



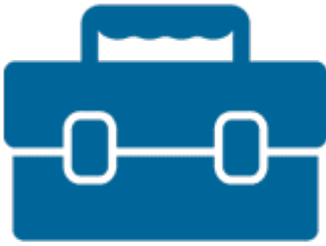
## **Module 2 : What you will need to Write Children's Literature in regards to Tools and Personal Skills**

- Physical items you will need to start writing a book
- Managing your time efficiently
- Personal skills you need to succeed as a children's writer
- Skills you can develop in order to write children's literature

This chapter take a look at what tools and skills you need to possess in order to become a successful children's writer, and will cover the following important points:

- Physical items you will need to start writing a book
- Managing your time efficiently
- Personal skills you need to succeed as a children's writer
- Skills you can develop in order to write children's literature

### **2.1 What is in a Writer's Toolbox?**



**One of the great things about being a writer is that it is an extremely cheap career to start as you need next to nothing!**

At the very minimum a notepad and a pencil are all any writer really needs. You may think this sounds very basic and it is unlikely that you will write your whole manuscript by hand. However, having a notebook and pencil always handy means that you can easily jot down ideas as you think of them throughout the day, whatever you might be doing. Often these ideas are difficult to remember so it is important to get them down on paper as soon as you have that 'light bulb' moment. Many writers keep a pen and pad by their bedside for those middle-of-the-night plot revelations, which are hopefully legible enough to make sense of the following morning.

Nowadays the majority of writers use a computer or laptop to write their books and this is probably something you are likely to own also. If you are looking to buy a new device you should pay special attention to the keyboard and have a go typing to see if you find it comfortable. Laptops are incredibly convenient but make sure the keyboard is not too small for your fingers. A USB mouse is a useful addition because mouse pads on laptops can be small and fiddly. Tablets are possible to use for writing as well but make sure you invest in a keyboard to connect.

Additional items that writers should invest in are a good dictionary and a good thesaurus. Of course you can get this all of this information online but it is always nice to have a reliable source at your fingertips and once you go to the Internet it is easy to get distracted; by checking your social networking sites and reading random articles.

The Internet, however, can be a good resource if used carefully and wisely. Force yourself to close down your email and any other distractions, like Facebook and Twitter, while you are researching information to make your stories more believable and realistic. Always check the origins of the information you gather to make sure it has come from reliable sources.

## **2.2 How to Find the Time to Write**



**Time is another important tool a writer needs to use wisely.**

We already discussed briefly distractions such as Facebook and email but there are many other

possible distractions all around the house. You can waste time so easily while putting off the thing you are meant to be doing, and if you find yourself reorganising your DVDs into alphabetical order instead of sitting down to write then maybe you need to think about managing your time more effectively.

Most writers already have another job when they begin their career because they still need to support themselves. If you are in the same position then you will need even more motivation to fit in the time to write when you already have a busy day. Even without a full-time job you will still need to make an effort to make time around all your other chores and commitments in order to write your book.

It is a good idea to have a regular time slot each day when you plan to write.

However, decide how much or how little time you have to write and make a promise to yourself that you will spend that set time writing every day. It does not always have to be working on the same project as sometimes you will find it useful and more productive to change things up a little and do some writing exercises as well to hone your skills. Even if you use the time to write your journal on days when you are feeling less inspired it will mean you stick to your plan and get into the habit of sitting down to write every day, preferably at the same time so you get into a routine.

## 2.3 The Importance of Good Spelling and Grammar



**With all the technology available these days there is really no excuse for bad spelling and grammar.**

You should check your manuscript carefully and correct any mistakes before letting others read it, and especially before sending it to the publisher.

Spelling mistakes can easily be checked with a word processing software, and some grammar mistakes can be picked up too.

Any grammar points you are unsure of can easily be cleared up by searching online or by investing in an English grammar book. Punctuation should also be paid close attention to, especially the use of speech marks and semi-colons which can often be misused.

You may think that spelling and grammar does not matter, as the publisher will sort it all out anyway. However, it creates a bad impression and if they are reading their way through spelling mistakes and misused semi-colons they will be completely distracted from your story. You want your readers to be completely immersed in your story and this means keeping them engaged and not distracted by silly mistakes.

It is especially important to get the spelling and grammar right when writing children's books as

they are learning these things as they are reading. You should be providing them with a perfect example from which to relate to and learn from. If your speech marks are inconsistent and your spelling questionable it will confuse your young readers. However, perhaps even more importantly, sloppy spelling and grammar will definitely turn parents and teachers off your books, and as they are your biggest buyers you really want to keep them on your side.

## 2.4 Personal Skills You Should Have as a Writer



### **Being a children's writer is not a nine-to-five job.**

You do not clock in and clock out, you do not have a supervisor telling you when to go on a break, you do not have any set routine at all, and most of the time you have no boss. These are all huge benefits and some of the reasons why writing is such an attractive career prospect to many. However, it also means that it is all down to you. The ability to self-motivate is one of the most important skills you need to possess.

No-one else can make you sit down and write every day. No-one can make you go through your manuscript in minute detail checking every full-stop and comma. No-one else will package up your manuscript and send it off to the fifteenth publisher after receiving your fourteenth rejection letter. You need motivation to carry on going each and every day. You need determination to keep on going after rejection letter after rejection letter. You need patience to wait for publishers to get back to you.

Apart from motivation, determination and patience you also need a lot of self-belief and confidence in your work.

Some days you will feel utterly rejected and that you will never be able to make it as a children's writer. Maybe you have days when you simply have no ideas and your mind goes completely blank. Maybe you receive some criticism and take it to heart instead of using it to improve your story. It is important to understand that you will have bad days and down days when you do not feel like carrying on. How you deal with those emotions will determine whether or not you will end up making it as a children's author. Letting the self-doubt and negativity eat you away will lead to a shelf full of half-finished stories. However, having self-belief will keep you going despite all the bad days, and having confidence will give you the courage to finish those stories and get them sent out to publishers.

Of course to be able to come up with a fascinating and unique story you will also need to be creative and imaginative. You need to be able to think up interesting characters, a thought-provoking plot, an unusual setting, etc. If you are struggling for inspiration take advantage of your surroundings, go watch listen and learn, and tweak the things, people and places you have observed into features for

your book.

## 2.5 Skills You Can Develop Further to Enhance Your Writing



**Don't despair if you think there are any of these skills that you don't possess.**

As previously mentioned there are many ways to develop certain skills and usually it is your attitude which will lead you to success more than any other individual skill. Approaching your new career in writing children's books openly and knowing that it will be a hard but rewarding journey on which you will have much to learn is a good attitude to have. Thinking you know it all and getting defensive and offended when faced with criticism is not acceptable.

Instead of snubbing criticism you should embrace it and learn from it.

If someone tells you your characters are wooden, put more work into making believable profiles for them. If you are told your plot is predictable, think about how you can make a twist or unexpected turn to throw the readers off the scent for a while. If you are criticised for your limited vocabulary, read some more books, pick up a thesaurus, or look at educational websites which indicate how many different words a child should know depending on which age range they fall into.

There are many different ways to improve and practise your writing skills but we will cover this in another chapter. Even imagination and creativity can be successfully developed by encouraging your mind to come up with more and more interesting and unusual situations. Exercises for this will also be covered later, and further along in the course we will also discuss maintaining your levels of confidence and self-belief.

### **In Summary**

There are not many physical things a writer needs to start writing. All that is really required is something to write on and something to write with; however a computer or laptop is the most common tool for writers to use nowadays.

When it comes to personality a writer must have the right attitude in order to appreciate the learning process and not get dejected by criticism and rejection. Another really important quality is self-motivation, as writers need a lot of this to carry on writing, rewriting, and rewriting again every day when they sit down to work.

If motivation will get a writer sitting on a chair and writing, then determination will get their story finished, and self-belief and confidence will get their manuscript edited numerous times and sent off

to numerous publishers.

There are many skills and qualities a children's writer needs but luckily many of them can be developed, improved upon and learnt so it really means that writing is something that anyone can do.

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