



EXISLE ACADEMY

**UNLEASH YOUR
CREATIVITY**

www.exisleacademy.com

Unleash Your Creativity

- Learn how to channel your voice and realize your creative potential so that you can make your book as good as it can be.
- Read your work with an editor's eye and sharpen your message so that it has a powerful impact on first-time readers.

CREATIVITY: INSTINCT OR HARD WORK?

Creativity is a spark of unique expression that enables you to make your mark on the world around you. You can be creative in multiple fields and in multiple ways, and we all have the potential to be creative. But the main thing to know is that it is up to you to find and then fan that creative spark. Seldom will you be hit by a bolt from the blue!

So, in the context of writing books, how can you go about finding that initial spark? You could start by asking what you're uniquely qualified to write about. For example, a primary school teacher who rescues stray cats would be well placed to write an engaging picture book for 4 to 8 year olds about a stray cat that moves into a school library and learns how to read. Similarly, a rural health and safety expert would be well equipped to deal with daily stress and bureaucracy, would undertake a lot of regional travel, and would have an excellent knowledge of farm practices and an ability to interpret evidence and draw conclusions. This would be a great background for books with a rural setting, perhaps involving intriguing crimes centred on rural 'accidents' that might be more than initially meets the eye!

Another path to finding your story is to take note of what fascinates you or what you're curious about. What random news stories catch your attention? Do you have a secret passion? For example, the same rural health and safety expert might actually hate their day job but has always been fascinated by South America and would love to travel there one day. Then they read an article in a newspaper about a British samba dancer becoming the first non-Brazilian to take on a leading role in Rio's Carnivale — and suddenly they have an idea for a story ... Of course writing it will mean extensive research and probably at least one trip to Rio to experience the atmosphere of Carnivale for themselves, but the point is that if you want to be a writer (or creative in any field) you have to be willing to meet inspiration wherever it finds you.

It's also important that you be aware of some common myths surrounding creativity. In her fascinating book *The Creative Seed*, Lilian Wissink explores the main ones:

MYTH 1

You must be born with a special gift to be creative.

TRUTH 1

We are all born creative — think of how you played as a child.

MYTH 2

Creativity is an escape and secondary to more important pursuits such as having a well-paid job.

TRUTH 2

We can both work and sing/paint/write/sculpt OR we can choose to focus on one.

MYTH 3

Creative people have a touch of madness in them.

TRUTH 3

There is no evidence that creativity stems from any kind of 'madness'. What fascinates us can be a healing balm for the difficulties we experience ... Our painful feelings of grief, anger and jealousy can also provide a rich impetus for creative expression. Consider the love songs that have been written after a break-up.

MYTH 4

Creativity is a mystical mysterious journey that only a few people undertake.

TRUTH 4

Creativity has been researched extensively and can be clearly understood from a logical and rational perspective rather than revered as something mystical. Experts see creativity as a learned ability to experiment time and time again and to problem solve until we get to a desired outcome.

MYTH 5

To be successful in a creative area you have to start early in life.

TRUTH 5

Raymond Chandler didn't write his first short story and novel until he was 45. Grandma Moses started painting in her seventies. Minnie Pwerle, one of Australia's highest selling contemporary artists, started painting in her eighties.

MYTH 6

You must have passion to be creative.

TRUTH 6

Don't feel that you must be passionate at the start of your creative journey or that you must sustain passion to be creative. Allow your feelings of interest, curiosity and fascination to guide you to explore and develop your creative interests.

So, you have found your creative spark and you have made the time to write. As the words fall onto the page in front of you, how do you develop your 'voice'. How do you know when you're writing like you and nobody else?

FINDING YOUR VOICE

The first step in finding your voice is to read. It is impossible for you to read too much. If you want to write children's picture books, read as many as you can. This will mean that you develop a solid understanding of structure, length and vocabulary appropriate to that age group and style of book. But also read outside that genre. In this way you'll learn, for example, how junior fiction and middle grade fiction differ from picture books and this, in turn, will further deepen your understanding of your chosen genre.

Then sit down and write. Don't over analyse it. Simply get words down on the page. If it's a children's book, you might write the entire story in one sitting. If it's an adult novel or non-fiction, you might write a chapter. Now go back and read it. Does it flow with a consistent tone and style? Do you stumble over what you've written? Do you feel comfortable reading it or awkward? Does it feel like you? Are you jumping between short factual sentences and longer lyrical ones? Which feels better to you? Tap into your intuition and be guided by your gut. Work out which pieces of your text appeal to you most. This is usually a good indication of your natural voice. Take note of the characteristics in the stretches of text that really resonate with you and then try to emulate that consistently throughout the entire draft. By repeating this process again and again, over many drafts, you will find that you gradually develop a writing style that flows naturally, reads comfortably and just 'feels right'. You will have found your authentic voice.

A note that non-fiction is a slightly different process. Usually when you write non-fiction, you are writing from a place of personal experience or professional expertise. If you are a child psychologist writing a book of parenting advice, it's most likely that your written voice will be very similar (if not the same) as your spoken voice, as you want to connect with your readers in the same way that you do with your clients in a consultation. The goal here, though, is still authenticity.

Writing in her book *Being You: How to build your personal brand and confidence*, Maggie Eyre helps you on the journey to find 'your authentic self' and then quotes e e cummings, the celebrated poet:

'To be nobody but yourself in a world that's doing its best night and day to make you like everybody else means to fight the hardest battle that any human being can fight, and never stop fighting.'

This applies profoundly to writers. You will not develop or even find your voice by asking friends and family about your work. While their encouragement is nice, it's generally useless as they usually don't want to hurt your feelings by pointing out any flaws or inconsistencies. Writing groups and schools can also be dangerous places for your authentic self, and publishers often see submissions that have come through the smoothing gloss of mutual critique sessions.

Good writing is by definition appealing in some way, so a reasonable analogy is that of a landscape. Too much of the same can become boring or tiring or both. A good landscape will have variety — perhaps lakes and mountains, boats and buildings. What it might lack in theoretical perfection is irrelevant as long as it is captivating and draws you in. A good editor can smooth out the bits of your manuscript that jar, but they cannot inject character and authenticity into your voice if it's not there to begin with.

REVISING WITH AN EDITOR'S EYE

At some point, you will have completed your first draft of your manuscript. (For most people it's best if they try to get the complete story down on the page first before they start refining or polishing it too much. Otherwise, you run the risk of forever being stuck on creating a perfect first chapter and never managing to actually finish the story!) Now it's time to start the refining process — and this will involve many, many drafts. You can help the process, however, if you keep a few questions in mind.

1. Have you overwritten? Read through your manuscript and analyse as objectively as possible whether each word, sentence or paragraph has earned its place. Just because you love a particular sentence doesn't mean it's necessary. Does it help to drive your story forward or do you just like the sound of it? Pay particular attention to your beginning. It's often the case that your much-loved opening paragraphs are best deleted.
2. Do you have a clear narrative arc? Is there a beginning, middle and end? This doesn't mean that there can't be side-plots along the way, but do you satisfyingly resolve the primary plotline? In non-fiction, have you delivered what you set out to?
3. Is there an inherent underlying logic to events? Your story could be set in a fantasy land but that land will still operate according to some consistent principles and rules. And don't think you can get away with doing what you like in kids' books. Children are some of the sharpest critics around; they will quickly notice if something 'doesn't make sense'!

Once you are happy with your story and have put it through several rounds of diligent revision, you're finally at the stage when it can be useful to have an editor take a look. Having a polished manuscript that has already been through an initial edit will certainly help to make your manuscript stand out when it comes time to submit it to publishers.

THE EDITOR'S INPUT

There are two main types of editing: structural editing and copy editing. Structural editing is when an editor looks at the broad scope of your manuscript, keeping in mind the three questions above. They will pay sharp attention to the plot and structure. If Mary ends up in Paris in Chapter 2, why is she in Milan in Chapter 3? Joe had brown hair and blue eyes when he was introduced. Why is Ellen now staring deeply into his mesmerising green eyes? Ethan headed off to Hong Kong to solve one of the riddles in the mystery but he never returned. Don't laugh! Some of these scenarios might seem extreme, but writers can get so close to their own work that they miss the obvious!

A structural editor will also look at pacing. Does it take forever for the story to really get going? Is there too much dialogue? Too much description? Too much telling rather than showing? Does the plot flag halfway through?

In a non-fiction title a structural editor will also look at the order in which material is presented. Would it be better if some chapters appeared earlier in the book? Should chapters include more subheadings to clearly signpost the delivery of information? Is information repeated in several chapters that would be better consolidated into one? Should any particularly long chapters be broken up into two (or more)?



The structural edit takes place before the copy edit, although these days many publishers often get both a structural and copy edit done as part of the overall 'edit'. The copy edit is focused on the detail: correcting spelling and grammar, improving flow between paragraphs if necessary, and making sure that Joelene is always spelt as Joelene and not Joleen or Joeleen or Jolene!

Above all, any editor should remain true to your intention and your voice. Remember that you are the author. It is your creative spark that has been nurtured to this point so make sure it burns brightly!