



Module 11 : Practical Writing Exercises

- Why writing exercises are useful
- Some writing exercises for different aspects of writing
- Some writing exercises to prompt your writing if you need ideas
- How blogging might help you as an emerging writer

In this chapter, we will cover:

- Why writing exercises are useful
- Some writing exercises for different aspects of writing
- Some writing exercises to prompt your writing if you need ideas
- How blogging might help you as an emerging writer
- How writing competitions might help you as an emerging writer
- What writers' forums are

11.1 Why are Writing Exercises Useful?



Writing exercises are a useful tool for every writer, and can be helpful in many different contexts.

You may be new to the craft of writing; if so, these should help you start to get pen to paper. Although it might sound silly to some, this first step can be one of the hardest. You may be smothering yourself with criticism, have low self-esteem, or struggle to prioritise writing above other things in your life when you have no particular goal. Commit to doing one or two exercises a day for the next month, and re-evaluate your situation. You will probably be more pleased with the results than you expected to.

You may have done quite a bit of writing before but be struggling to start 'the' project - your first book. Pick the exercises that suit the areas you're struggling with to give you the boost you need to take the first step towards being the published author of your very own book.

Or you may have started your book, and be experiencing the lull that many of us reach when the excitement of your initial idea has worn off, and the tricky part of putting it into practice seems a bit overwhelming. Intersperse the days you write on your book with some of these exercise to keep your mind nimble, focused and the best it can be.

These exercises, not just the ones labelled as such, are also helpful if you have drawn a bit of a blank. Literary paralysis can be very disheartening, but don't just keep pushing against a brick wall. Change direction slightly by doing exercises for a day, or even a week, to get yourself moving again.

Whether you are new to the craft of writing and needing to get started with practice, or an experienced writer looking to hone your skills or take a break from your book, you will find an exercise here to suit your needs.

11.2 First Page or Opening Exercises

Estimated Time: 1 hour +

1. Write an opening line for five books which revolve around these themes:
 - Discovery
 - Birthdays
 - Falling

- Siblings
- The zoo

Follow the advice in chapter 5 to help you make them engaging.

1. Write five first lines that start with dialogue. Think about how dropping the reader straight into the action could make an engaging opening for a book.
2. Get a copy of one of your favourite books and make a note of what happened in the story before the narrative starts. Then take this and apply it to your work; are you starting in the middle of the action?

11.3 Resolution or Ending Exercises

Estimated Time: 1 hour +

1. Write the final paragraph for three stories based on the following themes:
 - Departure
 - Mystery
 - Isolation
2. Take a book you have enjoyed recently and rewrite the final page. How do the endings differ? What effect might that have on the reader? You could get someone else who has read that book to give you an opinion on your alternate ending.

11.4 Using Observation to Create

Estimated Time 2 hours

1. Think of a scene or situation you have observed in the last week, and use it to write a short

story of roughly 1000 words. Remember it must have a beginning, middle, and an end.

2. Think of a scene you have observed recently and record it. How can you use description to give the reader the material they need to imagine exactly what you saw? How can you write the dialogue to get the tone, intonation, and character of the speakers across?
3. Take people from different parts of your life and write a scene where they meet each other. Would they get along? What exciting event might occur that would cause them to show their true colours?

11.5 Exercises for Creating Settings

Estimated Time: 1 hour

1. Write a description of the most beautiful place you have ever been.
2. Write a description of the most horrible place you have ever been.
3. Describe a scene if you could breathe underwater.
4. Describe a scene if you could fly.

11.6 Perspective and Point of View Exercises

Estimated Time: 2 hours

1. Take a scene from your book, or a favourite book of yours, and rewrite it from the perspective of a different character in the scene. Put yourself in that character's shoes and look at the scene through their eyes, keeping their backstory in mind. What is the difference in what the reader gets from the scene?
2. Write a scene with the title 'First Day at the Circus' from the first person perspective, and then the third person omniscient perspective. Compare and contrast, paying particular attention to what information the reader has gained by the end of the scene.
3. Write about a memory from early childhood in the first person. Be sure to limit your perception to the age you were. Without altering the structure, rewrite it in the third person perspective, including the insight and understanding you have today.
4. Write a passage in which an unreliable narrator gives a self-portrait of herself. Give the reader hints that the narrator is not giving them the truth.

11.7 Exercises to Help with Writer's Block

Estimated Time: 2 hours

1. Go for a walk and write down five objects, people, or scenes that you see (be sure to stop walking when you write!). When you return to your desk, write a 500 word short story which includes all of them.
2. Go to a café. Write the backstory for the person sitting directly in your line of vision. Then write the scene when they get home and realise their child has turned into an elephant.
3. If you have a pet, imagine what they would say if they could talk. If you don't, look out the window. Imagine what a bird in the tree would say, or a fly, or a worm. Write 500 words and then take a break.

11.8 Exercises for Writing Dialogue

Estimated Time: 1 hour+

1. Take a scene from one of your favourite children's books. Rewrite it, using only dialogue.
2. Write a scene for each of these scenarios, consisting mostly of dialogue:
 - An argument between an alligator and crocodile about who is better
 - A scene where a girl discovers she is moving to Australia with her parents
 - A scene where a child tells their invisible friend that they're not real
 - A family Christmas that ends up in argument
 - The conversation between a child and an alien when it first arrives on earth
 - A scene where two children are planning to run away
3. Practise your dialogue beats by writing a scene where the first element listed below is what the speakers are doing, and the second is what they're discussing. Remember to intersperse the dialogue with small pieces of description or action to get a good balance.
 - Drawing a picture of their family; what they will eat for dinner

- Running from an assailant; whose turn it is to drive the car
- Fishing; whether God exists
- Building a house; who's better at football
- Stroking a dog; whether they will go to school tomorrow

11.9 Exercises for the Nuts and Bolts of Writing

Estimated Time: 1-2 hours

1. **Using the senses:** Take five differently coloured highlighters and go through a passage you have written, preferably one with a fair amount of description, highlighting the use of each sense with a different colour. Is there a lot more of one colour than another? Is one colour lacking entirely? Rewrite it, trying to use all five senses to describe the environment and action.
2. **Practise being concise:** Write a 1000 word short story. Losing nothing that is important, bring it down to 400 words. Is it more or less effective? Why?
3. **Play with words:** Write a 300 hundred word passage using only one syllable words. Then rewrite the same passage avoiding them (you might struggle to leave them out completely).

11.10 Writing Prompts

Estimated Time: 1 hour +

1. Write a short story based on these prompts
 - A boy goes to school on the first day and discovers his school is a portal to another world
 - A teenager gets chosen by the government to be a guinea-pig for an experimental drug that enables you to fly
 - A boy has the ability to turn into whatever animal he chooses
 - A teenager is forgotten on holiday and has to find her way home

- A boy is bought a pony for his birthday
- A girl is allowed to do whatever she wants
- A teenager finds out that his real parents went to space when he was a baby
- A boy is made prime minister by accident

2. Create a twist or complete change of direction in a scene, short story, or book you have written and rewrite it from that point onwards. Is it better or worse than before?

11.11 Blogging



If you are looking for other ways to practise writing, why not start a blog?

Choose something you are interested in and just get going with it.

Commit to putting a post on at regular intervals, be that once a day or twice a week, and stick to it.

The feedback and comments you receive will serve you twofold. You may get a confidence boost when people agree with what you are saying and thank you for your words, and the inevitable, but hopefully occasional, negative comments will start to prepare you for the harsh world of trying to publish a book.

11.12 Writing Competitions



These are also a great way to motivate you to put pen to paper and maybe get some feedback too.

They range from poetry to flash fiction with stories of only 50 words, through short stories and novellas all the way to full length novels. The prizes are usually money plus publication in a magazine, e-zine, or collection, and sometimes a publishing contract with the company.

Often the runners up will receive critique, which you can use to improve your work if you feel the person who has given it to you knows what they are talking about. Some writers look down on writing competitions, but if you are lacking motivation and they give you a point to work towards, or you just fancy trying your hand at winning some cash, they are ideal.

11.13 Online forums



Many writers join online forums, where authors, published or otherwise, can join together to get support from each other and offer advice.

These work for some people, but not others; take a look and see what you think.

In Summary

Writing exercises can be useful whatever point you are at in your literary career; to get you going if you are just starting, to help you start writing your first book, to keep you focused if you are mid-book, and to hone your skills at any time.

There are a great variety of exercises you can use, from those addressing dialogue, plot, use of language, point of view, and creating settings, to writing prompts and creative exercises. You could also start your own blog, enter some writing competitions, or join an online forum to help with your growth as an author.

[Tweet "I just completed Module 11 of the Children's Story Writing Diploma Course"]
