



**LLA**

Literary Lancashire  
Award

**SCHOOLS PACK**





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Writing is about more than being an author. There are lots of options for creative writers, at university and beyond.



# WELCOME TO LLA

Hello, welcome to The Literary Lancashire Award Education Pack (or the LLAEP for short) - what's a fine-looking individual like you doing in a document like this? I'm guessing you're either:

1. Interested in writing as a potential degree or career option.
2. Interested in writing as a hobby.
3. Resoundingly bored.
4. A bit nosy.
5. All of the above.

Whatever the reason, the LLAEP is designed, firstly, to provide you with a little bit of insight into creative writing as a degree/career option. The world of writing can be a pretty mysterious one to delve into – weirdly mysterious actually – and the 'hows' and 'whys' can sometimes seem like closely guarded secrets. Enough is enough. We'll discuss:

- The Literary Lancashire Award's competition and outreach programme
- Creative writing at Lancaster University
- Bumps in the road
- Potential careers



**Secondly, this pack is designed to enhance your practical writing experience. People say that to be a writer; you also have to be a reader. That is darn true. However, to be a writer, you also... have to be a *writer*. Writing regularly and consistently is important. The LLAEP will, therefore, provide you with a list of writing exercises to help you improve your creative skills/techniques and develop your identity as a writer.**

# THE LITERARY LANCASHIRE AWARD

## WHAT IS IT?

Excellent question. The Literary Lancashire Award (LLA) is an annual poetry/short story competition and creative outreach programme open to 16-30-year-olds across Lancashire. Entrants can submit works to both strands of the competition – poetry and short story – with the hope of receiving prize money and publication.

*"We wanted to create an award that celebrated creative writing at our university. It was about giving young writers, like ourselves, an accessible competition to help build some accolades for the CV, with a little bit of prize money on the side. However, very early in the planning process, we realised that this opportunity shouldn't remain in an insular university community, but a wider one."*

*The Literary Lancashire Award is about celebrating young writers and celebrating the importance of creative writing.*

*Lancashire is a wonderfully beautiful and diverse place, tucked away in the Northern reaches of the country. We want to see something of this inspiration and potential in the writing we receive.*

*At our heart, we are just a group of students wanting to give something back to the community, using the skills we've gained in our education to introduce young people to a creative sector we've learnt to love."*

- Ruth Walbank & Lara Orriss,  
Co-Founders, 2018

The award is designed to celebrate the importance of creative writing across our beautiful county. It is also an opportunity for entrants to strive towards projects outside of work or studying, allowing entrants to write because it is their passion, rather than because it is something they are expected or required to do.

## WHY WAS IT SET UP?

Perhaps an EVEN BETTER question. Co-founders Lara and Ruth explain:

*"This competition was founded to fill an artistic gap in the community; to push creative writing as a viable degree and career option, and a worthwhile interest for young people. We hope to incentivise creative writing, offering a chance for young individuals of all backgrounds to get involved: removing the stigma of writing as an unemployable profession."*

# LLA IN 2021

After its first year, Ruth and Lara handed over the competition to the Lancaster University English Literature and Creative Writing Department where 2019 Poetry winner Daniel Findell took the mantle as its head. Now in its third year of running, Daniel remains in charge alongside fellow writing enthusiast Amy Cavanagh.

There are two categories, short story (max. 2000 words) and poetry (max. 40 lines). You can enter once in each category. Within the categories, there are themes to help prompt and direct your writing.

- **'My Life Had Lost its Relish When Liberty was Gone'**

*This is a quote by Olaudah Equiano. He is largely regarded as having pioneered the slave narrative; the book documents Olaudah Equiano's fight for freedom, his study of the Bible and his success after that. Equiano is presented in a portrait in the title page, looking directly at the reader and holding a book like a preacher, laying claim to literature and his identity.*

- **'Loss isn't an Absence After All. It is a Presence.'**

*This is a quote by Jackie Kay in Trumpet that describes the life and death of a fictional jazz musician named Joss Moody, whose passing reveals a secret 'unknown to all but his wife Millie, Joss was a woman living as a man'. This book was inspired by the real-life story of jazz artist and bandleader Billy Tipton.*

- **A Shift in Time**
- **Locked Away**
- **The Creature**
- **Out of Control**
- **A Glimpse of Familiarity**

To enter, you must be between the ages of 16-30 on the 1st January 2021, having lived/had an address in Lancashire, England, for at least three months or more (either as a student or permanent resident). If you enter this competition:

- You can get a head-start in this tough (but rewarding) creative industry.
- You will gain an important early accolade that will significantly help in acquiring future publication.
- You will improve your confidence as a writer, putting your work out into the world for people to see.
- You will develop your writing skills (practice, after all, makes perfect).

Furthermore, should you find yourself shortlisted, the credit achieved will demonstrate a high creative and communicative aptitude to any future employer: whatever your chosen career. You can enter through the website:

[www.theliterarylancashireaward.weebly.com](http://www.theliterarylancashireaward.weebly.com).



# CREATIVE WRITING

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## EXERCISES

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# SPORADIC POETRY

This one does what it says on the tin. It's sporadic; it's poetry. It's Sporadic Poetry. *Yeah, but what the heck's that supposed to mean?* We're glad you asked.

We're sure you've heard of the dreaded writer's block. Many of you will have experienced it too. It's that hair in your casserole that makes you stop and go "ugh, I can proceed no further."

When writing, it's all too easy to hit this kind of snag. The ideas can wither and dry up faster than the skin of a 102-year-old sunbather. However, Sporadic Poetry is an activity designed to get those creative beans jumping again.

## THE TASK

**Write down a word.** Any word. *Splash. Shenanigan. Zimbabwe. Cakes. Ohio.* Don't think about it too much; just pick the first one that comes to your head.

**Then write another**, different from the first. Again, try not to think too hard. *Splash. Carrot.* Keep going with this to create random sequences of words, before breaking when it feels comfortable to start another line.

**Don't concentrate on what word or form you're putting on the page.** Sporadic Poetry is the perfect excuse not to think at all, but rather feel and listen. Experiment with word lengths and rhyme, different letters, textures and sounds; it doesn't have to make sense; you just have to feel and hear it.



We'll concede, the examples on the worksheet below aren't likely to win the Pulitzer Prize any time soon (sorry, team). However, completing this exercise will help you empty all the random knots and strings that are dancing around in your noggin so that you can clear your mind and focus. It'll eliminate any negative energy or wild distractions that may be causing the block and increase your general productivity in the long run.

It also has the added benefit of sometimes producing cool creative images that you can edit, adapt and steal for your work. Look at cacti-juice or numpty-box! Candy-floss mittens and a yodelling fountain? They're fun, engaging, imaginings that you can use to enhance your work! Plus, this whole exercise takes 5 minutes, tops. #efficiency



# SPORADIC POETRY WORKSHEET

Spend 5 minutes writing a string of random words. They don't have to make sense, just keep writing and put one word in front of the other. Add line breaks and punctuation wherever you fancy or leave them out entirely. The goal is just to keep writing.

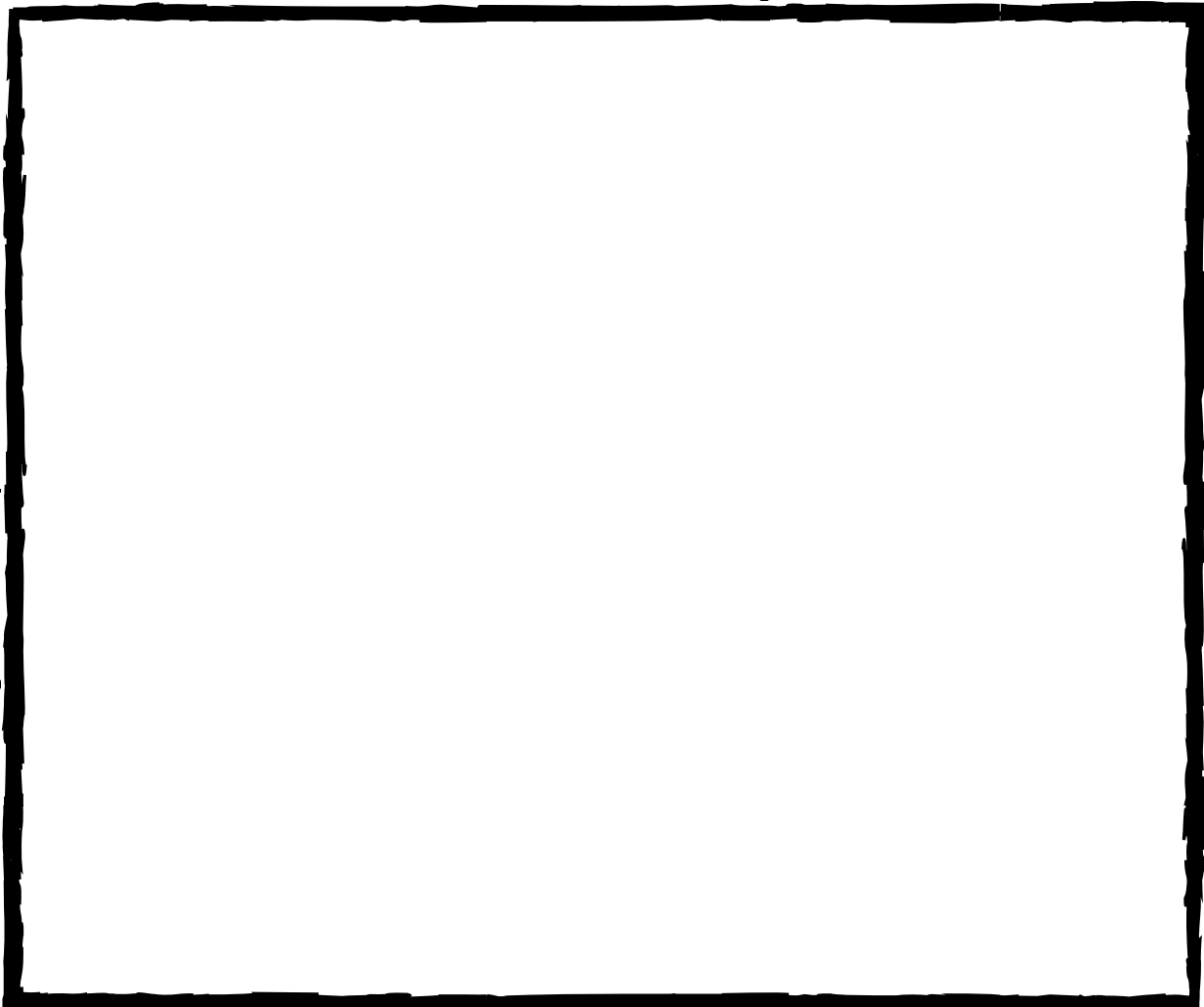
## HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES:

Peanut. Oaktree. Jamjar. Yellow.  
Jingle bells, Steve Carell, sausage dog, pea.  
Jiggly-puff, tectonic plate, blank slate, gated.  
Candyfloss, mittens, snowdrop, me.  
Numpty, box, tsunami.  
Street, cliff, high.

Platypus, barrel, leaf,  
adapter, scarecrow.  
Finger guns.  
Saucepan. Asparagus.  
Cacti. Juice. Showers.  
Chinchilla, yodel.

## WRITE YOUR SPORADIC POETRY HERE:

Nonsense is allowed and entirely encouraged.



# ONE WORD AT A TIME

You'll need to do this exercise in pairs: it's perfect for doing over Zoom, or for getting any miscellaneous family members (that just happen to be lying around) involved. Label yourselves A and B.

If you've got keen observation skills, you'll have noticed there is a list below. We've split this list into GENRE and SETTING.

One of you (Person A) should write out all the genres on separate scrap bits of paper; then rest them face down on a surface so you can't tell which is which. The other (Person B), should do the same with the settings.

Person A should (without looking) pick a genre from the face-down paper. Person B should do the same and blindly select a setting.

Don't cheat! That takes the fun out of it. You might get genres and settings which naturally correspond, e.g. Political Satire & 10 Downing Street. Or you might gather a seemingly random pairing, e.g. Horror & Your Birth (The Maternity Unit).

Now have a go at writing a quick story using these prompts. The catch? You've got to take turns, picking only one word at a time.

## GENRE

|                    |                  |              |                |
|--------------------|------------------|--------------|----------------|
| Romance            | Horror           | Fairytale    | Paranormal     |
| Historical Fiction | Comedy           | Young Adult  | Crime          |
| Memoir             | Political Satire | Epic Fantasy | (Wild) Western |

## SETTING

|                    |                    |                   |                |
|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Tattoo Parlour     | A Zoo After Hours  | Victorian London  | Alcatraz       |
| Complete Darkness  | The Maternity Unit | A Desert Igloo    | A Texan Saloon |
| Bachelorette Party | 10 Downing Street  | Campsite in Wales | Pirate Ship    |

**Consider each word you choose; they're all important. One word is the difference between 'I love you' and 'I love tacos' or 'call me Ishmael' and 'call me maybe'.**

**Think about which tropes specifically define your genre and setting. Why does, or doesn't your setting complement your genre? How does each word fit? Where does your choice take your story?**

**You can make this as ridiculous or far-fetched as you like but keep with your prompt and think about what you're doing. Then afterwards, you can use and flesh out the tale that you've written as a springboard for a larger narrative!**

# RIDDLE ME THIS, BATMAN

For this exercise, you're going to need to nip to Gotham for a quick spell... No. We're joking, though we've heard it's lovely this time of year.

Riddle Me This, Batman, controversially, doesn't require input from the Caped Crusader at all. Instead, it's a writing exercise that encourages you to think about character and storytelling within poetry. These features are sometimes forgotten or neglected, amid the form and imagery that poetry is famous for. Poetry can be a powerful tool to tell, to create and emphasise a robust narrative.

There are lots of remarkable poems that do just this, which contain characters, plot and even dialogue: *Middle Passage* by Robert Hayden is an intellectual, intertextual epic about the transatlantic slave trade. *Delilah* by Carol Ann Duffy is a jarring and modernised depiction of a Biblical story. *The Highwayman*, by Alfred Noyes, details a fictionalised forbidden romance, exploring love and loss themes.

## THE TASK

Pick a character. Make it a famous one. We'd suggest going for someone like a superhero, or supervillain, with a simple, well-known backstory or obvious narrative path.

Then break down five vital elements of your character's narrative.

These will work as scenes. They can be the bare bones of a story; you don't have to cover everything. If Deadpool's country and western-themed school prom isn't entirely relevant, leave it out.

Now, try to explore these scenes as a poem. Consider what kind of story you're telling. You can utilise the poetic form to emphasise your poem's content. The choices that you make will augment your work.

For example, writers often use Haikus to present a single moment: swift, objective, immersion. To heighten romantic aspects of your work, you may want to consider the classic sonnet, or a sestina (a complex poem traditionally sung by troubadours).

You may choose to ignore poetic form altogether – this is great too – but think about what this adds or takes away from your story?

Consider narrative voice and psychic distance.

- How close do you want to be to your character?
- What effect will this have on your character and your reader?

First-person and close third-person (or third-person-limited) allows you intimate access to your character, while third-person-objective or third-person-omniscient is further away like you're watching your character through a camera. Second-person places the reader in the poem: assigning actions to them.

Show your poem to a friend, family member or classmate, and see if they can guess your chosen character from your writing!



# RIDDLE ME THIS, BATMAN WORKSHEET

The plot is already there; you just have to consider how you want to write it!

**My chosen character is:**

**My chosen poetic form is:**

**Five elements of my character's narrative:**

**The rules/expectations of this poetic form are:**

**My poem:**

## HERE IS OUR EXAMPLE:

We're choosing Batman, for the sake of consistency.

His five vital narrative points are:

- Bruce Wayne grows up a rich kid.
- He witnesses his parents' murder and swears to rid Gotham of evil.
- Alfred, his butler, then raises him.
- Bruce trains physically and intellectually.
- Bruce Wayne becomes The Batman.

Here is a haiku (a Japanese poem which doesn't rhyme and has three lines of 5, 7, and 5 syllables) written in third-person-objective that represents the fifth 'scene' where Bruce Wayne becomes The Batman:

*the roof is silent  
the bat lurks amongst gargoyles  
he jumps and takes flight*

# SPEAK NO EVIL / SEE NO EVIL

Here at LLA, we're all about variety, so this is an exercise of two parts (*oooooh*). The first bit encourages you to think about the significance of description: the old 'show not tell' manoeuvre that every English and Creative writing teacher has written down on their checklist.

## SPEAK NO EVIL (TASK)

Write a short poem (or stanza) or a short piece of prose. The rules?

- There must be no dialogue/discourse (or telepathic communication if you're going to get pedantic). However, you may use direct thought, e.g. 'that was weird, she thought, I didn't know parrots could tap-dance' though try to keep it to a minimum.
- The scene must have a narrative arc – a path for the story to follow with a start, middle and end.
- You must have AT LEAST two characters. You may express the characters' thoughts and emotions through physical description, body language, and physical interaction

Here are some prompts for you to use (feel free to create your own as well)!

- A 106-year-old man robs his first bank.
- A tired housewife/husband takes out the bins and discovers a baby dragon in the rubbish.
- You're a journalist that meets the man of your dreams when you interview a recently apprehended serial killer.
- You are trapped on a sinking ship with the person you hate most; each of you is convinced that it's the other's fault.
- After a mix-up with some dry-cleaning, you are mistaken for 90's/00's pop-sensation Britney Spears; you're due on stage any minute now.
- You discover that your hamster has been elected the 47th President of the United States.
- A figure who looks exactly like you is stalking you; one night you confront them.
- You've been transported back in time to interrupt Archduke Franz Ferdinand's assassination.
- You catch Banksy in the act – it's your year seven maths teacher.
- The school rebel has wholeheartedly seduced you but you've found out that the entire thing was a bet.

## SEE NO EVIL (TASK)

Now rewrite the same scenario but use **ONLY** dialogue! The same mood, atmosphere, pace, tone and situation needs to come across within your speech. Consider how you use punctuation, interruptions, silence and longer chunks of speech to express your characters' emotion. How can you let your reader know what's happening without obvious exposition?

# MUSIC TO MY EARS

Can you hear it? It's the sound of you penning the most awesome poem ever to have been breathed into existence. Alternatively, it's ten miscellaneous YouTube videos that will hopefully help you on your journey... *to pen the most awesome poem ever to have been breathed into existence.*

Music to My Ears is pretty simple. It involves freewriting, which is where you write continuously for a period without worrying about the usual jazz: spelling, grammar, poetic form, structure etc. However, as the title suggests, this is not just freewriting (it's *M&S* freewriting).

We've chosen a couple of songs for you to listen to while you write. Write to the music. See where it takes you and what it inspires. The rules? There are no rules! (However, in their absence, we will offer you some strongly recommended advice... which is different.)

## TIP #1 DON'T EDIT

Or, at least not when you're writing it. If you make a mistake, tough tits, carry on. There will be time for editing later. If you really can't bear something (maybe you used the wrong 'your/you're', caught it immediately and it ate you up inside) then put a line through it and continue. However, we don't want to catch you counting syllables or googling synonyms: this ~~wastes time~~ dissipates duration.

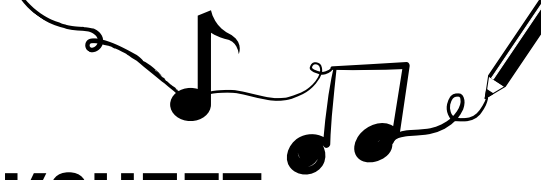
## TIP #2 DON'T PAUSE

Unless you have, like, a hand-cramp or something, then fair enough. Don't pause to think about what you're going to write, though. Listen to the music and feel the rhythm and words. Where do you go? Write it.



## TIP #3 DON'T PLAN

We all want every bit of our writing to rival Shakespeare's finest verse, which can lead to overplanning. Don't. Don't think about what you're going to write, don't consider motifs or alliteration. Just listen and let the words come to you. (We sounded a bit like a life coach there, sorry.)



# MUSIC TO MY EARS WORKSHEET

Here are the songs, linked. Try them out. You don't have to listen to them all. You could pick a few at random or listen to a minute of each. You could say '*screw you LLA, I'm picking my own songs*', and that would be fine too. As you move between songs, the mood will switch, and you can decide to start anew or continue your previous writing.

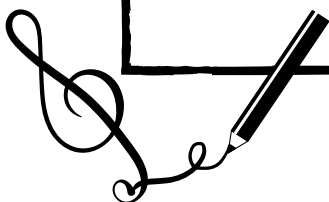
- Ingrid Michaelson, [Turn to Stone](#)
- Muse, [Uprising](#)
- Bach, [Goldberg Variations](#)
- Luis Fonsi ft. Daddy Yankee, [Despacito](#)
- 2CELLOS, [Smooth Criminal](#)
- Carl Davis, [Pride and Prejudice](#)
- The Correspondents, [Fear & Delight](#)
- Styx, [Renegade](#)
- Salt 'n' Pepa, [Push It](#)
- The Cranberries, [Zombie](#)

Describe what you can see, hear, smell, taste, touch. Is there a particular emotion that emerges, or a certain colour?

Do you imagine a specific genre or a place? Is it fiction, or creative non-fiction?

Does it remind you of another poem, or book, or TV show? A memory?

Write a piece of fiction, poetry, prose, or something else, inspired by this music...



# MUDDLED METAPHORS

Oooh, we can feel it. You're going to take like a duck to water in this exercise. Or maybe you'll be a knife through butter. Perhaps a duck to knives? Butter through a duck? Water butter? You're going to be great.

Cliché. It's a word that strikes fear in the hearts of writers. So often we're told that for our writing to succeed, we must **AVOID CLICHÉ**.

We get the 3 AM sweats pulling together a whole host of different inspirations - clowns, barbecue sauce, a poorly timed trip to Iowa - to craft the perfect tragic (yet distinctive) work. We spend hours umming and ahing about describing the scenery as beautiful, but unconventional. *Unconventionally beautiful*. Enough is enough.

## THE TASK

Muddled Metaphors is a topsy-turvy, harum-scarum kind of exercise. Here we are going celebrate and subvert cliché at the same damn time.

We've made a list of commonly used metaphors, similes, descriptions and idioms: all phrases that critics tell writers to avoid. Pick two and fuse them, creating an original (and sometimes non-sensical) image that's ready and rocking for your work.

- A Dark and Stormy Night
- American as Apple Pie
- Avoid Like the Plague
- Best Thing Since Sliced Bread
- Blind as a Bat
- Clean as a Whistle
- Common as Dirt
- Cute as a Button
- Dead as a Doornail
- Dull as Dishwater
- Dry as a Bone
- Every Cloud Has a Silver Lining
- Fit as a Fiddle
- Fought Like Cats and Dogs
- Funny as a Barrel of Monkeys
- Gets my Goat
- Happy as a Clam
- He is a Pig
- Heart of Stone
- In Hot Water
- Kick the Bucket
- Leapt Like a Gazelle
- Mad as a Hatter
- Quick as a Bullet
- Snow is a Blanket
- Sturdy as an Oak
- Wild Goose Chase
- White as a Ghost

### Here are a few examples:

- A Dark and Stormy Night + American as Apple Pie = *An Apple Pie Night*
- Cute as a Button + Dead as a Doornail = *Dead as a Button*
- Gets my Goat + Happy as a Clam = *Happy as a Goat*



# GRANDPA JOE & THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY



Here at LLA, we are not above exploiting the medium of fanfiction to enhance our writing skills. It's a good job really, or this exercise would be redundant.

## Why is fanfiction a good thing?

- You have established settings, characters and storylines ready to play around with, which takes some pressure off writing.
- You can anonymously publish work to amateur writing sites (like Fanfiction.net or Archive of Our Own) and receive feedback/criticism to improve your work.

- It forces you into the habit of regularly sitting down, getting words on the page and bashing out chapters/verses.
- It boosts your confidence, skills and techniques as a writer. Practise, as they say, makes perfect.

This activity is a fun one. Think of a piece of literature. It can be a play that you love; a book you hate; it could be a poem that inspired your work – whatever.

Now, think about this text in detail. What are its basic elements? What's the medium, the form? Who's telling the story? Is it a first or

third person? What's the style – formal or conversational? Are there any significant language choices – particularly flowery imagery or curt, gruff syntax? What's the genre, and how does it lend itself to that genre?

Take this text and **completely change either its form or point of view**. *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* might become yearning sonnet. You might retell *Peter Pan* from the perspective of the disgruntled Crocodile.

Write an excerpt of this adapted work, sticking to the original story but playing by your new rules.

# GRANDPA JOE & THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY WORKSHEET

Choose an existing text, and rewrite it from a different perspective or use a different form. You can use books, poetry, TV shows, films, or plays as your narrative, but focus on how you present that narrative to your reader.

What text are you using?

Who's perspective are you writing from?

Who's perspective are you writing from?

Which form are you using? What rules come with this form?

Your rewrite:

# A LOAD OF DRABBLE

Welcome to Flash-Fiction 101. It's not an official course, and thank goodness, because there are a whole bunch of subsections to flash fiction and a lot of debate as to what does and doesn't *technically* count.

Still, literary discourse aside, we're going to throw you right in at the deep end with this activity and start with the '**drabble**'.

If you're a regular purveyor of platforms such as Tumblr and DeviantArt or fanfiction sites, then you may have encountered a drabble. Or work that claims to be one.

A 'true' drabble is a piece of writing that's 100 words long. It can be a short poem or prose piece; it's not picky in its medium.

Drabbles encourage brevity; they challenge an author to work within a confined space. Earlier, we emphasised the hundredth word on this page, 'A', to show you just how little 100 words is to work with. Each word in a drabble must be significant: purposeful.

We'd like you to look around the room/location you're currently in for this exercise. **Pick an object** or thing. *E.g. tea-cup, storybook, flowerbed, scaffolding etc.*

Try to make it the first item you see, or at least the first one that jumps out at you. Don't go searching for anything. Now, observe the object and write 100 words about it.

**Consider your story, what narrative can you successfully achieve in 100 words?** Think about the item. What is it? Where did it come from? Whom does it belong to? Whom *did* it belong to? What can you do with it?

Are there distinctive textures, colours or features? Do you associate it with a mood or a genre? Why is it there? How do you feel about it?

The answers to these questions don't have to be true. You might choose to write about your Dad's *Now That's What I Call Music 67* album that he bought from a now-closed down HMV. Or it might be your Dad's *Now That's What I Call Music 67* album that Justin Timberlake personally sent him as a thank you gift. Both are equally valid.



# A LOAD OF DRABBLE WORKSHEET

Don't worry if this piece isn't the best thing that you've ever written. We assure you; it is bloomin' well difficult.

## OUR EXAMPLE:

Just to give you some insight into what a drabble looks like (and to reassure you that yours is probably actually quite good), here's an attempt at writing an encounter with a stray tube of Pringles\*.

*The start? A wayward slip of the finger. She grazed the rim with a callused tip. The blunt edge of her nail caught. Gently. Please. Take your time. She traced each curve with burning eyes before pulling away.*

*"No," she said. "Not again."*

*The words were feeble, even to her ears. Her wants, her desires, were that of any red-blooded woman. Tongue heavy, eyes restless, she grew more and more unsettled the longer she resisted, sat, watching. A low ache settled in her stomach. She could taste salt; she wanted more.*

*She snapped, reaching for the Pringles can.*

*"Last one."*

\*Sour Cream and Onion if you were wondering.

## YOUR TURN:

Name of your object: \_\_\_\_\_

# DRABBLE TO DRIBBLE

Don't say we never follow-up on our activities! This one is a cheeky add-on to the previous 'A Load of Drabble'.

Here, we're asking you to consider how you can edit work without negatively impacting its content. You don't want to remove something significant accidentally, so it's important to consider what you're cutting exactly, why you're cutting it, and what impact this has on the piece.

Once you've written your lovely 100-word drabble, you're going to slash it down even further. We'd like you to half it, in fact, and cut it down to a '**dribble**' which is ~~what dogs and babies~~ do a 50-word narrative.

"You fool," we hear you shriek. "It's impossible, that's too few words!"

Yeah. It's tricky. However, if Ernest Hemingway could pump out a solid 6-word story for a bet: 'For sale: baby shoes, never worn', then we are certain that you can whip one up in 50.

## THERE ARE TWO WAYS THAT YOU CAN DO THIS:

Firstly, if you're on your lonesome, then you can cut it down yourself.

- Keep in mind that you must maintain the voice and narrative - you're editing the drabble, not obliterating it.
- Strip the piece back to its core, the essential story – what must the reader know when engaging with this work; what can they infer?

Secondly, if you have someone else, either in person or over a video call, then pair up!

- It's much easier to edit other people's work than your own. You notice mistakes more easily; you can identify what is key to understand the work from an outside perspective.
- You also tend to get attached to your work e.g. there might be a particular phrase or image you like but is wildly irrelevant.

Stephen King in *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* states:

*"Kill your darlings, kill your darlings, even when it breaks your egocentric little scribbler's heart, kill your darlings."*

Contrary to popular belief (and literary reputation) he is NOT telling you to murder loved ones. He's saying that as writers, we need to learn when to get rid. It can be really painful to remove chunks of text from work, especially if we're particularly proud of those sections, but often it is necessary.

You can also keep these passages saved in draft versions, or on a spare document so that you can go back and use them in the future. It's not the end!



# DRABBLE TO DRIBBLE WORKSHEET

Does turning 100 words into 50 sounds impossible? It's easier than you think!

## OUR EXAMPLE:

Here's our Pringle-based drabble to dribble:

*The start? A slip of the finger. She traced each curve with burning eyes before pulling away.*

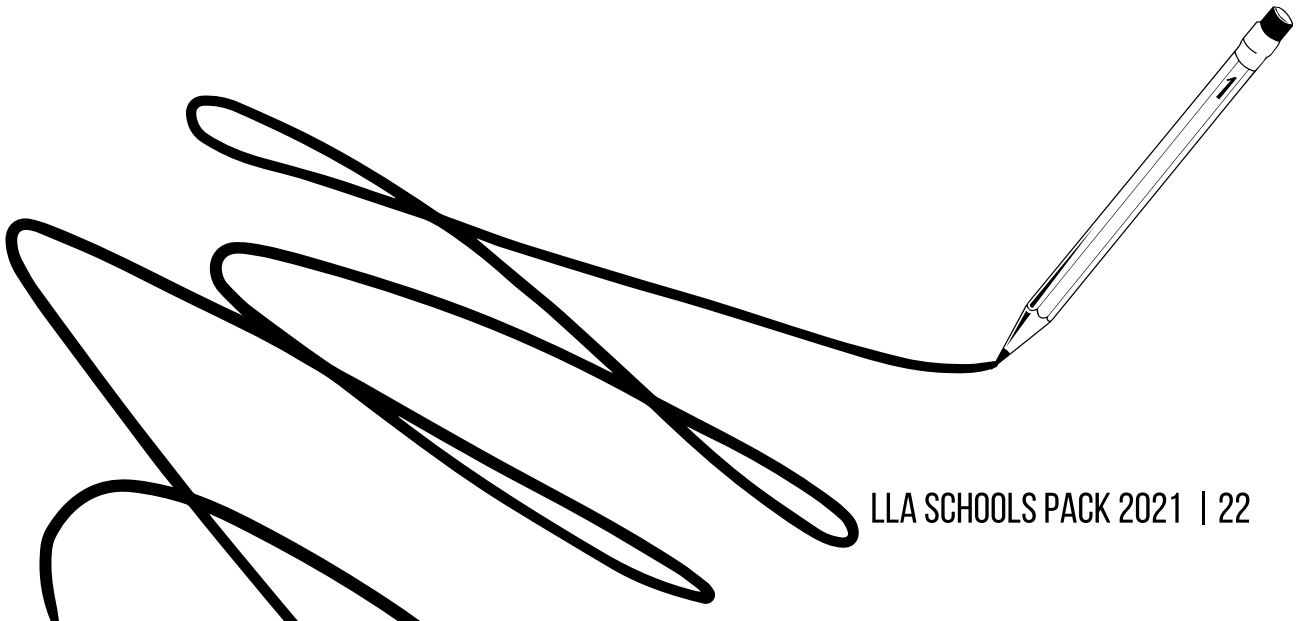
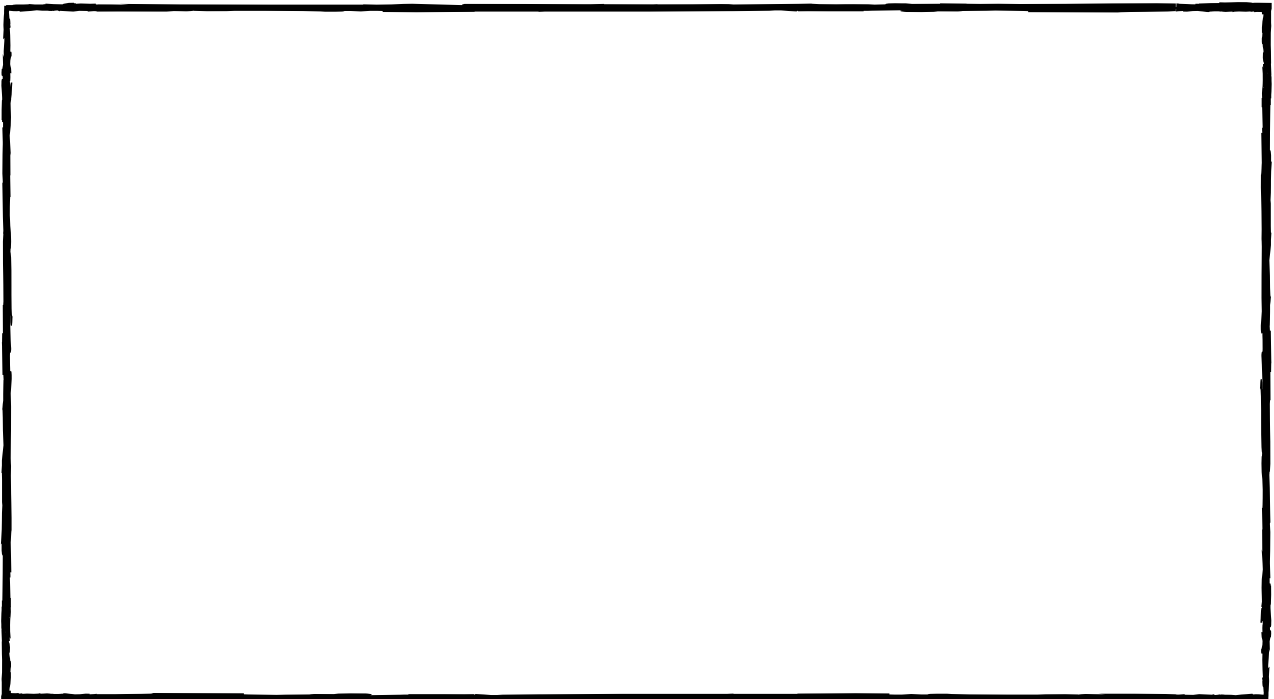
*"No. Not again."*

*She grew more unsettled, the longer she resisted. Her wants were that of any red-blooded woman.*

*Salt, she could taste salt. She snapped, reaching for the Pringles can.*

*"Last one."*

## YOUR TURN:





# 4 LINES, 4 PERSONALITIES

Before we begin, we would just like to emphasise that we do NOT endorse plagiarism here at LLA.

Not only is it extremely lazy, tasteless, and downright unpleasant to steal work from your fellow writers, it's also wildly illegal. You can face expulsion from education, ruin your career, face a hefty fine (sometimes up to £50,000) and get a year's jail-time.

So, **DON'T PLAGIARISE**, goshdarnit. Why the heated rant? We're glad you asked.

Aside from plagiarism being a morally bankrupt method, 4 Lines 4 Personalities is an exercise that encourages you to experiment with other writer's styles and work to improve your writing. So, we want you to enter it with your eyes (and ears, and mouth, and nose) wide open.

## THE TASK

Choose four poets/poems with contrasting styles. Consider what features are prevalent throughout their work. For example:

- **William Shakespeare:** we celebrate his sonnets for their consistent iambic pentameter, distinctive rhyme scheme, and magniloquent language.
- **Rupi Kaur:** her work is known for being lower-case, simple and concise, directly talking to readers about themes such as love and womanhood.

- **Edgar Allan Poe:** his poems are renowned for unreliable first-person narrators and gothic imagery that centres on death, ambiguity and imagination.
- **Sylvia Plath:** her poetry is famous for its vivid, often questioning, voice that perpetuates frenzied and violent images and techniques.

Take a line or sentence from one of the poet's works.

Break this line down. Shake out the metaphor and flowery language (literally, in this instance) and put it in crude terms. What does it mean, or what does it mean to you?

Now think about what your poet did to transform this rudimentary statement into their poetry. What techniques have they used? How have they utilised voice, tone and perspective? What's the form, structure and rhythm of this line – why is or isn't this important?

Once you have done this, consider how you would convert this sentence/line into the second poet's style on your list. Does the meaning shift? Is there a different aesthetic or narrator?

What's changed, how and why? Repeat this exercise with each poet.

# 4 LINES, 4 PERSONALITIES WORKSHEET

We've designed this exercise to help you think about voice, style, and tone. Feel free to substitute any of our poets for your own, and have fun with it!

## HERE'S OUR EXAMPLE:

Here is the final couplet from Shakespeare's Sonnet 94:

*'For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds;  
Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.'*

Here's our slightly blunt translation of the previous sentence:

*'Sweet things turn bitter because of their actions;  
this is worse than being unsatisfactory in the first place.'*

Here's Sonnet 94's final sentence in the style of Rupi Kaur.

*'it is strange how  
love rots  
maybe i should pick weeds  
not lilies  
they never seem sweet'*

## YOUR TURN:

Original Poem:

Break down its meaning:

The poem in \_\_\_\_\_'s style:



# A TITULAR TALE

Titles. They're the mobsters of the literary world; the villains we love to hate. However, without these crafty baddies, there would be no text.

In poetry, particularly, the title is essential. It's so close to the text; there's very little to separate it. A good title can transform a piece of writing, introduce ideas, offer additional depth and meaning. Say you write a ballad; at first glance, it's a moment of beautiful, intense, yearning. Then, you read the title: *Fratricide*.

**Bam.** A completely different poem.

Don't just take our poorly formed example as gospel. Maya Abu Al-Hayyat's poem, *I'm a Destitute Woman*, opens with 'I'm a destitute woman | Who lives on a checkpoint' where the first phrase also acts as the title. With the personal pronoun 'I', this concise title tangibly connects to the poem and promotes the theme of identity right from the get-go.

## THE TASK

In A Titular Tale, we want you to concentrate on how a work's title influences the text. On the page below, you'll find a list of titles. We've plucked most of them from random things at hand, or the dark abysses of the internet. Pick one. Break your chosen title down brainstorm.

Are there any significant connotations? Relevant genres? Important settings? What does it make you think of, feel?

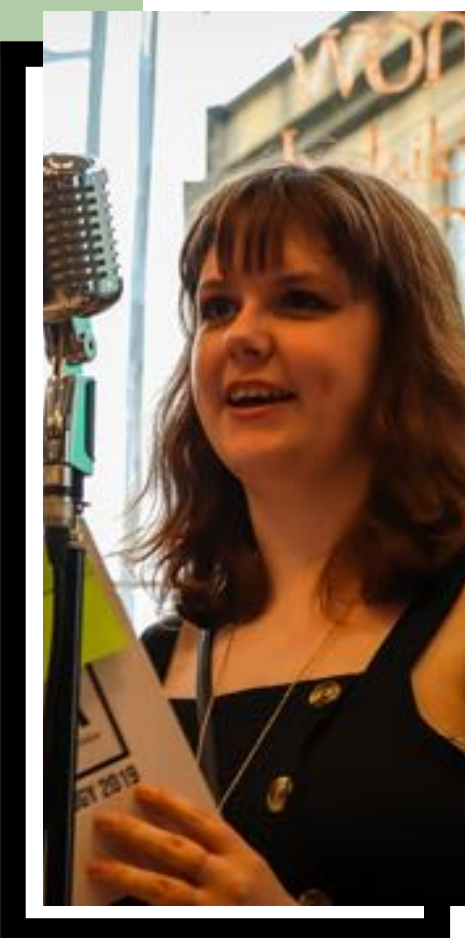
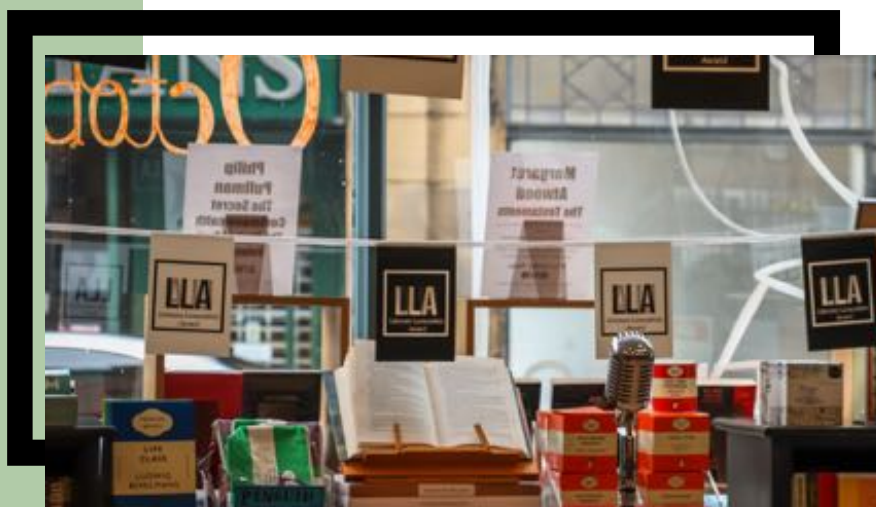
Do any colours or textures come to mind? Particular seasons, decades/eras, instruments, television shows, celebrities?

Now that your title has informed your ideas write a short story or poem of any form or style based on them.

For this exercise, you can negate specific structure and literary techniques, unless it is significant in how the title affects the writing. (You can always add these bits in the editing stage!)



- Mauve
- Mac 'n' Cheese
- Drink Me
- Like Clockwork
- The Frisbee
- Spruce
- Syrup
- Love Me
- Count Your Chickens
- The Encyclopaedia
- Canary
- Beans on Toast
- Bite Me
- Watched Pot
- The Onion
- Shamrock
- Angel Cake
- Trust Me
- Birds of a Feather
- The Rope



## TITLES TO CHOOSE FROM

# COLOUR ME IMPRESSED

This exercise was offered by Richard Bean, who wrote the play *One Man, Two Guvnors*, at a playwriting workshop held by the Royal Shakespeare Company. This guy knows his stuff.

It's important when crafting voice and character to create distinct, engaging and interesting personalities. It's also vital that you don't create an ensemble of different versions of the same person – because that would be super repetitive and probably quite boring.

Richard said that a story is most interesting when there are a mix of character personality 'colours':



**Red:** Physically orientated, into their own body, and sees other people's bodies. Their character revolves around food, drink, sex, fights – think Dean Winchester from *Supernatural* or Spike from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

**Orange:** Social, selfless, cares about the group. This character is the mum-friend who's family and friendship orientated, the worrier – think Leslie Knope from *Parks and Recreation* or Jane Villanueva from *Jane the Virgin*.

**Yellow:** Intellectual, scientific. This character often asks questions, providing information and exposition. They try to solve the problem – think Chidi Anagonye from *The Good Place* or Alex Wilder from *Marvel's Runaways*.

**Green:** Self-obsessed, arrogant, contentious, vain. They like the sound of their voice and will do what best suits their purpose, damn the consequences – think Damon Salvatore from *The Vampire Diaries* or Rachel Berry from *Glee*.

# COLOUR ME IMPRESSED

**Blue:** Stickler for the rules, likes to play by the hand-book and generally uncomfortable with going off-piece. They often have roles as rule enforcers, police officers, accountants, prefects etc. and reference what the team should be doing in a given situation – think Amy Santiago from *Brooklyn 99* or Fabiola Torres from *Never Have I Ever*.

**Violet:** Alternative, dark, a little bit weird and off-piece. If this character told you they had bodies stashed in their basement for recreational purposes, you wouldn't be surprised - think Prudence Night from *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* or Jefferson (The Mad Hatter) from *Once Upon a Time*.

**Indigo:** Creative, kooky, quirky. This character lives outside of the box and comes up with fun but often implausible alternatives to problems – think Winston Bishop and Jess Day from *New Girl* or Reggie from *Julie and the Phantoms*.

Everyone is a mix of all seven colours. However, most of us will be led by one (or two). These traits are what define the characters' personalities; it makes their responses much easier to write. They can have other reactions, but when you introduce them, they should display their coloured response; when they're in a major event or emotional situation, they ought to play by their personality colour.

## THE TASK

Now to play around with this. You have seven characters, one of each personality colour, and they are trapped in an enclosed space where they cannot leave, e.g. school detention, a storage closet that locks from the outside, a supervillain's dungeon.

Write a short scene that details the interactions of these characters. It can be done solely as dialogue, as a prose piece or as a character poem.

How do these personality colours interact? Is one more dominant than others? Will two character colours instinctively clash?



# THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

Look, we've all been there. Tip-toeing around something in particular without ever actually saying anything about it. Maybe a teacher has been displaying clear favouritism because their child's a student, or someone's had spinach stuck in their braces for the past hour, but it'd be damn awkward to point out. They're obvious problems. Everyone knows about them. Nobody's likely to address them. They're the elephants in the room.



Using the elephant in the room (EITR) in your writing is an excellent way to:

- **Create tension** – avoiding talking about the problem magnifies it.
- **Highlight relationships** – why can't they discuss the issue with one another? What's in their way?
- **Demonstrate realistic, humanised interactions** – while some people are blunt as a butter knife, many will do their best to avoid confrontation.

Write a short description of an EITR, either in poetry, prose, or script form. Consider:

- **Dialogue and characterisation** – what are people saying, what are they NOT saying? Description, tone, movements, body language, emotion.
- **Setting and scenery** - there's a whole language beyond the verbal, e.g. yellow roses indicate infidelity while crimson roses represent mourning.
- **Structure and form** – how does a piece's presentation impact it? Line breaks and white space manipulate how the reader tackles your work.
- **Perspective** – what difference does a third person objective narrator, and a first-person narrator have on the scene? Is the narrator reliable?



Try **not to say outright what the problem is**. Skirt around it in such a way that the reader may infer. Then, if possible, ask someone to read it and see if they can identify what's happening in the scene. Go as big and wild or small and subtle as you want. Here are some examples to help you on your way!

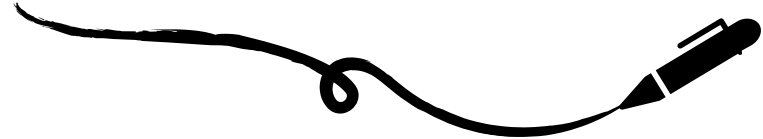
# THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM WORKSHEET

Choose one of the following scenarios:

- A werewolf has recently bitten your cousin, and it is fast approaching the full moon; rather than preparing, he's sat in the lounge playing Mario Kart.
- You're on your boat at sea, and there's been a murder. Nobody could get on or off the vessel, so one of you did it.
- Five years ago, you died after an incident with a grizzly bear but didn't realise and came back as a ghost. Your family could never quite break it to you.
- You're at a dinner party where two people are having an affair, everyone knows except their significant others.
- There is an actual elephant in your conservatory.
- You're a Superhero and, dressed as your everyday alter-ego, you have a fantastic date. Later, as you're fighting your Supervillain arch-nemesis, you both recognise one another... from the date.

Now, turn this scenario into a piece of prose, poetry, or script. Avoid mentioning EXACTLY what the scenario is, but use your words to communicate to the reader.

My chosen scenario is: \_\_\_\_\_



# LOST THE PLOT

Firstly, a little reading recommendation. If you're like us and struggle to navigate between the beginning, middle and end of your work without having four cups of tea, six breakdowns and enough biscuits to feed a small country, John Yorke's *Into the Woods* is fab. It helps navigate narrative structure in a way that's accessible, even if you're not an expert on the subject (and it's also mildly amusing).

While plots can be a pain, often, it's structure to blame for wonky storytelling. The plot is a sequence of events and their connection. The structure is how you organise these events. Using Freytag's five-act-structure can help you organise your thoughts and events. Here, you break down what's happening into five key chronological chunks:

- **Exposition** - what does the reader need to know immediately? Set up your main character(s), situation and world.
- **Rising Action** - what's the driving point? Things start to move towards this. Complications and obstacles arise.
- **Climax** - what changes? This part is the turning point; the moment with the most uncertainty. The protagonist's state/situation begins to shift.
- **Falling Action** - what's the result of this change? The conflict unravels; loose ends are tied up, and twists are exposed.
- **Dénouement** - where do you go from here? It's the ending, the rounding up and consequences of the story's events.

To help you manage your plot and detail your structure, outline what you want to happen. It doesn't need to be great swathes of detail and explanation. You just need a sentence or two that identify key

occurrences and when these happen. This structure gives your book a skeleton, a bare-bones outline that you can refer back to if you get lost.

Here's an example using *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. You'll notice that many events are missing, but that's okay; you can also do a fleshed-out version later on. Having this short, sparse guide is good to gather your thoughts in a single glance.

- **Exposition:** Harry Potter is the 'Boy Who Lived' but isn't aware of it yet. Harry is an orphan that lives with his mean aunt, uncle and cousin.
- **Rising Action:** Hagrid hunts down Harry and the Dursleys to tell Harry that he's a wizard. He gets his wand and travels to Hogwarts Express where he meets Ron. He finds out more about his parents that he's famous, and he gets sorted into Gryffindor.
- **Climax:** There's something shady occurring at Hogwarts. There's a *TROLL IN THE DUNGEON!* Harry and Ron save Hermione; the three become firm friends. Harry sees Voldemort drinking unicorn blood (ew) and learns about the Philosopher's Stone from a centaur (Firenze).
- **Falling Action:** Dumbledore is lured away from the school; Harry, Ron and Hermione fear someone (Snape) will steal the Philosopher's Stone; they try to combat the problem themselves. Obstacles encumber Ron and Hermione, leaving just Harry - all is revealed - Quirrell's the bad guy (kind of).
- **Dénouement:** Harry defeats Voldemort, wahay! Dumbledore's back and explains his mother sacrificed her life so he could live. Thus, he is protected by her love. Everyone's happy (except Voldemort).

# CREATIVE CAREERS



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# CREATIVE WRITING AT UNIVERSITY

You hear a lot of umming and ahing over creative writing at degree level. Many people seem to believe that it is a subject that cannot be taught – you either have it or don't – so what's the point in studying it? Strangely, it's very rare to hear this sort of thing about other professional fields.

*Scuba-training? For practise and safety? Absolutely not. It should be WITHIN YOU.*

Hence, we would say that these people are wrong. Or mostly wrong, anyway. You can't teach someone how to have an imagination, but you *can* help someone learn how to use it to the best of their ability. Creative writing at university does the same as any other subject at university: it exposes you to new research, mediums, techniques and technology.

Is it necessary to study creative writing to become a writer? No. *Absolutely not.* There are many paths you can go down to become a writer, far too many to list, half of which are completely by accident. Higher education isn't everyone's cup of tea. However, taking a creative writing course, or studying the subject at university is not a bad thing; it doesn't mean that you don't have the intrinsic writers' knack. Listen to novelist, Dr Nell Stevens:

*"Writing, like anything – from athletics to nuclear physics – depends on a basic degree of talent, which can be cultivated through training. So, let's stop pretending that devoting a year or two to studying writing in the company of others is anything other than a valid step towards a literary career"*

- [Let's Silence the Creative Writing Course Snobs](#), The Guardian, 2018

In studying at creative writing at university you hone and develop your writing skills with an awareness of audience, genre, form/medium and professional practice. Essentially, doing a creative writing course trains you to expand your skillset and utilise that creative brain.



# Lancaster University



## CREATIVE WRITING AT LANCASTER UNIVERSITY

The Complete University Guide ranks Lancaster University as top overall in the UK for their creative writing course at Lancaster (this combines rankings for student satisfaction, entry standards, research quality/intensity and graduate prospects). Not too shabby! However, most significantly, the course occupies the top spot for graduate prospects (this measures students' professional success upon completing their course).

Lancaster University offers creative writing at an undergraduate level as a joint major with:

- English Language (AAB)
- English Literature (AAB)
- Film (ABB)
- Fine Art (ABB)
- Theatre (ABB)

The comparative proportion of Creative Writing depends on which other subjects you choose. Most are 50% for both subjects. However, English Literature, for example, has the option for 25% Creative Writing to

75% English. They are always quite flexible; for example, in your first year (or PART 1 of your degree) you may choose to take 75% English Literature, 25% Creative Writing. Then, after experiencing creative writing, for your second and third year (or PART 2 of your degree) you might decide to change to 50% each.

Even if you're not a fan of any of the paired subjects, due to Lancaster's PART 1 minor scheme – where students take another subject alongside their chosen major for their first year of study - you may pair creative writing with lots of alternate fields of study e.g. History, Politics, Psychology.

At postgraduate level Lancaster offers:

- Creative Writing Modular MA (2:1 Hons)
- Creative Writing Distance Learning MA (2:1 Hons)
- Creative Writing with English Literary Studies MA (2:1 Hons)
- Creative Writing PhD (2:1 Hons undergraduate degree + MA at 65% or above)

If you study Creative Writing at Lancaster University, you open yourself up to a heck of a lot of opportunities. There are a whole bunch of chances to be published within the university:

- The Literary Lancashire Award.
- Student Comment and News or 'SCAN' (the student newspaper).
- CAKE (a student-run literary magazine).
- The departmental magazine.
- Flash Journal (a literary journal supported by the English Literature and Creative Writing Department) .
- LUX (an undergraduate academic journal).
- Lancaster Words (a literary festival).



However, importantly, you'll also work closely with industry professionals in a series of lectures and workshops, even outside these on some projects. You'll get tips and advice about how to break into this mysterious creative industry, and you'll get vital feedback and critique for your work.

You're not just getting a degree at Lancaster; you're working out who you are as a writer. You can specialise and tailor your course to your own interests which gives access to a whole range of forms and mediums of writing: some that you might not yet be aware existed.



# BUMPS IN THE ROAD

This is the bad news page. Or the *'important-stuff-you-should-be-aware-of-but-also-partially-ignore-because-quitters-never-win-gosh-darn-it'* page. Yes, it's about to get real.

- Writing can be flipping (excuse the vulgarity) hard. According to Authors' Earnings 2018, £10,500 is the average amount a writer earns a year; this includes big-hitters like JK Rowling who annually pop out a couple of million or so (in this climate, £10,500 is only about four and a half Freddos). Most writers do not rely on writing as their sole income, especially when they're just starting out.
- You also can't just send your work to any old Tom, Dick or Harry and hope that you get published. Publishing Houses generally don't read unsolicited submissions: they get chucked on (what is brutally known as) the 'slush pile'. It would be best if you had an agent.
- Agents (and publishers) can be notoriously picky. They sometimes won't consider taking on writers who haven't successfully entered competitions, or had their work printed in journals or anthologies.

Furthermore, getting published traditionally can be a long old road. Here's a bare-bones outline:

- Write the thing.
- Get people to read the thing.
- Rewrite the thing.
- Send the thing to literary agents (rewrites may be necessary).
- Agent secures publishers for the thing.
- Editors at the publishing house conduct structural edits on the thing.
- Editors copy-edit the thing (amendments may be necessary).
- Designers and Typesetters get involved to jazz up the thing.
- Proofread the thing, once, twice, three times or more (amendments may be necessary).
- Print the thing.
- Market, publicise and sell the thing.

Equally, writing is extremely time-consuming...

- So, there's no hard and fast rule, but novels categorised as 'thrillers' tend to fall at around the 90,000-word mark.
- Stephen King claims to write 2000 words a day. Let's say that you're Mr King. That's 45 days to write your thriller. Not too bad. Only you haven't thought of the idea yet. You haven't planned it or plotted it out, got stuck on how to end it - realised you've accidentally copied part of Riverdale – had to rethink it. Maybe that's another month.
- Now you read it back, and it's riddled with clichés and plot-holes: you've used the word bloodcurdling 43 times, and you've told not shown more than you thought physically possible. That's another month spent redrafting. So, now we're at around the 100th day of writing your book (which is just over three months).

- Also, and here's the kicker, you're not actually Stephen King. He gets paid to write those 2000 words each day for a living. You're navigating your writing around the school, university, your job – whatever else you may be doing. Now three months isn't looking wholly realistic either.

I know what you're thinking: 'thanks for throwing down a bunch of terrible news via PDF and scampering off to eat dinner'. However, this info-dump isn't meant to put you off; it's meant to prepare you. The aforementioned points have long been true, yet we still have writers.

There are thousands of them – millions even – a lot of whom are earning steadily from their writing in all sorts of different avenues. Stephen King's not a one-person miracle, he just worked hard and didn't give up, like most writers you'll see flitting about.



# WHAT CAREERS ARE OUT THERE?

My goodness, you are on the ball for asking excellent questions today. People can make it as a writer with talent, creativity, hard work and a sneaky bit of luck. However, it's a commitment. Still,

***Creative writing = Transferable Skills.***

If you can write, it means that you can communicate, work independently, think critically, organise and self-motivated, employ attention to detail and handle criticism about your work. These are fantastic transferable skills that may be utilised in many occupations. There are (approximately) a gazillion different careers for people that involve an aptitude for creative writing (a quick Google will bring up a whole bunch). Here are just a few that you might want to think about:



## **Traditional**

- Novelist
- Short-story writer
- Poet
- Playwright
- Screenwriter (for film or TV)
- Lyricist

## **Unconventional**

- Flash-fiction writer
- Videogame writer
- Comic book/graphic novel author
- Online blogger
- Biographer
- Performance poet
- Comedy writer

## **Niche**

- Speechwriter
- Greetings-card writer
- Technical writer
- Grant writer
- CV writer
- Ghost-writer

## **Journalism**

- Magazine columnist
- News correspondent
- Travel writer/blogger
- Article writer
- Reviewer (books, film TV, theatre etc.)
- Editor

## **Publishing/Editing**

- Acquisitions editor
- Developmental editor
- Line editor
- Copy editor
- Production editor
- Advertising copywriter
- Digital copywriter
- Proof-reader
- Literary agent

## **Other**

- Professor/Lecturer
- Teacher
- Creative director
- Advertising and marketing officer
- Web content writer

# NON-PROFESSIONAL CREATIVE WRITING OPTIONS

Not everything you do has to be with the immediate intention of forging a career and getting published. Sometimes you might want to create work for fun, as a project, to improve your skills and build your confidence; these sites are an excellent way to do just this. Non-professional writing sites are a great way to get your work out there: you can think of it as test marketing, you'll get feedback on your writing and immerse yourself in a fantastic online, creative community.

Please note that if you want to publish said work, having the entire thing available on the web may not be in your favour. However, different publishing houses have different rules, so this isn't always the case. In fact, Penguin Random House (one of the 'Big Five' publishers) joined forces with online storytelling community, Wattpad, in 2019 and has since published 33 young adult novels from the site.

Here is a list of popular non-professional creative writing sites (and what they have to say about themselves):

- **Archive of Our Own** – site that specialises in fanfiction, though there is a community for original fiction too - "a fan-created, fan-run, nonprofit, non-commercial archive for transformative fanworks, like fanfiction, fanart, fan videos [etc]".
- **Booksie** – "a free social publishing site [where] writers can develop and post short stories, books, poems, podcasts, and more".
- **Critique Circle** - "one of the largest and longest-running writing communities on the web".

- **Critters** – "online workshop/critique group" that specialises in "Science Fiction/Fantasy/Horror."
- **Fanfiction.net** – site that specialises in fanfiction - "world's largest fanfiction archive and forum" where writers can "unleash [their] imagination".
- **FictionPress** – Fanfiction.net's sister site for original fiction - "world's largest short story, fiction, and poetry archive and community".
- **Scribophile** – "respectful online writing workshop and writer's community [where] writers of all skill levels join to improve each other's work".
- **Story Write** – "the home for writers" giving "honest and encouraging feedback".
- **Wattpad** – "social storytelling platform [that] connects a global community of 90 million readers and writers through the power of story."
- **Young Writers Society** - "a keynote global community for young writers".



# WITH THANKS TO...



The Department of English Literature and Creative Writing at Lancaster University; the entire LLA team of 2021; all the writers and tutors who inspired these exercises through our education; the teachers who share this with their pupils; most importantly, those of you who made it this far in the education pack. Honestly, we wrote the thing, and we barely managed it. You deserve a medal.

- Lara and Ruth