

# NATIONAL WRITING DAY

26<sup>th</sup> June 2019

## WRITING RESOURCES FOR ALL

Resources created in collaboration with  
National Writing Day partners across the UK

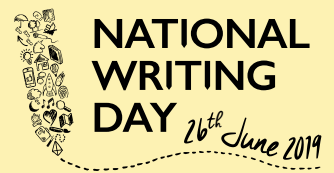


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# TIPS AND TASKS TO KICK-START YOUR WRITING



## I. HOW DO I CREATE SPACE TO WRITE?

### Thinking visually; using a seed image to find inspiration

Adapted from *Complete Screenwriting Course* by Charles Harris

Ideas can come from anywhere and everywhere. They surface unexpectedly and partly formed, born out of your feelings, memories, concerns, experiences, to make themselves available for use. One of the primary jobs of a creative artist is to nourish the process and encourage it to bring us its unpredictable gifts.

*Look in.* Look inside yourself and see what there is to be seen. At times, this will be nothing. This doesn't mean you give up. An amateur can afford to do nothing and wait for those golden moments. A professional sets about preparing the soil so that inspiration can grow.

You may find it useful to start with the 'seed' of a picture, an image that somehow both stimulates your imagination further and sums up an idea that may become a story one day.

The novelist Paul Scott tells of how an image once came to him: a woman was running down a road in India. This was his start. He became curious; he asked himself who she was, who she was running away from so urgently, where she might be running to. From this single image grew four books, the acclaimed series of novels known as the 'Raj Quartet', and a fourteen-part award-winning TV series, *The Jewel in the Crown*.

Seed images can also help when you take over an idea that comes from outside.

When I was commissioned to rewrite the script of a Portuguese epic, I found a vivid story based on a true-life struggle by a group of farmers against poverty and injustice. The events were dramatic and yet, initially, rather formless. I needed to find my way into the script.

The story opened in the dead of night. A young farmer was walking home, finding his way by the light of a small lantern along a mountain railway track. The image of that single lantern became my seed image. With its help, the screenplay followed a continuous movement, from fighting alone to strength in numbers – from a single lantern, to two lamps, to a burning warehouse,

all the way to the climactic rising of the entire region.

Here's Ethan Coen, on *Inside Llewyn Davis*:

One day Joel just said, 'What about this? Here's the beginning of a movie: Wouldn't it be interesting to start with a folk singer, specifically Dave Van Ronk, getting beaten up in the alleyway behind Gerde's Folk City?' We thought about the scene, and then we thought, 'Why would anyone beat up a folk singer?' So it became a matter of trying to come up with a screenplay, a movie that could fit around that and explain the incident.

### TASK

1. Find a quiet place where you won't be disturbed. It may help to close your eyes.
2. Imagine that there is a screen in your mind and that you can put any image you like there – black and white or colour, still or movie, silence or sound. Now think about the story you want to write. What pictures appear on the screen? If there are none, then invent some. Feel free to borrow from other stories, from your own memories or from any other source.
3. When you have one or more pictures that satisfy and excite you, start to ask questions: where, what, who, why, how, when? What came before? What might come next? Do other pictures start to appear?
4. Try out other possible seed images until you have one that you feel works best as the seed of your story. (Don't worry if you're not sure yet: you'll be able to improve and enrich your pictures as you develop your ideas.)
5. Write your opening scene. Include the seed image and try to evoke the feeling, atmosphere and spirit of the story you watched in your head. Can you imagine taking this story forward with the light of that seed image powering it?



## TIPS AND TASKS TO KICK-START YOUR WRITING (CONT.)

### 2. HOW DO I WRITE IN MY CHOSEN GENRE?

#### Use all six senses

Adapted from *Get Started in Writing Historical Fiction* by Emma Darwin:

Settle yourself and, using a watch or a timer, spend one minute writing down everything that you can see, then one minute writing down everything you can hear, a minute of everything you can feel, a minute of what you can smell, a minute of taste, and finally a minute of what's called kinaesthesia: how your shoulder feels when you've got your head cocked to one side, the pressure between your knees where you've crossed them, the way the table-edge presses into your wrist.

It's important that you write about each of the senses in that order: sight – sound – touch – smell – taste – body sense, and that you don't let yourself give up before each minute is up. Patiently staying with not knowing-what-to-write is important because that's when your creative mind gets a chance to work.

Now, close your eyes and imagine your way back into the setting of the fiction genre that you have in mind – a historical time and place, another planet, or a crime scene. Don't worry if you feel you don't know it very well yet, just let your imagination rip. Open your eyes, and do exactly the same exercise, for that time and place.

### 3. HOW DO I FIND MY VOICE?

A novelist is like a film director. It is not enough to say: in this scene such-and-such happens to so-and-so. The novelist must decide how to portray such events happening. As a writer, it is your job to decide where to position your camera so that you have a viewpoint that works with your story.

Experiment with this by taking a passage from a favourite novel and rewriting it. Change the viewpoint and the tense. Assess the impact of the change. And do the same with a piece of your own writing.

### 4. HOW DO I CREATE CHARACTERS?

#### Learn about your character

From *Write a Novel in 10 Minutes a Day* by Katharine Grubb:

Choose a protagonist from your story and spend ten minutes learning more about your character's traits. With a little thought, you can sculpt the four cornerstones of your character in progress. Ask yourself the following questions and jot down the answers.

- What is your character afraid of?
- What is your character hiding?
- What is your character's biggest weakness?
- What is odd or unusual about your character?
- Now go back to your story. You may find there are changes you wish to make to the way you reveal your character.

### 5. HOW DO I CHOOSE MY SETTING?

Make your setting feel as significant in the writing as it is to the story.

Adapted from *Complete Creative Writing Course* by Chris Sykes:

Pick up a travel book and find a passage that describes a town or part of a city that you can transform for use in a story. Imagine your character arriving, on the verge of an adventure. Employ all five senses, making your setting feel significant, powerful and full of life. What happens?

### 6. HOW DO I OUTSMART WRITER'S BLOCK?

#### Use 'clustering' to explore new avenues in your writing

Adapted from *Get Started in Writing Historical Fiction* by Emma Darwin:

Take a piece of paper and a pen – or use a felt pen and a huge wall or whiteboard, which can be great fun. Write one of the potent words from your last piece of writing in the middle of the page and circle it. Then start free-associating outwards, in chains of words and phrases so that you get a spider-diagram. Continue until the page is full. Try to open your mind to whatever turns up on the page: the next word might be connected by sound – rhyme and rhythm – rather than meaning, or references, connotations, patterns or oppositions.

Above all, don't force the logic or censor your words because they don't seem to make sense. If your mind goes blank, just stay with the blankness – with what poet and novelist Philip Gross calls 'the *not-knowing*' – or switch to another chain, or start a new one.

When the page is full, look it over. Are there any other connections you can spot, in sense or sound? Draw a line between them. Are there any interesting oppositions? For example, in a 'cluster' I did on 'gold', 'cold' turned up several times: it's always interesting when that happens.

### 7. HOW DO I BRING MY WRITING TO LIFE?

Shut your eyes and think back to your childhood. Can you remember the house of a friend or a relative that had a different smell from your house? Let your mind

## TIPS AND TASKS TO KICK-START YOUR WRITING (CONT.)

wander over it; let the place come to you.

When you are ready, write down as much as you can remember of the different smells: food, perfume, clothes, tobacco, people, pets, etc. Pay particular attention to all the concrete details, all the 'things'. Look over your notes and, using them, write a page recreating this place.

Do not worry about creating character or telling a story, let this emerge through the things and place you describe. Concentrate on smell but bring in all the other senses too.

### 8. WHAT ARE THE RULES OF WRITING?

This task is about the application of grammar and the degree to which you choose to break away from rules. To begin, free write on a topic of your choosing – but write more loosely than usual. Free associate, switch between multiple viewpoints, play with form and language.

Now you are going to edit two versions of the same piece. In the first, use the rules of grammar to make sense of your freewheeling prose. In the second, corrupt the conventions even further – imagine grammar as a cage from which you are trying to escape. Then compare your two pieces and the feelings you evoked. Which piece would you most like to keep writing?

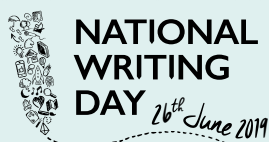
### 9. HOW DO I REACH OUT TO OTHER WRITERS?

Writing need not be a solitary task. Now that you've worked your way through the writing process, try reaching out to other writers and agents as you explore your publishing options. There's a whole world out there!

Do you have a Twitter account? Even if you don't, there is much to learn from heading over to Twitter and searching for and following hashtags such as #amwriting, #amquerying and #pitchwars. You'll discover a world of people talking to each other and to agents about the process of writing and getting published. Why not ask a few questions yourself?



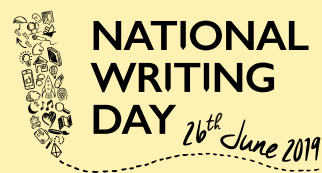
A National Writing Day resource contributed by Hachette and adapted from several creative writing titles within John Murray Learning in collaboration with The Future Bookshelf.



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# A PLACE TO START



We asked our Creative Writing Programme tutors to share their favourite writing prompts – something to get students started if they're staring at a blank page, something to help shape characters or get their descriptive language flowing.

Pick and choose the one that's right for your students or for your writing project – or just try them all!

## 1. BUILDING A CHARACTER:

Write about someone you regularly see in everyday life but never have a conversation with. Whose life are you curious about? How do they make you re-evaluate your own life? **(With thanks to John McCullough.)**

## 2. GETTING INTO THE HEAD OF ANOTHER PERSON:

This is a good character exercise and anger/annoyance dissipater.

Someone has annoyed you: an angry word at home, a crass remark in the street, a politician on the news or social media-ranter.

Bite back the urge to respond. Instead try to get inside their head. What has happened to them today or in their lives that prompted the remark that got you going? You don't need to sympathise with them, just try to understand where the remark came from. Knowing any character's motivations makes them more credible. Write down what you come up with. **(With thanks to Lizzie Enfield.)**

## 3. FINDING A PLACE TO START:

Write on separate post-it notes:

1. An action
2. A thought
3. A line of dialogue
4. A (non-visual) sensory perception (e.g. the feel of a fabric, cold air on your skin)
5. A visual description

Now write something incorporating them all. **(With thanks to Umi Sinha.)**

## 4. WRITE A CINQUAIN (THIS IS LIKE A SIMPLER HAIKU):

1. The first line is a one-word title, the subject of the poem
2. The second line is a pair of adjectives describing that title
3. The third line is a three-word phrase that gives more information about the subject (using words ending in '-ing')
4. The fourth line consists of four words describing feelings related to that subject
5. The fifth line is a single-word synonym from line one

For example:

Snow  
Silent, white  
Dancing, falling, drifting  
Childhood excitement, covering dreams  
Blanket

**(With thanks to Sara Clifford.)**

## 5. CHOOSE AN OBJECT:

In Rachel Cusk's latest novel, a writer sets himself a daily task of thinking about an object that doesn't mean anything to him and including that object somewhere in his day's work. In the novel, the example Cusk's character gives of such an 'object' is... a hamster.

Choosing an object with no emotional resonance for you can help focus your writing. Of course, you may have a meaningful relationship with a hamster, in which case choose an alternative – and another the next day, and another the next day.

**(With thanks to Hannah Vincent.)**

## 6. CREATING A CHARACTER:

Look at the list below and invent a character who owns these things. Write as much as you can about this character and incorporate some (not all!) of these items into your description.

Dead spider plant

Business card

Broken radio

Locket with two photos inside

## A PLACE TO START (CONT.)

Rescue Remedy  
Blonde hair dye  
Tarot cards  
Jar of pickled onions  
Laptop

(With thanks to Sally O'Reilly.)

### 7. ACTIVATE THE SENSES:

One way to get past the blank page is to activate the senses one by one. For example, close your eyes and note all the sounds in the room.

Write them down and think about why you noticed them and which sound you noticed first.

This activity can be repeated using smell, touch, sight and even taste. Then consider how a particular character might notice and respond to particular things they have experienced directly through their senses. For example, a baker might be tuned to smell, while an architect might notice shapes, colours or scale of objects.

Once you have begun to identify your character's propensity to notice certain things over others you can start to think about which particular words they might use to describe them.

You can begin this exercise in a room, but it can then be developed further in the outside world.

(With thanks to Rosie Chard.)



A National Writing Day resource created by New Writing South. To find out more about their work, visit [newwritingsouth.com](http://newwritingsouth.com).

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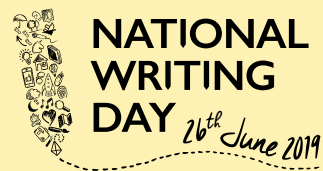
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# POETRY TOOLKIT I: EXTENDED METAPHORS

FOR ADVANCED WRITERS



sun trap

I

let her walk  
into the calmness  
of your hills

show her the glow  
you've brought to leaves  
the blush  
to ripening fruit

sit her  
in your sun trap

be the passing wind  
teasing

the long grass  
to rub  
and scratch  
against her skin

touch her  
softly

be the juice  
of mellow mangoes  
running  
from her mouth

bathe her  
with cascading waters  
from your rock

sit her  
in your sun trap

be the penetrating

heat  
rub  
under the waters  
of her flow

stir the histories  
of her untouched  
pools  
tune her  
nerve ends  
to the wind's  
hot breathing

then melt  
into her earth  
as you tongue  
your funky rhythms

and lap  
against her beach  
like morning tide  
watching waves crash  
against her reefs

flagged out  
spaced out

sitting  
in your sun trap  
where the mind  
meanders  
with the streams

II

and when you have possessed  
her  
left her living  
ritual metaphors  
and the river dries  
what will you do  
with the body  
in the rut  
where will you search  
for the dust of a mind  
who

## POETRY TOOLKIT I: EXTENDED METAPHORS

will stare  
at that empty space  
in the prison  
of your sun trap  
when dusk falls  
calling night

**Jean 'Binta' Breeze**

from *Third World Girl*, Bloodaxe Books, 2011

Performed on 15 March 2002 at the 'Pimp' event, which you can listen to (at 41:02 mins) here: <https://www.mixcloud.com/spokenwordarchive/pimp-pt-ii-15-mar-2002/>

Jean 'Binta' Breeze's 'sun trap', above, is an example of the extended metaphor (and also personification). The poem addresses an unnamed 'you' who can be loosely interpreted as 'time and tide', and its interaction with a 'she' who can be loosely interpreted as Mother Earth. I say 'loosely' because Jean leaves these definitions unclear, giving a dreamlike quality to the poem. She constructs a general metaphor for sexual sensuality through nature.

The poem describes *your hills; the glow you've brought to leaves; your sun trap; your being the passing wind that teases the long grass; your being juice of mellow mangoes, and so forth.* Although the imagery relates to the sun generally, it details effects of the sun on Mother Earth.

A metaphor is the practice of describing one thing as something entirely different, to give extra dimension to its description. Here are five examples:

1. All the world's a stage.
2. His room is a disaster zone.
3. He is a lion in battle.
4. She has a heart of stone.
5. The promise between us is a delicate flower.

Metaphors are distinct from similes. Similes take images as a point of comparison, using the words *with* or *as*. She has a heart *like* a stone. He fights *as bravely* as a lion in battle.

An extended metaphor is where substance is added to the initial description. So here's Shakespeare, extending his *all the world's a stage* metaphor:

**All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely  
players;  
They have their exits and their**

**entrances,**

Shakespeare made two basic additions to the initial metaphor: that people are players, and that they enter and leave. If we were to extend the metaphor *his room is a disaster zone* by adding two further statements, we might write: **His room is a disaster zone. A tornado has torn through it. His mother has declared a state of emergency.**

Now try adding two further statements to metaphors 3,4,5 above.

Another classic extended metaphor is 'Valentine' by Carol Ann Duffy, here:

[http://famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/carol\\_ann\\_duffy/poems/8116](http://famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/carol_ann_duffy/poems/8116)

In this poem, an onion acts as a metaphor for a Valentine gift. Can you identify the elements of the onion that reflect a passionate love affair?

The key elements are:

It is a moon  
It undresses, layer by layer  
It will make you cry  
It is a photograph of grief  
It has a fierce kiss  
It is a wedding ring  
Its scent will stay on your fingers  
It can be deadly

What makes 'Valentine' such a powerful metaphorical poem is that an onion seems like such an unlikely metaphor for a Valentine's gift, but the extent to which Carol Ann Duffy makes her argument makes the metaphor feel very full, and totally apt.



## POETRY TOOLKIT 1: EXTENDED METAPHORS

### PICK 'N' MIX METAPHOR GAME

#### Subject words:

Detective  
Sleep  
Kisses  
Words  
Ocean  
Wound  
A promise  
Justice  
Hair  
Laughter  
A teacher  
Capitalism

#### Metaphors:

A trophy  
A fashion show  
Roses  
A plaster  
A dinosaur  
A worm  
A knife  
A drum  
A seed  
A roadmap  
Chains  
Wine

### Method

Write each of the subject words on a scrap of paper and place them in a bag. Then do the same for each of the metaphors and place them in a different bag.

If you are in a group, each person must pick one word from each bag and create a three-point metaphor along the lines of the ones described above. As this is pot luck some metaphors will be easy to create, such as 'A teacher plants seeds inside a pupil's head'. Others, like Carol Ann Duffy's Valentine onion, will be more challenging, such as *Sleep is a drum*.


If you are doing this exercise by yourself, choose one subject word and one metaphor. Choose two words that will challenge yourself. If you chose *sleep* as your subject word and *drum* as your metaphor, you might write something like:

Her sleep was a drum, counting out her nights and days, the pitter-patter of her heart counterbalancing the harsh cymbal clash of her troubled nightmares.

If you're in a group, share your results with one another to expand the learning process. As a final task choose a subject and a metaphor – either from the two lists above or your own ideas. Create a poem using an extended metaphor, similar to 'sun trap' or 'Valentine'.

**APPLES  
AND  
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A National Writing Day resource created by Apples and Snakes and Steve Tasane. To find out more about their work, visit [applesandsnakes.org](http://applesandsnakes.org).

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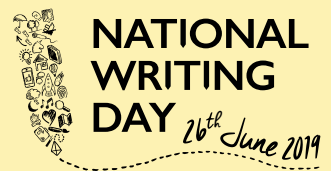
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# POETRY TOOLKIT 2: THE TALKING HEADS

## POETRY PORTRAIT

FOR ADVANCED WRITERS



This exercise is suitable for advanced writers who have previously studied the different types of poetic form.

For this creative exercise, you will create a 'portrait' using a specific poetic form as the style of portraiture.

To begin, here is a short example of a poetry portrait of Homer Simpson:

he's the early morning alarm clock that needs  
a new battery  
he's endless rain, all pitter-pat, pitter-patter  
he's a busted sofa bed that can't take the  
weightiness  
he's a double 99 that can't take the flakiness  
he's an ice cream van that's turned into an  
ambulance  
he's a big baboon with a bad case of flatulence

**Steve Tasane**

(unpublished, 2018)

Each line imagines Homer as a specific thing, using metaphor. In order, the things are:

- time
- weather
- furniture
- food
- transport
- an animal

### EXERCISE 1

Think of a famous person – specifically somebody with a larger-than-life personality – and come up with six metaphors for them from the list above. For instance, if we were writing about Donald Trump and were looking for a 'time' metaphor for him, we might write: *He is sixty years in the past, when lynchings were the norm and women knew their place.* Your phrases do not have to rhyme; the key point is that together they will paint a consistent picture of the famous person.

### EXERCISE 2

Select one of the poets from the Talking Heads

interviews on the Apples and Snakes archive website: <https://www.spokenwordarchive.org.uk/content/new-contributions/talking-head-interviews>.

Watch the entire filmed interview of the poet and make basic notes on the following:

- General description: note how the poet dresses; their eyes, mouth, hands, voice, hair. Do they have any distinguishing features, such as tattoos, piercings or dreadlocks? Can we think of any similes for specific physical traits, such as their hands conducting like batons, or swishing like swords? Do they slice the air metronomically? Do their fingers make shapes, or dance like James Brown?
- If the poet is filmed in their home, what does the background say about them? Are they surrounded by books or exotic art? Do these backgrounds evoke a sense of warmth or chaos? A well-ordered mind? A childlike sense of fun?
- How do they speak? With emotion or seriousness, or in bursts of rapid fire? What is the timbre of their voice? Do they laugh? Do they boom? Do they speak softly?

While doing this, you should be considering the six metaphors from the list above (time, weather, etc.)

Finally, click on one of the links for the poet performing one of their poems, and consider how their interviewing energy reflects or contrasts with their performing energy.

The notes you have made are the writer's equivalent of an artist's sketches. They are the preparation for your portrait of the poet.

## POETRY TOOLKIT 2: THE TALKING HEADS POETRY PORTRAIT

### EXERCISE 3

You must now decide on your style of poetry portraiture. This requires an understanding of poetic forms. The simplest form will be free verse, which – as the phrase suggests – is free of any limiting structure, can be loose in its rhythm, free of rhyme, and of any length.

The poet you've chosen as the subject of the poem may be suggestive of a particular form, such as:

- sonnet
- pantoum
- rap
- ballad
- rant
- villanelle
- a series of haiku


You may now write your Benjamin Zephaniah sonnet, Last Poets ballad, Joolz haiku sequence and John Hegley pantoum.

If you're doing this exercise as a group, as a final exercise you could open up a discussion around your choice of poem, for example why did you choose the sonnet form to write about Benjamin? Why is John Hegley a pantoum?



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This resource gives a taste of some of the thoughtful, inventive and moving writing produced by entrants to the 2018 Koestler Awards.

The annual Koestler Awards are a unique award scheme for people in prisons and other secure settings. We receive over 7,000 entries each year from establishments across the UK in fifty-two art forms, including poetry, short story, painting, craft, sculpture and music. Entrants are given feedback on their work, recognition for their achievements and a chance to benefit from our mentoring scheme. Through our annual exhibition at Southbank Centre and regional exhibitions across the UK, we aim to share the talent and potential of prisoners and people in secure settings with the public.

Our entrants often write to tell us how important being creative has been for them while inside:

It has helped keep me sane. I have found an ability to create perfect monuments to memory and experience that I can fashion like sculptures. In conversation I tend to say too much. Poetry gives me the ability to pare away the nonsense and aim towards the essence of what I really want to say.

*A poet featured in our 2018 national exhibition  
'I'm Still Here'*

Our second anthology of poetry from the Koestler Awards, *Koestler Voices: New Poetry from Prisons Vol 2.*, will be published in September 2019, featuring entries from the 2018 and 2019 awards.

We've pulled out some of our favourite written entries, a fraction of the nearly 2,000 that came in last year. They give an idea of the vast range of approaches and ideas sent to us, which can be used with students to try and inspire new things!

## PEOPLE

Characters can bring your writing to life, drawing in your readers and giving a voice to your narrative. Have a look at these very different approaches to describing two people:

Extract from 'Funny Business'

HM Prison Parkhurst

The brothers bore a family resemblance but not judged by their looks; they had the same facial expressions, body language, even patterns of speech – as if somebody had duplicated the same person in the bodies of two strangers. Jacky (otherwise Jackson – don't ask) was tall with dark thinning hair, as lean as a broom handle and had that rumpled look that you'd get by sleeping in your clothes. Johnny (otherwise Johnson – again, don't ask) was short, paunchy with a Bela Lugosi [Dracula] hairstyle, totally inappropriate considering he was ashen blond. His rumpled look was of a sort that appeared other people had been sleeping in the clothes with him. These were my dinner companions, the Longstreet brothers...

Extract from 'She And I'

Shaftesbury Clinic

I like coffee, she likes tea  
Her favourite cake is banoffee where mine is cheese  
She likes to party when I want to chill  
I think riding should be easy but she likes struggling uphill  
I'm fond of jackets. She really likes coats  
The Sea; I can't hack it; she's a fan of boats  
Art makes me gaze about; she hardly bothers to look  
She likes to dine out but I like to cook  
We both enjoy books

## EXERCISE:

Both authors give us a vivid impression of the people they're writing about through contrasts. Try describing two characters who are total opposites, or someone who's completely different to you. Do they look different? Do they have different tastes? Do they react differently?

## KOESTLER ARTS: VOICES FROM PRISON (CONT.)

### PLACES

Writing can transport your readers anywhere: to a fictional world, or somewhere you know like the back of your hand. The following entries all conjure up a strong sense of place.

Extract from 'A Walk'  
HM Prison Parkhurst  
Highly Commended Award

You are the mud on my boots  
You are the trees' twisted roots  
You are the blackbird I do not see  
You are the breath coming out of me

### EXERCISE:

In this extract from 'A Walk', the countryside becomes a character itself. Choose a place that means a lot to you – somewhere you've lived or that makes you happy – and write a poem made up of the different elements that make it special.

'The View'  
HM Prison Stocken

Insolent dewy air  
hanging and smelling like rainy camping.  
A distant owl three times  
moans to the drunkard wind,  
'Who are you?'  
as confused gusts fail to snare  
a million taunting fairies  
playing bulldog:  
'Reach ground and you're home.' They whisper  
and a third settle stripped branches,  
abandoned nests  
or razor wire crowning the perimeter fence,  
outrunning the slap of the monster cold.

### EXERCISE:

In this poem the weather comes to life, becoming 'insolent', 'drunkard' and 'confused', snowflakes becoming fairies and the cold becoming a monster. Look out of a window, what can you see? Try describing the wind as an animal, or rain as a swarm of insects.

Extract from 'With Passing Time'

HM Prison Isle of Wight, Parkhurst  
Bronze Award

In the dimly lit room  
the wallpaper hangs in threads  
and dusty curtains block the light.  
In the dimly lit room  
an old armchair tattered and torn  
is drawn up to a two bar fire.  
A large clock ticks  
on the mantelpiece.

'Reflections'  
HM Prison Wakefield

Deep in a pool by the rockery, beyond the  
scented glade  
The willows bow and gently sip  
While electric tadpoles fizz like lemonade  
Burping frogs on skating lilies sit  
White the heron, stately stands as fish with  
mirror scales parade  
Breezes softly swirl around dancing with the  
thistledown  
I sit, beside the pool and ponder how all this  
was made.

### EXERCISE:

These two poems give vivid impressions of their settings with different methods. The writer of the first poem tells us about the room and its contents in great detail, making it easy for the reader to picture themselves there. In 'Reflections', the descriptive language brings the location to life through similes ('like lemonade'), carefully chosen adjectives ('scented' and 'electric') and verbs that make the animals sound like people ('bow', 'sip', and 'parade').

Think of a room you know well and imagine you're inside. Describe it through all the objects it contains. Is it full of furniture or empty? Are the walls painted or papered? What time of day is it – is the light bright or dim?

Like the author of 'Reflections', try describing a natural setting. Can you hear water? What does it sound like? Are there animals there? If so, try describing them as if they're human – their mood, their movements or how they speak.

'Astronaut'  
Cambridge Probation Service  
Highly Commended Award

Got the Earth right out

## KOESTLER ARTS: VOICES FROM PRISON (CONT.)

Our front window!  
I can block it out with  
My thumb up on the glass.  
It's a sight I won't forget.  
Still, sure is lonely up here,  
They say we're made of stardust  
But I don't feel at home.  
My life's there below a thumb nail.

### EXERCISE:

In this poem, the place being described is very far away, small enough to be hidden by a thumb. Imagine you're in outer space looking down at the Earth. What can you see? Is it hidden by clouds? Can you make out the electric lights of cities? How does it feel to be so far away from home?

### THINGS

A well-described object can add great meaning and weight to your writing. Instead of just thinking about what something looks like, consider how your senses react to it, who owns it, whether it has a story behind it and how you or your character feel about it.

Extract from 'Time for Bang-Up'  
HM Prison Grendon

I was lying in my cell recently watching the news, when an item about a group of prisoners in Cardiff caught my attention. Apparently, they fashioned a small explosive device out of prison-issue whiteners for tea and coffee, and successfully detonated it. Thankfully, nobody was hurt. Upon hearing this, my first thought was that the whiteners are so foul they should *all* be destroyed in controlled explosions. You see, each week we are issued a 'tea pack' containing some round paper sacks of dross masquerading as tea bags, sachets of a soil-like substance alleged to be coffee, some sugar, and the offending whiteners. The compounds arising from the addition of hot water to these noxious products take a bit of getting used to...

'Coffee'  
HM Prison Castle Huntly

The smell of coffee  
Horrible stuff

Reminds me  
Of a teacher's breath  
Shouting and spitting  
As I get  
In to trouble  
Needless to say  
Av never tried it  
The smell of coffee  
Horrible stuff

### EXERCISE:

These entries are about hot drinks, but also tell us something about the narrator's past or present. Describe an object through a memory. It could be a food you love or hate, or a smell or sound that transports you back to your childhood.

Extract from 'Missing Home'  
HM Prison Risley

I haven't had toast now for over a year  
Or walked down the street wearing new gear.  
It's funny in prison the things that you miss –  
McDonalds or BK right now would be bliss.

### EXERCISE:

This writer conjures up a sense of home by telling us about the things that he misses. A lot of our entrants write about the foods they miss! Imagine that you're far away from home, and write a love letter to the foods that you crave.

'A Midnight Jar'  
HM Prison Wakefield

If I could capture midnight and put it in a jar  
I'd keep it on my mantelpiece and view it from afar

When the world was sunny, altogether too  
too much  
I'd carefully take it down, and with the softest  
touch

I'd slowly open up the top and night would  
gently creep  
across my wall and ceiling would silky velvet  
seep

Then, in inky darkness, from the clamour I'd  
retreat  
to dwell a while in silence and drift happily to  
sleep.



## KOESTLER ARTS: VOICES FROM PRISON (CONT.)

### EXERCISE:

Here, midnight becomes an object that can be stored away. Is there a time of day or a place that you wish you could keep for when you feel overwhelmed? Where would you keep it? What would happen when you opened its container?

### FORM

Using different forms of poetry, like sonnets, haikus or limericks, can guide your writing by giving you a set of rules to follow. Experiment and see where it takes you...

'Broken Robots'  
HM Prison Magilligan  
Silver Award

Just, Broken Robots  
Brought In For Repair, Waiting  
To Go Home, Rebuilt.

*Leap Year*  
HM Prison Dartmoor  
Highly Commended Award

Not three sixty-six  
Only the usual amount  
It's not a leap year

### EXERCISE:

Haiku is a traditional form of Japanese poetry, with poems of three lines. The first and last lines have five syllables and the middle line has seven. They often feature an image, or a pair of images, meant to describe a specific moment in time. Read the haikus above and try writing one of your own.

'Institutionalisation'  
Brecon South Wales Probation

Why does everything in jail end in TION?  
Like, come on Boys, ur time for association.  
Or if you get in trouble u get adjudication.  
On your first day at work they call education,  
I suppose it's to get u to think about  
realisation  
In the outside world on the way to probation  
To keep u outta trouble and out the pig

station.

You want anything you need an application,  
Even when u add phone numbers they want  
verification.

Unlock in afternoon 'last call for medication'.  
It's a bit of a \*\*\*\* when they change location  
Coz u settle in then 'Bam' another relocation.  
Some kick off but they don't get a reaction.  
They need to sort out the system with  
organisation,

Then maybe the prisoners would think a lil  
cooperation

Is in order, let's get together an do this  
operation

Steady feeling unhappy in this institution.

INSTITUTIONALISATION

### EXERCISE:

This writer has created a poem with the same rhyme at the end of every line. Pick a sound, see how many words you can come up with and create a poem around them.

'Word Association Football'  
HM Prison Long Lartin  
Commended Award

Jug of water,  
Water 'otter,  
Otter, odder, pencil jotter,  
Jot, iota,  
South Dakota,  
County, country, place.  
Places raided,  
Space invaded,  
Freedom fighter,  
One pound lighter;  
Heavy weight,  
I'll be there late,  
Taxi stand,  
A two-piece band:  
Sheet, seat,  
Cover, neat,  
Tidy, right,  
I've seen the light;  
Switch, titch, small and tall,  
Family with sandy ball.  
Uncle, Auntie, son and daughter,  
Thirsty?!  
Oh, look – jug of water.

## KOESTLER ARTS: VOICES FROM PRISON (CONT.)

### EXERCISE:

Here the word association game goes in a circle, coming back to repeat the first line. Pick an object in your room and see where the word association takes you – can you get back to where you started?

### DIFFERENT VOICES

The characteristic speech and thought patterns of a narrator can make them stand out, letting the reader hear an accent or tone. These poems are written in a way that shows how each word sounds out loud, or use words that are specific to a way of speaking.

'Jist tay let yi know'

(Inspired by William Carlos Williams and Tom Leonard)

HM Prison Castle Huntly  
Commended Award

Jist tay let yi no  
I'm coming hame  
I've hid enough a this jail game

In a want ma space  
In the bed again  
You've been lying there  
awe these years  
you and yir big floppy ears

noo get yer toys  
and get tae \*\*\*\*  
efer awe yer only a dug

Extract from 'Bad Timing'  
Kent, Surrey and Sussex Community  
Rehabilitation Company  
First-Time Entrant Award

I fort I'd 'ave it sorted an' by now be  
stinkin' rich,  
But som'ow that ain't 'appened so I fink  
there's bin a glitch.

Did wot I was spose'd ta do t' make me  
life run smooove,  
'n still me wheel of progress jus' don't sit  
right in the groove.

Don't be fooled, I've 'ad me chances,  
more'n I can count,  
But all them doors I stepped fru don't  
add up to no amount.

'My Catz'  
HM Prison Long Lartin  
Silver Award

My cat dem no kin teet,  
my cat two cat dem no ramp fe eat.  
My cat dem no ramp nar play,  
my cat dem catch bout three mice ah day.  
My cat dem bad an hard,  
my cat dem no run from darg.

My cat dem cold hearted,  
dem bad no-rartid.

My cat dem no yam food out'a tin,  
my catz yam fish out'a sea whe swim  
My cat dem no hitch nar gaze,  
more time my catz dem garn fe days,  
My cat dem big an fat,  
one brown an white, one gray an black.

My cat dem cold hearted,  
dem bad no-rartid.

### EXERCISE:

Try writing a poem or story using a distinctive voice. Convey the pronunciation by changing spelling – do they have a strong accent or a lisp? Play with your choice of words or the order that you put them in,, using slang or words that are specific to an area of the country. Maybe the character uses certain specific idioms or phrases?



## KOESTLER ARTS: VOICES FROM PRISON (CONT.)

### IMAGES

Try using an image to inspire a piece of writing. It could be a photo, a view from a window or an illustration in a magazine. Here are some artworks from the 2018 Koestler Awards that could spark a story...



*The Therapy Journey*  
HM Prison Warren Hill  
Commended Award for Painting

Write a letter to your future self – what would you say?



*Family Tree*  
HM Prison Shotts  
Patrick Holmes Platinum Award for Painting

What is happening in this scene? Is it a dream? Imagine you're the little boy – how did you get here? What happens next?



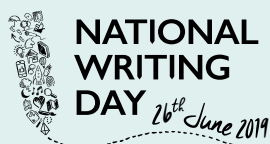
*How I Felt*  
HM Prison & Young Offender Institution Low Newton  
Lamberth Family Highly Commended Award for Needlecraft

Start a piece of writing with these words, or imagine that you've stitched them – who is this person?



*1805*  
HM Prison Lewes  
Painting

Who is walking along the beach? Where are they?



Find more resources at [www.nationalwritingday.org.uk](http://www.nationalwritingday.org.uk)  
#nationalwritingday

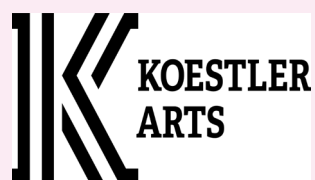




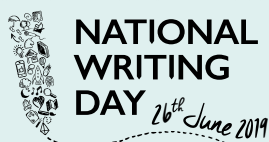
## **FINISHING YOUR WORK**

After you have written your poem or story, remember that writers always write several versions of their work, making improvements each time until their writing is as good as possible.

Once you have finished your poem or story, read it aloud to yourself. Are there any phrases that are a mouthful to say or which sound out of place? Take a few minutes to change them. Read the piece of writing slowly, one sentence at a time. Are there any ways you could make the sentence more interesting or more precise? Are there any words you could swap for a more exact word?



A National Writing Day resource created by Koestler Arts. To find out more about their work, visit [koestlertrust.org.uk](http://koestlertrust.org.uk).



Find more resources at [www.nationalwritingday.org.uk](http://www.nationalwritingday.org.uk)  
#nationalwritingday



Nature is full of inspiration. Step outside; walk, run, ride, scoot, play and explore the wonderful world around you. See where it takes your imagination! Here are some ideas to help get you started:

## TAKE AN ADVENTURE IN NATURE

Take a notepad and pencil or pen with you when you go out for a walk or a bike ride. When you come to somewhere that you like the look of - a place that intrigues you or excites you - STOP, sit down (don't forget to bring a blanket) and start writing.

Explore the world with all your senses, not just your eyes. When you're on the beach or in the forest, look closely at ground beneath your feet, touch the sticks and the stones, feel the sand run through your fingers, listen to the wind rustling through the leaves and grass, taste the salt in the air and smell the blossom and the flowers.

Take photos. Try to take some from unusual angles, try close-ups as well as wider landscapes. Back at home, choose a photo to inspire your story.

## EXERCISE 1

Choose any object you can see. Now describe it; not just what it looks like but what it smells, sounds and feels like. If you don't know for sure, use your imagination and make it up.

Look at the world differently. Write as if you are a bird soaring through the sky, an insect scurrying along the soil, a cat prowling through the grass, a tree standing still and steady in the ground or a fish darting through the water.

What does your world look, sound, smell and feel like? What is important to you?

Imagine an outdoor space you know well. Now think about how different it would look, sound and feel in the middle of the night.

What's your favourite season? What makes that time of year special, interesting or exciting for you? Are there any particular places you like to go during that time of year? Why?

## EXERCISE 2: FIVE-MINUTE FREE-WRITE

No editing, no changing things as you go along. Just set a timer for five minutes, choose one of these exercises, get set and go!

- Write whatever comes into your head (that's right, anything!) whether full sentences or single words, whether it's what you thought you'd write about or not, just don't stop.
- Write single words only. Don't try to make sentences, just write a list of words: maybe colours, objects, names, adjectives, feelings, places, anything, but only single words.
- Write the word NATURE, like this:

N  
A  
T  
U  
R  
E

Now write a single word starting with each letter. Try the same with the words: ADVENTURE, STORY, WORLD, ANIMALS, ESCAPE.



**Dramatic  
Impact**

A National Writing Day resource created by the Dramatic Impact.



Pick one piece of creative writing that you are working on – your main piece at the moment and run through the following exercises.

## EXERCISE 1: STARTING POINTS

Think about the following questions:

- Who is the hero/heroine?
- What do they want?
- What action do they take?
- What conflict do they meet with?
- What is the climax of the piece?
- What is the resolution?
- Finally – what do you want to say with this piece?

## EXERCISE 2: STRUCTURE

Script narratives should follow a basic structure of beginning, middle and end.

Breakdown your script into three separate acts and work through the following questions:

### ACT I – BEGINNING – EXPOSITION

- Set up the protagonist and their world. Write what happens here in a few sentences
- Inciting Incidents – The catalyst for the story. It often provokes a change in the protagonist's routine – something new that they experience that could either challenge or encourage them. What is your inciting incident?
- Finish with something that drives the plot forward. What will happen here to drive your narrative forward?

### ACT II – MIDDLE – CONFRONTATION/COMPLICATION

- Longest part of the narrative. Write what happens in the middle of the piece. What further complications occur? What raises the stakes?
- Ends with the biggest moment of crisis. What is this in your piece?

### ACT III – END – RESOLUTION

- Conflict resolved/unresolved. How does your piece end? Does the hero succeed or fail?

## EXERCISE 3: CHARACTER

Work through the following questions to develop the narrative around your characters.

- Who is your character? Write a character bio in a few sentences.
- At the beginning of the piece, what is normal for your character? What does their day-to-day life look like?
- What does your character want?
- What do they need?
- What is their flaw?





## SCRIPTWORKS REFRESHER (CONT.)

- Why should we care about them?
- What do they learn?
- How do they learn it?
- Write down 20 things your character wants. Anything that comes into your head.
- Write down one interesting thing that happens to your character from birth to age ten, one thing from age ten to twenty, one thing from age twenty to forty, one thing from age forty to sixty and one thing from age sixty to eighty.

### DIALOGUE

Dialogue is the first thing that gives away bad writing so take your time with it! Dialogue serves three main components in drama:

- Characterisation – great dialogue reveals who characters really are deep down, not who they try to portray themselves as.
- Exposition – dialogue conveys information that the audience need to know. However, the best dialogue does this subtly.
- Subtext – the best writing is when the truth lies beneath the surface of the meaning of the words.

Some key points to consider when writing dialogue:

- Dialogue does not resemble conversation – verbatim conversations are often muddled and not dramatically interesting. What good dialogue does is gives the illusion of conversation whilst moving the narrative forward and developing character.
- Make every word of dialogue count. Often less is more and the less said can be more poignant
- Considering how your characters listen or don't listen to each other, and respond or don't respond to each other will enhance your dialogue.
- Watch out for on-the-nose dialogue. In real life, people don't always say exactly what's on their mind or say what they mean and neither should your characters.

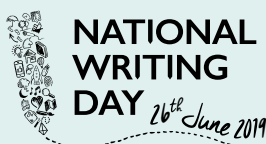
### EXERCISE 4:

Reading through the dialogue of a script, think about the following questions:

1. Could it be more succinct?
2. Are they always saying exactly what is on their mind (bad writing) or is there subtext to what they are saying (good writing)?
3. What are they not saying to each other? Often what they are not saying is where some of the best writing shines, and when we can see what is going on under the surface of their words.

### FEEDBACK

If you are in a group, share a line of dialogue that you have edited. What changes have you made and how does this affect the piece?



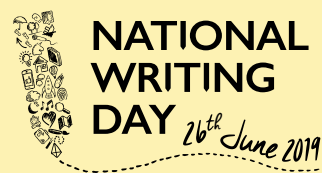
Find more resources at [www.nationalwritingday.org.uk](http://www.nationalwritingday.org.uk)  
#nationalwritingday



A National Writing Day resource created by CAST Theatre. To find out more about their work, visit [castindoncaster.com](http://castindoncaster.com).

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR WRITERS

Here is a directory of resources and opportunities that can help you to continue your writing journey. They are aimed at a wide range of ages and writing abilities. Please refer to each organisation's website for full details.



## ONLINE LEARNING RESOURCES

- **BBC Writersroom.** Information about screenwriting courses, competitions and other opportunities.

Link: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom/>

- **BBC Script Gym.** Series of exercises to aid young writers with scriptwriting.

Link: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom/writers-lab/script-gym>

- **Future Learn.** An Introduction to Screenwriting – free online course.

Link: [www.futurelearn.com/courses/screenwriting](http://www.futurelearn.com/courses/screenwriting)

- **Young Poets Network.** Online resources and guidance for young poets.

Link: [www.ypn.poetrysociety.org.uk](http://www.ypn.poetrysociety.org.uk)

- **Poetry School.** Online and face-to-face courses on various topics with established poets.

Link: [www.poetryschool.com](http://www.poetryschool.com)

## NATIONAL OFFERS

- **Arvon** offers creative writing courses for groups and individuals.

Link: <https://www.arvon.org/>

- **WriteNow.** Penguin Random House's WriteNow initiative provides all the tools, information and access necessary for someone from an underrepresented background to get published.

Link: [www.penguin.co.uk/company/creativeresponsibility/writenow/writenow.html](http://www.penguin.co.uk/company/creativeresponsibility/writenow/writenow.html)

- **National Novel Writing Month** provides support in writing a novel in one month.

Link: [www.nanowrimo.org/](http://www.nanowrimo.org/)

- **Impact Arts.** 'Creative Pathways' creative writing course (training allowance provided).

Link: [www.impactarts.co.uk/](http://www.impactarts.co.uk/)

- **The Literary Consultancy** offers one of the UK's leading manuscript assessment services providing expert, market-aware editorial advice to authors at all levels.

Link: <https://literaryconsultancy.co.uk/>

- **National Poetry Day.** Annual celebration of poetry with a programme of events and activities taking place across the UK.

Link: <https://nationalpoetryday.co.uk/>

- **Apples and Snakes.** Regular spoken word events taking place across the UK for young poets to attend and take part in.

Link: [www.applesandsnakes.org/whats-on](http://www.applesandsnakes.org/whats-on)

## REGIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

### East Midlands

- **Chesterfield Super Scribes.** Monthly creative writing workshops on Monday afternoon for nine to fourteen-year-olds.

Link: [www.writingeastmidlands.co.uk/young-writers/young-writers-groups/](http://www.writingeastmidlands.co.uk/young-writers/young-writers-groups/)

- **Ashbourne Young Writers.** A monthly writing group at Ashbourne Library for primary and secondary school students.

Link: [www.writingeastmidlands.co.uk/young-writers/young-writers-groups/ashbourne-derbys](http://www.writingeastmidlands.co.uk/young-writers/young-writers-groups/ashbourne-derbys)

- **The Writer's Den.** An annual one-day festival of creative writing and performance for nine to fifteen-year-olds at Derby University.

Link: [www.writingeastmidlands.co.uk/young-writers/writers-den/](http://www.writingeastmidlands.co.uk/young-writers/writers-den/)



- **Nottingham Writers' Studio.** Provides space, networking, and creative and professional development opportunities.

Link: <https://www.nottinghamwritersstudio.co.uk/>

- **Nottingham Young Writers.** For nine to fifteen-year-olds. The group meets monthly on a Saturday morning at Nottingham Central Library.

Link: [www.writingeastmidlands.co.uk/young-writers/young-writers-groups/nottingham-young-writers/](http://www.writingeastmidlands.co.uk/young-writers/young-writers-groups/nottingham-young-writers/)

## London

- **National Poetry Library.** Free access to thousands of poetry resources.

Link: <https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/venues/poetry-library>

- **Poet in the City.** An arts organization that promotes a love of poetry to new audiences through live events, projects, commissions and participation.

Link: <http://www.poetinthecity.co.uk/>

- **The Poetry Café.** Vegetarian café and regular poetry performance venue.

Link: <https://poetrysociety.org.uk/poetry-cafe/>

- **Spread the Word.** London's writer development agency.

Link: <https://www.spreadtheword.org.uk/>

- **Free Word.** An arts organisation that explores the power and politics of words.

Link: <https://freeword.org/>

- **Royal Society of Literature.** Regular programme of literary events.

Link: <https://rsliterature.org/whats-on/>

- **Koestler Arts.** Exhibition of the annual Koestler Awards at the Southbank Centre (September to December).

Link: <https://www.koestlertrust.org.uk/>

## Hull

- **Absolutely Cultured.** Regular programme of cultural events.

Link: <https://www.absolutelycultured.co.uk/events/>

- **The Writing Squad.** A development programme for writers aged sixteen to twenty-one living, working or studying in the North of England.

Link: [www.writingsquad.com](http://www.writingsquad.com)

- **The Warren.** A spoken word and creative writing group led by First Story Writer-in-Residence Joe Hakim.

Link: <http://thewarren.org>

- **Humber Mouth/Head in a Book.** Hull's annual literature festival (October) provides writers with the opportunity to take part in workshops with professional writers and new writing commissions. The supporting Head in a Book cycle of literature events also provides opportunities to network with professional writers and writers at all stages of their careers.

Link: [www.humbermouth.com](http://www.humbermouth.com)

- **Freedom Festival.** Annual arts and literature festival (September).

Link: [www.freedomfestival.co.uk](http://www.freedomfestival.co.uk)

- **The Big Malarkey.** Annual children's literature festival with opportunities for young people to get involved with spoken word, reading and performance opportunities.

Link: [www.thebigmalarkeyfestival.com/](http://www.thebigmalarkeyfestival.com/)



- **Middle Child Theatre Company** offers an artist development programme that provides opportunities to develop while actually making work, along with regular 'submit a script' window throughout the year.

Link: [www.middlechildtheatre.co.uk/](http://www.middlechildtheatre.co.uk/)

- **Women of Words.** A collective of female performers of prose, song and drama featuring open mic slots and longer performance opportunities.

Link: [www.facebook.com/womenofwordshull/](https://www.facebook.com/womenofwordshull/)

## South West

- **Creative Youth Network's Creative Futures** supports young artists (including writers) in creating new work including mentoring, money to make a new work, studio space, etc.

Link: <https://www.creativeyouthnetwork.org.uk/Pages/Category/creative-futures>

- **Novel Nights.** A monthly literary event in Bristol and Bath showcasing and supporting excellent writing and writers all stages of their career.

Link: <https://www.novelnights.co.uk/programme/>

- **New Writing South.** The Writers' Place offers training for aspiring or established writers, including shorter courses and workshops.

Link: <https://newwritingsouth.com/category/news-features>

- **Literature Works** offers resources and opportunities for writers based in the South West.

Link: <https://literatureworks.org.uk/projects/>

- **WriteClub** hosts regular events and workshops for writers.

Link: <http://www.writeclub.org.uk/>

## The North

- **Cast Theatre.** Young Leader's Programme offers hands-on experience in the delivery of a variety of creative activities, assisting arts professionals in dance, drama and theatre.

Link: <https://www.castindoncaster.com/take-part/expect-arts-young-leaders-scheme/>

- **Bradford Young Writers.** Weekly young writers group as part of Ilkley Literature Festival.

Link: <http://www.ilkleyliteraturefestival.org.uk/families-young-people/bradford-young-writers-group>

- **Bradford Literature Festival.** Bradford's annual literature festival (June to July) with a wide-ranging programme of events celebrating the written and spoken word for adults and young people.

Link: [www.bradfordlitfest.co.uk](http://www.bradfordlitfest.co.uk)

- **New Writing North** runs talent development programmes for writers.

Link: <http://newwritingnorth.com/>

- **West Yorkshire Playhouse** provides training opportunities for young people in the creative arts including support for young playwrights.

Link: <https://leedsplayhouse.org.uk/creative-engagement/youth/youth-theatre/>

## Northern Ireland

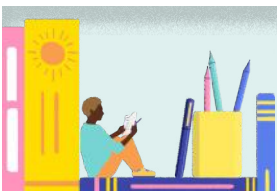
- **Fighting Words Belfast** runs free creative writing workshops for children and young people aged between six and eighteen.

Link: <https://www.youngatart.co.uk/write-club-duncairn>

## Scotland

- **Scottish Poetry Library.** Collection of contemporary poetry and offers a free lending service.

Link: <https://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/>





## Wales

- **Literature Wales's** creative writing centre Tŷ Newydd offers residencies and day-courses for writers.

Link: <https://www.literaturewales.org/for-writers/ty-newydd-writing-centre/>

