buongiorno
 at 6.30pm

*** Writing Right Labeled Wine ***

Labeled bottles still available at \$7 each.

The wine was approved by our best taste buds at the Awards Dinner during the conference, perhaps they will become collectors' items and increase in value with age.

25 UNIQUE PLACES TO FIND STORY IDEAS

by Michelle Giles

Writers always say they get their ideas from "everywhere." You may ask, what exactly is everywhere?

Stories can be created from a simple thought, a word, a headline; even a line from a song can inspire your creativity and motivate you to write. The little things from life's daily events can also provide dozens of ideas. Anything you do or anywhere you go could supply fodder for your next story. You simply need to keep your mind open.

If you're having trouble coming up with that perfect story idea, here's a list of 25 unusual places that can spark your imagination:

1. Market research

Read through market listings and guidelines, even in areas you don't normally write. Make note of what the editors are looking for. Many times an editor's request will set off a new idea for a story or article. Even if an editor is looking for a non-fiction article about cloning, that may spark an idea for a science fiction story.

2. The TV Guide Channel

Everyone watches TV. Check out the channel that lists TV and cable movies along with a one-sentence summary. Use it as a study of what's been done, and what's been successful. Then create a new plot with a unique twist. Your story could be the next Movie-of-the-Week.

3. Greeting cards

People buy greeting cards as a way of expressing their feelings. Browse through your local card store and seek out the section that best matches your writing. For example, if you're blocked on a romance idea, read through the relationship section. If you need some humor to get you going, check out the funny cards. Then use a card's theme as your starting point.

4. Yellow pages

Believe it or not, the telephone book is full of creativity. Often, a catchy name for a company or service can stimulate ideas for a title or story. The telephone book is also a great resource for character names.

5. Newspaper articles

Read through your local weekly papers, as well as the freebies, and think of ways to develop the news into your writing. Real life stories are also good starting points for fiction. They show the drama, motivation and feelings of the characters of life. Court trials also offer details on characterization. In addition, headlines, especially those of the tabloids, make great titles.

6. Lyrics

Listen to the radio for inspiration. A line from a song or poem can provide the germ of a story. Relaxing to music also allows you to release your worries and helps to open up your creative side.

7. Other people

Non-writers are especially good for playing "what if?" Try probing your family and friends for plot points, titles, and ideas; you may be pleasantly surprised.

8. The Bible

Nowhere else can you find more plot, characterization, setting and voice. The story of all stories provides the basic plot for any type of writing. It can also be used as a basis for inspirational writing, which continues to run on a strong publishing trend.

9. Science and technology magazines

Read these for the latest discoveries and technological advances. They are particularly helpful when plotting science fiction and futuristic stories.

10. Comedy sketch shows

Watch shows like "Saturday Night Live" and "Tracey Takes On..." They are prime examples of characterization. Study the characters and note which attributes make them humorous and memorable to you, as well as what makes them popular. This will help you create likeable characters your readers will remember.

11. Classics

Great writing always inspires the mind. Even if you write commercially, a good literary read will help you improve the quality of your writing and language.

12. Internet

A search on any subject can yield hundreds of ideas. Surfing the Net for fun can often start you thinking about your next project. The Internet will also allow you to see what's been done before, especially in nonfiction.

13. Photographs

A photo of a place can stimulate an idea for a setting, while a photo of a person can spark an idea for a character. If a picture moves you, but you can't immediately think of a story idea, file it away. You never know when it may come in handy. You can also jump start the creative process by finding an intriguing photo and creating a story about it.

14. Psychology books

Introduction to psychology and abnormal psychology textbooks provide a wealth of information on character. Psychology books provide background, motivation, and deep insight into human behavior. Similarly, the Diagnostic Statistic Manual (DSM) lists various character traits, which can be used for profiles. The DSM and psychology books can usually be found at the reference desk of the library.

15. Commercials

These mini-stories often hint at what's hot with consumers. Many commercials even present a short story with a punchline or twist ending in just a minute. Try using the same format to create your own short piece. This can be very effective in contest writing, where judges are looking for writers to present information in a unique way.

16. Life events

Take an incident in your daily life and bring it to an extreme. For example, suppose you go to the doctor for a routine checkup and find you're healthy. Why not go home and write a story about a doctor telling your character she will die?

17. Consumer products

Current products represent life today. If you're writing con-

25 UNIQUE PLACES TO FIND STORY IDEAS - CONT'D

temporary stories or articles, people want to read about things they know or use. Even the back of a cereal box can start you off.

18. Contests

Each contest forces you to write about a specific subject or theme by a certain deadline. This gets your mind going in several directions for different types of writing, in addition to the contest entry. And even if you don't win, you have a manuscript you can sell elsewhere.

19. Stupid criminal books

These books list all the dumb mistakes average criminals make. Although criminals in fiction must be clever and smart, these books will teach you a lot about human nature. They can also spark crime and humor story ideas.

20. TV story lines

Watch a television show, then add a new twist, new character, or new plot. The themes of most TV shows, particularly prime-time dramas, often work with cutting-edge trends in fiction and nonfiction. Remember, the better the market for your story, the better chance it will sell.

21. Children's books

Children's books offer basic themes that can be adapted and expanded in any story. They also offer an easy and clear way of explaining technical information, which can be useful in non-fiction articles.

22. Senior citizens

Our elders have fantastic stories and touching memories. Talk to your grandmother, great-grandfather, parents, an uncle, a friend. The possibilities of creating powerful stories from their memories are endless. Their tales could set off an historical novel, a nonfiction book, even a murder mystery.

23. Magazine ads

Advertisements tell a story in a few short words. Use the idea, then expand it. Again, the ads show the current trends. Read a variety of magazines, because you never know what may hit you.

24. People in a crowd

Pick out a person, imagine yourself in his shoes and start from there.

25. Writing formats

Stories and articles don't always have to be written in the expected form. Letters, press releases, business reports, memos, even recipes can serve as a format for fiction or non-fiction.

Remember, it doesn't matter how you find your story idea, only that you find it. The best way is to pay attention -- all the time and everywhere. Look at your surroundings, listen to the nearby voices, smell, touch, and taste. Never limit yourself. Then, when someone asks you where you get your story ideas, you'll be able to say "everywhere."

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Instructions

STEP 1: Carry a small notebook and pen wherever you

go so that you're prepared to write down fleeting flashes of inspiration. Place it on your nightstand table when you go to bed - dreams and insomnia often lead to great ideas.

STEP 2: Keep your mind open. Use your daily events and observations about people and life as potential short story fodder.

STEP 3: Take a bus ride around your city. When you see a person who interests you, imagine yourself in her shoes and begin your story.

STEP 4: Be on the lookout for an intriguing photograph - a compelling image can fuel your imagination. What story does the photograph tell you?

STEP 5: Scan newspapers and seek out real-life sagas that would make compelling short stories.

STEP 6: Select an event from your real life and give the situation a different or even extreme conclusion.

STEP 7: Listen to your relatives. Our elders, especially, often have interesting stories to tell. Take special note of dialect, intriguing names, characters, etc.

STEP 8: Keep a freewriting journal. Write for 15 minutes daily about anything that pops into your head, and try not to edit yourself. Read your freewriting journal and look for interesting passages, phrases or ideas that might inspire a story.

Tips & Warnings

Develop an "ear" for dialogue. Write down interesting snippets of conversation and use them in your next short story.

Write short character sketches about people you meet who interest you, and read them when you need inspiration. Could you build a unique story around one or two of those characters? Perhaps you could even combine two character sketches into one fascinating personality, helping to make a great short story.

Peruse the phonebook, especially the yellow pages. An interesting name or occupation can spark a story idea.

Don't make the mistake of writing what you think other people want to hear. Dig deep and get to know yourself, and write from your own point of view.

THE VALUE OF OUR WRITING RIGHT MEMBERS' LINE

Comments below were made by **Helen (Melbourne) and Carol (Adelaide)** on the **Writing Right critique line**.

The first from Helen:-

The comments to follow may seem a statement of the freaking obvious, but I'll make them anyway.

Settings: Before you write a scene, close your eyes, imagine it (in every detail) and firm it in your head. If you need to, draw a diagram. If you have chosen a setting as somewhere you have actually been (IE Coorong), imagine your characters acting their roles there. Your knowledge of the place, the feel of the sand, the ozone smell, the shifting tides, water swells, swaying sea-weed, bird sounds etc will help a lot.

If the place is imaginary, create it in your mind first. Look for the special sights in your imaginary scene, ditto with smells, weather, feelings etc. Walk around it. Look at it from every angle. Feel its textures, colours and moods. Your ability to describe it will enable the reader to imagine it too. It may help you if you stand in the (say) doorway, and look around. Where are the windows? The furniture? Look for details (magazines on a coffee table, a basket of knitting, bookshelves, ornaments etc)

Characters: Each should be unique in dress, speech and mannerisms. It is really good if we (readers) can pick your characters by their dialogue alone. Imagine your characters like you imagine your settings. Climb inside their head and become their brain. Take us the reader on the character's journey. Become a part of their senses and emotions. Ask yourself "How would I feel if that happened to me?" then write how you feel. Ditto with thought and speech. What would I think? How would I respond? Because as adults most of us have experienced grief, loss, frustration, anger, jealousy, love, disappointment and a gajillion other emotions, we can write from them our inside own heads.

I can't stress enough how important I think it is to write from inside your characters. It is a skill well worth developing, as characters written without it always (to me) seem distant...like they are holding the reader at arms length, and, personally, I

hate that. THIS IS ONLY MY OPINION. IT IS NOT A RULE. **Helen Chilcott**

This is another comment Helen made on line last week in answer to a query:

Dear Emma - I suppose by 'ideas' you mean plots? Mine seem to stem from a single word, which applies to both long and short works. Conway's *Women* came from 'psychoses', *Ten Thousand Brides* came from 'vampire' and 'romance', *Blood Red Tomatoes* came from 'tomato' and 'crime'.

I nut out a very brief plot in my head and then when writing begins, I permit the story to follow its own path, running on its own energy. This sometimes is not a successful formula as, without discipline, the plot can drift too far away from my original vision. Sometimes this means cutting big chunks of work. This has happened to me on a couple of works.

I suppose for a "P" Plate writer, setting a theme (plot) and writing to it would be good practice. IE, find a short story comp and write a work to fit the theme. Or choose a single word yourself and write a short around it.

You might also write about something that really interests or moves you. In my case, the piece that most fits my interest is Conway.

Are there particular things you enjoy? A sport, a genre you like reading? Something you think may be a challenge?

Perhaps you might sit in your local coffee shop window and watch people. This for me can be a huge source of inspiration for characters.

Ask your friends for ideas. Read shorts in mags for ideas. Pick three things you like and tie them together with a story, IE a dog, a farm and a storm. Perhaps you can be more abstract with your choice, IE earth, fire and sky; red, hard and sad; fragile, wet and dangerous.

Draw inspiration from everyone and everything. Listen to people talk. Watch the news. Read mags and newspapers. Try reading the want ads, or Seek ads (ie guy seeks gal). Watch doccos and movies. Never stop looking for inspiration.

When you get an idea, a word, a character, a colour, a feeling or scene, RECORD IT so it isn't lost. Think about it. Think with BREADTH. Think OUTSIDE

your normal way of thinking. EXPAND your ideas. EXPLORE parts of yourself that are latent, or fearful, or painful. Inject yourself into your work and believe you are capable and wonderful.

Look for details, IE don't just see a tree. See a living, breathing entity capable of providing shelter to bugs and animals and birds; vulnerable to environment and climate; hard yet soft too; massive yet intricate...

I could ramble on for yonks. Hope this helps. **Helen**

From Carol - on the line - adding her piece to the discussion:-

You can weave all sorts of stories about people you see on the bus or at the shops

eg the woman with the crisply ironed shirt and cameo brooch has a food stain... is she whom she seems?

Compare these people with ones from another suburb

Looking at houses you can imagine lives within them who what why events

Listening to phone conversations/ gossip on the train or a coffee shop is GREAT!

Watching the choices people make at the library, hardware shop, dress shop

Think about experiences you have had then change it to different people etc etc

With a situation try transposing it to another place/ time/ person

Think about what "lesson" or theme think about what would be expected then ask WHAT IF

eg the job interview becomes more sinister... the camping holidaythe shopping trip...the bus trip....all boring but add another element and it can become much more than a diary

As Jackie French says ...write the simple story....then "make it fat" ie add a lot of detail ...then make it thin again by getting rid of what doesn't add to the story

or "start simple then add" a la the snowflake method!

Hope this helps me if not you!!

Carol

ps I remember the best twist I read was a space ship that crashed carrying a whole race of highly civilized beings

THE VALUE OF OUR WRITING RIGHT MEMBERS' LINE

who wanted to share their knowledge/live in harmony etc
It ends that the space ship is smaller than a football and has crashed through the barn roof of some human farmers who saw these "horrid pink wiggly"slug/insect type things coming out of it (the highly civilized beings) so they sprayed the lot with fly spray! loved that story!

I would like to add to it by suggesting the importance of what/when to reveal the "whole" story ie you need to give enough information to satisfy the reader but don't give it all at once, leave a bit to surprise or make the reader think that not all assumptions can be trusted.

Carol

These are examples of the great information exchange that happens daily on the line

Helen is a mentor of exceptional talent and is a published author of two books with two more under contract and more under her belt. She runs her own business and Helen is the moderator of our Writing Right line. Her untiring energy and enthusiasm is exhausting just to think about.

She is supported by a talented group of writers who exchange work and critique each other on line.

This is not an easy thing to do. But they do it with thoughtful kindness and most of all support each other to achieve the best possible results. Working together is a delicate balance at times because it is so easy to bruise the muse. But they manage to encourage while pointing out how work can be improved.

Writers need courage to expose their beloved work to critical scrutiny while it is still a work in progress. But those on the line have shown remarkable progress in a very short time.

There is a common 'saying' among writers that it takes seven years and a lot of writing to perfect the craft. This line is proving the 'saying' is wrong.

I'm an occasional 'lurker' on the line – and I'm constantly amazed by the progress made by many.

Congratulations Helen – you are truly amazing. **Diane Beer**

PITCH YOUR STORY

by Diane Beer

When pitching your story to your critique group, to friends, to editors – even to yourself – you should be able to reduce the pitch to a brief paragraph. Reading blurbs on the back of book covers or summaries of Television shows will give you some idea how to analyse your story until the bare bones are showing.

If you can't reduce your story to a blurb – your story hasn't got a plot. That's OK, you believe you will write it as you go along – or you believe the characters will write the story as they emerge. You may be able to do that – but it will take you longer and you will need more rewrites – especially if you are new to the game.

If you intend pitching your story to your critique group – why waste time. The faster you can tell your story the more time you will have to open it up for discussion to utilise their time to full advantage. If you ramble while telling the bones of your story they will lose interest, lose the plot or believe you don't know what you are writing about. Pitching your story becomes easier if you refine the message.

Imagine that you have to go into a film director's or editor's office and you have three minutes to grab their attention.

When people give us their time to evaluate our ideas – we must value that gift of time and in return entertain/inform and present the story with the best possible pitch.

Don't start your story with...Billy grew up with a...mother and ...father in a tiny town of.....that's backfill that comes into the story later – if ever.

Start with the turning point in Billy's life that leads to the conflict such as... When Billy found the body of his wife in their car, he knew the police would believe he had killed her.

Grab the reader/editor/s attention with a hook and keep them hooked.

The following paper was given to the Clearwater Writers Conference by Kathy Carmichael.

**Pitch Workshop
Presented at the Clearwater Writers Conference
Sponsored by the Clearwater Library**

System

Copyright Kathy Carmichael

Pitches can be used either for in-person pitches or in written form. If you have an appointment with an editor or agent, you'll want to prepare what you're going to say ahead of time. Also, your pitch can be used on your query letter, cover letter, or as the opening for your story synopsis or outline.

Some terms are used interchangeably. Oftentimes, a pitch is also referred to as a logline, theme statement, or story question. Sometimes you'll see that editors are looking for high concept (which means a pitch that is easily understood, oftentimes this means comparing two movies or two books such as *Gone With the Wind* meets *Rambo*).

No matter what you call your pitch, you'll want to be ready to rattle it off at the drop of a hat! Think of this as a sales pitch - it's the method by which you can create interest in your product - your book. Your goal in creating a pitch is to make the editor prick up his or her ears enough that they'll want to read your story.

Purpose of pitch is to convey:

- * type of story
- * setting (place and time) (includes genre or subgenre)
- * who
- * goal
- * conflict
- * what makes it special or unique
- * how it fits with the books they publish
- * as well as showcase your story's marketing hooks (the things that will make a reader want to pick YOUR book up off the shelf). I can't say this strongly enough - the reason you want to write the story is often different from the reason a reader will want to read. Your pitch must concentrate on the marketing angle.

You should be prepared to tell

PITCH YOUR STORY - CONT'D

how long the book is and more details. You shouldn't pitch if you've never finished a book and generally you should only pitch a completed book.

There are as many methods of pitching a story as there are book genres. Today I'm going to tell you about a few and then show you how to create your own using a simple template. You can use this template to come up with your pitch or you can use a combination of other methods or simply your own method. My motto is KISS: keep it simple stupid - and so I'll teach you the method I use myself.

A method, one of the most simple, is often used in the screenwriting/Hollywood community and is called high concept. This method is a means of abbreviating your storyline by comparing it to other successful movies or stories. For instance, if you heard: *Gone with the Wind* meets *Star Wars* - you'd have an idea of what the storyline is about.

Here are a few written by [Kimberly Llewellyn](#) - :

* BLANK is a 100,000 word horror novel about a vampire who gives an interview to a journalist as a means to come to terms with his need to survive. (Interview with a Vampire by Ann Rice)

* BLANK is a 100,000 word mainstream novel about a woman desperate to heal her injured daughter and save her savage horse. She seeks help from a man known to calm wild horses with his whispering voice and healing touch. (*The Horse Whisperer* by Nicholas Evans)

* It's theme: The greatest espionage coup in history. It's story: The chase for a top-secret Russian missile sub. It's title: (BLANK). Taken right from the back of the cover! (Except you might want to add that it's a techno-thriller if you were writing this pitch yourself.) (*The Hunt For Red October* by Tom Clancy)

* This story is a 150,000 word horror novel about an evil that began in a laboratory and swept through America. Only a handful of survivors had the courage to take a stand against evil, yet day by day and defeat by defeat, their chances grew even slimmer. (*The Stand* by Stephen King)

* BLANK is a 120,000 word historical novel set during the civil war. It's about a young woman's ruthless struggle to survive despite the ravages of war, but she loses the one thing she learned she'd loved the most - the only man who was her equal. (*Gone With The Wind* - Margaret Mitchell)

Now let's go into more depth on this process.

The first concept is Who, also known as Character. Who is your protagonist or protagonist? If you're writing a romance, then you'll need to do this for both the hero and the heroine since there are dual protagonists in modern romance novels. If you're writing a murder mystery with a detective, then the story will relate to him. If you're writing a story with a group cast, then the group will stand-in as protagonist.

It helps if you can use an adjective or other descriptive word to addumph to your characterization. Here are some examples:

- * A dedicated doctor
- * A happy teacher
- * A blind writer
- * A frightened woman
- * A talented dancer
- * A fiendish drug dealer
- * A mad scientist

Next is Wants What - what does he/she want - this is also known as Goal.

At the opening of your books your characters usually want something - even if it's only to maintain or return to the status quo. Other goals might be to stay alive, to make a fortune, to find a killer, to become a renowned dancer.

So now we have something like this: An airhead septigenarian is desperately trying to stay alive or a talented dancer is obsessively pursuing fame. Nothing too special here so let's continue.

Why? Why does she want her goal? This is your character's motivation and helps to make your character come alive.

Some motivations are:

- * Her mother was a famous ballerina and she won't feel whole until she's proven herself as well.
- * He is the only one with a potential cure for aids.
- * She is sworn to uphold the law.
- * He is afraid of change.
- * Anything is better than death.
- * Only he knows the location of the lost city of Atlantis.

The last item is Why not? Why can't she have it? This is also known as conflict.

Some potential conflicts are:

- * Because she suspects the man she loves is the murderer
- * Because he has contracted the virus himself
- * Because the remains of Atlantis will reveal the true origins of mankind - and it's not what you'd think.
- * Because she's deaf.

Does this sound intriguing? A talented dancer pursues fame in order to live up to her ballerina mother's image but she can't hear the music.

A veteran police officer must avoid being killed himself as he pursues a serial murder. He's been sworn to uphold the law but fears the murderer may be the woman he loves.

Or in the case of this logline in TV guide: A cop has a steamy affair with a woman who may be a killer: BASIC INSTINCT

Or how about this one: A pregnant police chief investigates a botched kidnapping as it evolves into a string of murders: FARGO

Once you have your basic pitch, you'll want to finesse it by adding setting, important details - even a story question or theme. If you are going to an editor or agent appointment, once you have your pitch like you want it, you can either write it directly on an index card or, if you're unable to read your own handwriting like me, type it up, cut it out and paste it directly on an index card.

In addition to your pitch, you'll want to come armed with more information about your book - written on other index card/s. Editors who are interested in your story may ask specific questions and you'll want to be ready to answer them.

THE PLOT THICKENS

by Rob Parnell

It's important to bear in mind that none of the advice below will be useful to you unless you know your main characters well. This is because most good plotting is about the decisions your characters make when confronted with specific situations.

For instance, if you're half way through plotting a novel and you need to know how Janus would react to the death of his sister, if you don't know Janus very well, you might set your novel off in a completely unbelievable direction.

Readers won't necessarily know what happened but will 'get' on a subconscious level that Janus did something out of character. This is not good because, to you also, you will be writing a novel you don't believe in anymore. It won't feel right - one of the main reasons why authors stop writing their novels.

There are many reasons why authors don't finish novels but in my experience you can usually trace back problems to initial characterization - if it's not strong, the story won't work.

Also bear in mind that I believe it's important to plot your novel first - before you start writing. It might be only in the vaguest of ways but, and here's the kicker, you MUST know the ending before you start.

Again, from my experience of working with authors and writers for many years, most books fail to get finished because the writer hadn't decided how the story would end.

Now, I know some of you will howl. Many writers say they don't plot - they let the action unfold for them as they write. Stephen King has famously said that the Dark Tower series just comes to him and he writes it without knowing the ending. But this is deceptive - Stephen King DOES know the ending, in his subconscious mind, in the sense that his characters will always behave in certain ways.

The authors that say they don't plot - and finish their novels - have an advantage. They have a value sys-

tem that will dictate the correct ending. As a first time novelist you can't afford to assume you can rely on this facility - it's something that comes with age and experience. Writing without plotting requires a maturity that is beyond most of us.

Cause and Effect

There is one very easy way to plot any story and it relies on the law of cause and effect.

Try this.

Take your main character and place him/her in a situation. Bear in mind he/she has an agenda. Now, have something happen to them. How do they react? What decisions do they make. Depending on your answer, this is Plot Point One.

Next, based on the actions your main character made, where did your story go? Resolution? Or some little way toward resolution? Whatever. The next part of the story should be dependent upon and caused by the previous plot point.

Keep doing this while plotting and your whole story will make sense, even if you go off at tangents and tell all kinds of interweaving stories. As long as you know the ending - or at least have some idea of a resolution that your story will dictate, you can do what you like - take your story wherever seems to make sense at the time.

But this is a golden rule about plotting:

This Happens Because This Happens Because This Happens etc etc.

Plots don't make sense unless they are logical and coherent to the reader. They also won't work to you unless they make sense. It's important when plotting to make sure that no events happen without proper cause - and that your characters don't behave inappropriately.

Keep writing!

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This article is condensed from *The Easy Way to Write Fantasy*:

<http://fantasy.fictionfactor.com/course.html>

You can visit Rob and read more of his writing tips here at <http://easywaytowrite.com>

WRITE WHAT PEOPLE WANT!

Be up with topical subjects in your writing!

What People Search For - Most Popular Keywords

By [Danny Sullivan](#), Editor-In-Chief
<http://Write4kids.com/nowwhat.html>

Millions of searches are conducted each day on popular search engines by people all around the world. What are they looking for? A number of major search engines provide a way to glimpse into the web's query stream to discover the most popular search keywords or topics. These are:

AOL Hot Searches: Top current queries, or see those in the last hour, last day and within particular categories.

Ask IQ: See top searches at Ask.

Dogpile SearchSpy: Choose to see either a filtered or non-filtered sample of top, real-time search terms from this popular meta search service. Sister site MetaCrawler offers a similar [MetaCrawler MetaSpy](#) service.

Google Trends: Allows you to tap into Google's database of searches, to determine what's popular. View the volume of queries over time, by city, regions, languages and so on. Compare multiple terms, as well. See our review: [Google Trends: Peer Into Google's Database Of Searches](#).

Google Zeitgeist: What people are searching for at Google and its associated specialty services in a variety of categories. There are [versions](#) for various countries, as well.

Lycos 50: Long-standing service showing top searches at Lycos each week.

MSN Search Insider: Top 200 queries on MSN Search (annoyingly in random order), top "movers" in TV, sports and music, and a "duels" feature pitting top queries in a race against each other.

Yahoo Buzz Index: Shows you what's hot and what's not in terms of search topics at Yahoo.

Also see:

dWoz Search Phrase Lists: Great directory of services like those above, for search engines large and small, across the web. Also see the [Search Spies & Voyuers](#) category.

Google AdWords Keyword Tool: Enter a term or terms, the use the drop-down box to see the popularity of terms and popularity over time.

Yahoo Keyword Selector Tool: Formerly called the Overture Keyword Selector Tool and the Overture Search Term Suggestion Tool before that, this free service is primarily designed to help advertisers who wish to select terms to target with ads on the Yahoo network. But you can use it to see how popular particular terms are.

Researching Keywords: For Search Engine Watch [members](#), this provides an annotated rundown on key tools useful for search marketers needing to perform search research for their campaigns.

Search Term Research and **Search Behavior:** These categories of Search Engine Watch's [Search Topics](#) area compile articles on the subject of how people search from across the web and stretching back to 1997. Available only to Search Engine Watch [members](#).

Writing right

Many students find grammar difficult. Jonathan Gabay delves into the intricacies
Wed October 4, 2006 EducationGuardian.co.uk

Split infinitives

One sure-fire irritant is the split infinitive. As Bill Bryson wrote: "It is probably safe to say that the number of people who would never split an infinitive is a good deal larger than the number of people who actually know what an infinitive is and does."

An infinitive is the "to" of a verb: "to laugh", "to sing". It is called an infinitive because it is not restricted to a person or number, which is why you don't write "we to laugh", or "we to sing".

Splitting an infinitive means putting another word between the "to" and the verb. A famous example is Star Trek's proclamation of the mission of the Starship Enterprise: "To boldly go where no man has gone before." The "boldly" splits the infinitive "to go".

When writing dissertations, many people use the split infinitive for emphasis; however, if you follow this style you are in fact splitting the infinitive. The accepted rule is do not separate "to" from its infinitive.

However there are occasions when you simply cannot help splitting an infinitive.

An example is: "Will Mary ask Jane to kindly tell the customer that she simply cannot help?" (Putting "kindly" in front of "to" would change the meaning entirely).

Punctuation

The Victorians had a simple yet effective way of remembering the basic rules of punctuation that I still recommend to students of all ages:

Sentences start with a capital letter,
so as to make your writing better.

Use a full stop to mark the end.

It closes every sentence penned.

Insert a comma for short pauses and breaks,
And also for lists the writer makes.

Dashes - like these - are for thoughts.

They provide additional information (so do brackets, of course).

These two dots are colons: they pause to compare.

They also do this: list, explain and prepare.

The semicolon makes a break; followed by a clause.

It does the job of words that link; it's also a short pause.

An apostrophe shows the owner of anyone's things,
It's quite useful for shortenings.

I'm glad! He's mad! Don't walk on the grass!

To show strong feelings use an exclamation mark!

A question mark follows Where? When? Why?

What? and How?

Can I? Do you? Shall We? Tell us now!

"Quotation marks" enclose what is said.

Which is why they are often called "speech marks" instead.

Rotten rules

Common grammatical pitfalls that really annoy university professors are outlined in the Rotten Rules of Grammar:

Don't spel rongly

Don't never use no double negatives

Always use full stops they make sentences easier to read every sentence needs one

Always check your work to make you haven't any words out

Always a verb in every sentence

Always, word order important, is reading easier to make, remember

Don't use attenuated asseverations when uncomplicated vocabulary will suffice.

Another important tip for all new university students is to be wary of computer spellcheckers:

I have a spelling checker,

It came with my PC.

It plane lee marks four my revue

Miss steaks aye can knot sea.

Eye ran this poem threw it,

Your sure reel glad two no.

Its vary polished in it's weigh.

My checker tolled me sew.

Students may take comfort from the absurd image of lecturers spending hours in common rooms de-

WRITING RIGHT BOOK CLUB

Phone: 8332 6085

Email: dyoz@ozemail.com.au

Writers naturally want to talk about books.
They need to analyse, compare and learn from the work
of other successful writers.
To satisfy that need we will start our Book Club.

The aim is:

- to share and exchange books
- to discuss what makes a book a good/bad read
- to lift our understanding of the book industry by studying titles, content, publishers and genres.

Organisation:

- Meet on the first Monday of each month at 7pm
- Bring a book for exchange
- We will keep a record of books and exchange them through the Book Crossing system
- At the next meeting describe the book you have read and get a new exchange book

Planning:

If enough members are interested we will arrange a venue and inform those interested of the first meeting.

I am interested in taking part:.

Name.....

Address.....

Tel No:.....

Email:.....

Type of books I prefer to read.....

PACING BY DIANE BEER

The way a writer paces the scenes and actions within a book determines the way a book is read and enjoyed.

If the pacing is ponderous, the reading becomes boring. And this applies to all genres, to business and academic work and we all know about tedious government documents where the aim is to confuse rather than inform.

Poor pacing can kill a book. These are some of the most common pacing mistakes.

- ◆ Scenes that aren't relevant to the story and don't drive the plot forward. The writer has gone off into his/her own imagination and is drawing happy little word pictures which detract from the main thrust of the story. Imagine your book is a film or television and it will help to make each scene relevant.
- ◆ Overlong waffling descriptions where the writer indulges in their own fanciful scenes of clothes, props, scenes or dialogue which slows down the story.
- ◆ Rambling dialogue which isn't natural. The reader will immediately sense a discrepancy if the characters start deviating from their normal speech.
- ◆ The writer Telling the story and not letting the characters SHOW what is happening. This is one of the hardest aspects of writing to learn – the SHOW don't TELL rule. This is when the author starts telling the story rather than letting the characters show how they feel, think, act and see each scene.
- ◆ Use of wrong words. Short sharp words speed up tension and pace, whereas longer descriptive words are for the leisurely moods and swings of the book.
- ◆ Anything that makes the reader stop reading to puzzle the meaning of a piece. Obscure writing and poor sentence structure can stop a reader.
- ◆ Lack of strong characterization. Even dialogue portrays the characteristics and motivations of the people (or animals) within a story.
- ◆ Too many bad tags. He said – She said constantly tagging the dialogue when not needed.
- ◆ Weak hooks at the beginning and end of each chapter can slow the pacing to a full stop and the reader will switch off the light and may never pick up the book again. Keep hooking the reader with lively writing and interesting scenes.
- ◆ Lack of tension – nothing happening. The writer has gone to sleep and forgotten the reader.

COMPETITIONS

Slippery When Wet Short Story Competition

12 May 2007 (closing date)

Open to amateur writers across Australia and New Zealand. Up to 2000 words and the theme is now Open, with a new added prize for the Best Road theme story.

Prizes: 1st \$500, 2nd \$200, 3rd \$100, with 12 finalist prizes of \$50, plus additional prizes of \$100 each for the Best student entry under age 19, the Most humorous story, and the Best Road theme story. Yes, you could win several prizes with the one entry. Entry is \$7.50 per story. Sponsored by Australian Roadside Services P/L, ALL entrants will receive a published collection of the winning entries.

For full details and entry form: www.alphalink.com.au/~vanselow or contact Australian Roadside Services on Freecall 1800 810 385 or email ars@soltek.com.au.

* * * * *

If you write sweet romance, both for the inspirational and secular markets, check out By Grace Publishing, <http://www.bygracepublishing.com> This e-book and print-on-demand publisher produces romantic suspense, light paranormal, and romantic comedy in addition to Christian centered titles. They pay a 50% royalty. In addition to full-length novels, they're open to 5,000 to 15,000 word short stories and 20,000 to 25,000 word novellas. Writer's guidelines are available at <http://www.bygracepublishing.com/guidelines.html>

* * * * *

ASA Mentorship Program

Applications are now open for 20 mentorships in 2007 in the areas of fiction, non-fiction, poetry, Young Adult, children's writing and picture book illustration. Applications close at 5 pm on 2 April 2007.

Applicants must be over 18 with no more than two books published and have a work in progress to at least first draft stage. You must be an Australian citizen or permanent resident.

For further information call the ASA (Australian Society of Authors) on 02-9318-0877 or email [Jill Dimond](mailto:Jill.Dimond).

This program is funded by CAL (Copyright Agency Limited) Cultural Fund. Visit [CAL's web site](http://www.cal.com.au) for details of the Cultural Fund

* * * * *

For list of success tools for children's writers, visit <http://write4kids.com/collect.html>

* * * * *

ABC Radio Short Story Project

<http://abc.net.au/shortstories>

Closing date July/August Broadcast on ABC Radio

\$650 for 30 winners

Allan Marshall Short Story Award www.nillumbrik.vic.gov.au

Up to 2500 words Closes late February. Entry fee \$15 Prizes \$3500 distributed to winners.

Queensland Poetry Awards www.queenslandpoetryfestival.com

COMMANDMENTS OF PICTURE BOOK WRITING

by Laura Backes,

[Children's Book Insider](#)

Many beginners believe writing picture books are a breeze, but it requires a lot of skill to pack a story into a few words. If writing a picture book is your dream, here are some tips to consider before you begin:

1. Keep it simple. You should be able to sum up the plot of your picture book in three sentences. Not every detail, of course, but the broad strokes. Use one sentence for the beginning (naming your main character and the problem or conflict he'll face in the story), one for the middle (describing the gist of the efforts your character makes to solve his problem), and one for the end (how he finally resolves the conflict and reaches his goal). If three sentences doesn't capture the essence of your plot, then it's probably too complex for a picture book.

Note: You're concentrating here on plot (the action of the story), rather than theme (the underlying message). Don't get into describing theme when you're summarizing your plot. The theme shouldn't even be an issue at this point. You want to construct the story so the character's actions, and how he changes because of those actions, implies a lesson to your readers.

2. Think in pictures. The term "picture books" says it all: the illustrations are just as important as the words. The average picture book is 32 pages long, with about four pages of front matter (title page, copyright page, etc.) So you have 28 pages of text and illustration. If you aim for 1000 words to tell your story (the average length of picture book text), that gives you about 36 words per page (some pages will have more words, some less, depending on the pacing of your story).

While you don't want to obsess over precise word counts when you're writing early drafts of your manuscript, do keep in mind that

every page of your book needs to inspire a different illustration. So count out 36 words from your manuscript and note how big a block of text that is on the page. That's about how many words you can devote to each illustration. After that, your characters have to do something— move around, change locations— so the illustrator will have a new picture to draw.

One way to think in pictures is to convey the character's problem, and her efforts to solve that problem, in concrete, visual terms. If your character is having trouble memorizing facts for school, that all takes place inside her head. But if she's embarrassed because she can't swim, then her attempts to learn are easily illustrated. Note: Some illustrations will span two facing pages, called a two-page spread. In this case, you'll have about 70 words for that one illustration. But picture books are a mix of single page illustrations and two-page spreads, so keep the action moving at a good pace.

3. Keep a childlike outlook. Picture book characters can be children, adults, animals or fantasy characters. But all main characters must embody the sensibilities of a child between the ages of 4-8. This means the problem your characters face needs to be relevant and important to your target audience. The way your character tackles that problem must fit with the way a child would tackle it. Don't create an adult main character just so you can impose some adult wisdom on your readers. Grown-up characters using the emotional, illogical and sometimes messy coping strategies of children can be a very effective, and funny, storytelling technique. Above all, the character must be the one to solve the problem, using methods that are accessible to children. If readers see themselves in your main character, then they'll understand the underlying message of your story.

NEED STORY IDEAS?

Here's A Killer Resource

What fascinates people? What motivates them? What subjects prompt folks to want to know more? The answers to these questions can really be summed up in one single query:

What are people searching for on the Internet?

Thanks to a remarkable set of tools, you can find out in seconds which topics have captured the world's imagination. Armed with this knowledge, you can develop magazine articles and book ideas that tap right into a waiting market.

Have a look at <http://searchenginewatch.com/showPage.html?page=2156041> and start digging around.

A favorite is the Yahoo Buzz Log (<http://buzz.yahoo.com/>) which does more than simply provide raw data – it places it in context and provides some sharp analysis.

Google offers a clever daily videocast based on the day's hot searches. Today's Google Current videocast celebrates the late Momofuku Ando, who invented Noodle Ramen, and thus became a hero to poor college students everywhere. The daily Google Current can be viewed at <http://www.current.tv/google>

Google Trends is a nifty tool that allows you to compare the search popularity of two things over time. What's more popular: Ramen or pretzels? (Answer: Ramen by a big margin. Also, thanks to Google Trends' geographic breakdown, I learned that Belgians really, really like Ramen.) <http://www.google.com/trends>

Dogpile's Search Spy allows to see, in real time, exactly what folks are searching for. Good entertainment while you wait for the Ramen to finish cooking. <http://www.dogpile.com/info.dogpile/searchspy/>



Writing Right

12 Sandford Street, Kensington Gardens S. Aust. 5068
08 8332 6085 dyoz@ozemail.com.au

Meetings: Third Friday of each month at 6.30pm
in the SA Writers' Centre. 187 Rundle Street, Adelaide 5000
(Upstairs above Buongiorno café lift to 2nd floor)

Critique groups: First Saturday of each month from 2 pm at 12 Sandford
Street, Kensington Gardens.

On Line Critiquing: Link through our webpage
<http://www.dream-craft.com/writingright/home.htm>

MEMBERSHIP application FORM

Writing Right, 12 Sandford St, Kensington Gardens SA 5068 8332 6085 dyoz@ozemail.com.au

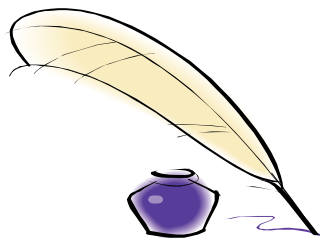
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Now Accepting entries for :-

2007 Anthology ***'Uncensored'***

poetry up to 50 lines Short Stories up to 1500 words

send before April 1st 2007

\$200 to best short story and \$50 for best poem.

Send work email to kerrinda23@bigpond.com

Name:.....

Address:.....

Email:.....

Title of work:.....

CRITIQUE SESSIONS BY DIANE BEER

We can't waste a moment.

Every writer needs their work checked before sending it to an editor.

Critiquing is an important element of helping members in the group.

When a writer has their work assessed at a critique session they are trusting us to give them strong feedback.

We can inhibit a writer so easily by assuming they know their work is good, and that they need no further encouragement.

Or by ignoring their need for guidance to simply strengthen their resolve to continue writing.

We can't just assume that the best writers within the group do not need just as much feedback as the beginners.

Every session is important every writer – and just as important to ourselves.

Because if we learn to critique well- while reading or listening – we improve our own writing skills.

The best critiquers make the best writers.

If writers come along to critique

sessions without work – their involvement is sometimes more important than those who bring work to be assessed.

Everyone in the group is coming to exchange information and learn further skills – and we should learn to strengthen everyone within every group.

We need to keep a few points in mind when evaluating work.

We should be honest, but kind and intuitive about the needs of each writer.

We should be aware of how our critique will advance skills and to that end we need to know what we are looking for in each piece of work.

The first step is to help every to obtain their goal – whatever that goal may be.

Is the HOOK strong enough to make an editor or reader want to continue reading.

Will the CONFLICT be strong enough to sustain the book?

Is the work PROFESSIONALLY presented?

Are the transitions in place?

Does every scene/sentence more the story forward or is the writing too descriptive and not succinct enough to keep the reader turning the pages.

Are the CHARACTERS unique – memorable?

Is the PACING right?

Does the DIALOGUE sound realistic?

What is the book's projected market?

Has the book got a realistic premise....even if its science fiction everything must appear CREDIBLE within the context of the story

Check the GRAMMAR

Are the TENSES are right?

Check that your are not being biased because you don't like the genre.

Does the work rave on without communicating with the reader?

If the piece of work were entered in a contest and you were the judge – how would you mentally score the work.

Can you honestly assess the best and worst in a piece of writing in a fair and unbiased manner while still advancing the skills of the writer?

MISPLACED AND DANGLING MODIFIERS

From the University of Ottawa

You have a certain amount of freedom in deciding where to place your [modifiers](#) in a [sentence](#):

We rowed the boat vigorously.

We vigorously rowed the boat.

Vigorously we rowed the boat.

However, you must be careful to avoid misplaced modifiers – modifiers that are positioned so that they appear to modify the wrong thing.

In fact, you can improve your writing quite a bit by paying attention to basic problems like misplaced modifiers and dangling modifiers.

Misplaced Words

In general, you should place single-word modifiers near the word or words they modify, especially when a reader might think that they modify something different in the sentence. Consider the following sentence:

[WRONG] After our conversation lessons, we could understand the Spanish spoken by our visitors from Madrid easily.

Do we understand the Spanish easily, or do the visitors speak it easily? This revision eliminates the confusion:

[RIGHT] We could easily understand the Spanish spoken by our visitors from Madrid.

It is particularly important to be careful about where you put limiting modifiers. These are words like "almost," "hardly," "nearly," "just," "only," "merely," and so on. Many writers regularly misplace these modifiers. You can accidentally change the entire meaning of a sentence if you place these modifiers next to the wrong word:

[WRONG] Randy has nearly annoyed every professor he has had. (he hasn't "nearly annoyed" them)

[WRONG] We almost ate all of the Thanksgiving turkey. (we didn't "almost eat" it)

[RIGHT] Randy has annoyed nearly every professor he has had.

[RIGHT] We ate almost all of the Thanksgiving turkey.

Misplaced Phrases and Clauses

It is important that you place the modifying [phrase](#) or [clause](#) as close as possible to the word or words it modifies:

[WRONG] By accident, he poked the little girl with his finger in the eye.

[WRONG] I heard that my roommate intended to throw a surprise party for me while I was outside her bedroom window.

[WRONG] After the wedding, Ian told us at his stag party that he would start behaving like a responsible adult.

[RIGHT] By accident, he poked the little girl in the eye with his finger.

[RIGHT] While I was outside her bedroom window, I heard that my roommate intended to throw a surprise party for me.

[RIGHT] Ian told us at his stag party that he would start behaving like a responsible adult after the wedding.

Squinting Modifiers

A squinting modifier is an ambiguously placed modifier that can modify either the word before it or the word after it. In other words, it is "squinting" in both directions at the same time:

[WRONG] Defining your terms clearly strengthens your argument. (does defining "clearly strengthen" or does "defining clearly" strengthen?)

[RIGHT] Defining your terms will clearly strengthen your argument. OR A clear definition of your terms strengthens your argument.

Split Infinitives

The [infinitive](#) form of the [verb](#) consists of the word "to" followed by the base form of the verb: "to be," "to serve," "to chop," etc. Inserting a word or words between the "to" and the verb of an infinitive creates what is known as a split infinitive. Prescriptive grammarians, who knew Latin grammar better than English, once decreed that a split infinitive was an error, but now it is growing increasingly acceptable even in formal writing. Nevertheless, some careful writers still prefer to avoid splitting infinitives altogether.

In general, you should avoid placing long, disruptive modifiers between the "to" and the verb of an infinitive. However, you must use your judgement when it comes to single-word modifiers. Sometimes a sentence becomes awkward if a single-word modifier is placed anywhere but between the elements of the infinitive:

[WRONG] The marketing team voted to, before they launched the new soft-

ware, run an anticipatory ad campaign. (disruptive – the infinitive should not be split)

[RIGHT] The marketing team voted to run an anticipatory ad campaign before they launched the new software.

Dangling Modifiers

The dangling modifier, a persistent and frequent grammatical problem in writing, is often (though not always) located at the beginning of a sentence. A dangling modifier is usually a phrase or an elliptical clause – a [dependent clause](#) whose [subject](#) and verb are implied rather than expressed – that functions as an [adjective](#) but does not modify any specific word in the sentence, or (worse) modifies the wrong word. Consider the following example:

Raised in Nova Scotia, it is natural to miss the smell of the sea.

The introductory phrase in the above sentence looks as if it is meant to modify a person or persons, but no one is mentioned in the sentence. Such introductory [adjective phrases](#), because of their position, automatically modify the first [noun](#) or [pronoun](#) that follows the phrase – in this case, "it." The connection in this case is illogical because "it" was not raised in Nova Scotia. You could revise the sentence in a number of ways:

For a person raised in Nova Scotia, it is natural to miss the smell of the sea. (the phrase no longer functions as an adjective)

Raised in Nova Scotia, I often miss the smell of the sea. (the phrase functions as an adjective but now automatically modifies "I," a logical connection)

A dangling modifier can also appear when you place an elliptical clause improperly:

Although nearly finished, we left the play early because we were worried about our sick cat.

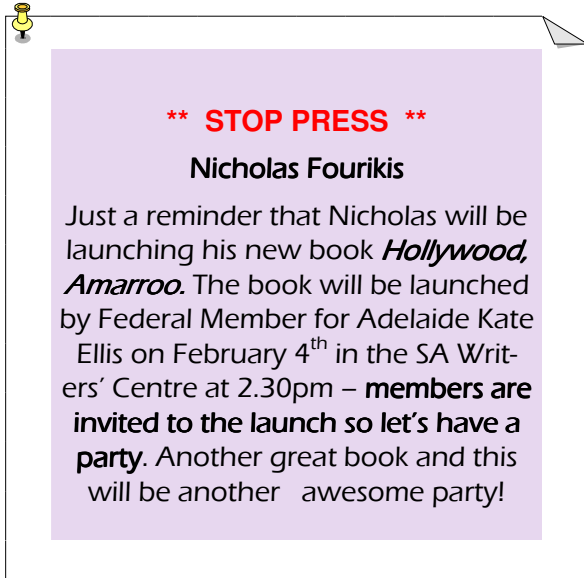
The way this sentence is structured, the clause "Although nearly finished" illogically modifies "we," the pronoun directly following the clause. An easy way to rectify the problem is to reinsert the subject and verb that are understood in the elliptical clause:

Although the play was nearly finished, we left early because we were worried about our sick cat.

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HELP US TO HELP YOU IN 2007

TELL US WHAT YOU NEED?

WHAT INFORMATION WOULD HELP YOU TO GET PUBLISHED?

DO YOU WANT MORE WORKSHOPS?

DO YOU WANT MORE SPEAKERS? – WHAT SUBJECTS?

SEND YOUR EMAILS TO dyo@ozemail.com.au

** Reminder - February Meetings **

Saturday 3rd February 2 pm

Critique Sessions

12 Sandford Street, Kensington Gardens, 8332 6085

The sessions are run by Barbara Brockhoff.

Remarkable achievements result from these sessions.

Writers make decisions about their books and their future directions for writing.

The group acts as a sounding board where writers can discuss their work with people who understand the process. As we critique books we read or the work by fellow writers our own skills are enhanced and we learn to enjoy reading with deeper insights into the construction of stories and the presentation of work.

Friday 16th February 6.30 pm

Writing workshop followed by Critique Sessions

SA Writers' Centre, Rundle St., 2nd Floor above Café Buongiorno

The first hour for this month will be a Short Story Workshop and the 2nd hour will be critique sessions.

Our Short Story Workshop ties in with our Anthology for 2007. We are accepting short stories and the cutoff date is April 1st for both stories and poetry.

This anthology will have a classy layout and something all members will be proud to share.

There is no entry fee and a first prize of \$200 will be awarded to the best story and \$50 to the best poem up to 50 lines.

Members are encouraged to bring drafts of their stories to be critiqued and polished.

Entries to Kerrinda23@bigpond.com Copies of our 2006 Anthology are now being sold below cost for \$10 each.

This anthology is planned to give our members the best chance to become published authors. We aim for a high standard of edited and print-ready work.

** REMINDER **

MEMBERSHIP FEES DUE JANUARY 2007

\$25 per annum

Send cheque or money order to:

Writing Right

12 Sandford Road
Kensington Gardens
SA 5068