

THE ONE AND ONLY THING YOU WILL EVER NEED TO WRITE A NOVEL

The one and only thing you will ever need to write a novel is....

...YOU.

Please stay with me here. Trite as the above answer sounds, it is also a Universal Truth that we writers tend to ignore but MUST understand and then use.



Who Are You?

Do you Really Know who you are?

When you take the time to find out who you really are, you will be well on the way to writing your novel.



Why?

Why does a writer have to really know who they are?

This is a little question that could take a long time to answer. It is also a question that will breed many other questions.

OK. Writers who write both fiction and non-fiction MUST have an intimate knowledge of themselves.

- Writers write about life.
- Writers write about living.
- Writers write for readers who want to learn something new.
- Writers are human beings.

- Readers are human beings.
- We ALL have one thing in common – we all live and breathe and feel.



What?

We all live and breathe and feel.

We, as human beings, are inexorably bound to story.

We can't help it/ignore it/deny it.

Millenia ago we survived and thrived by listening to story.

Mr Hunter went out to get lunch for his people. Mr Hunter came home with enough meat to feed everyone. He then told the story of his GREAT adventure.

OR – Mr Hunter's brother, Mr Hunter, went out to get lunch, came home -But - with no food. He told the story of his EPIC adventure.

Mr Hunter and his brother told their stories to an audience. In that audience were those who believed every word told. Those who didn't. Those who attacked the storyteller. And some who fell asleep, bored.

To write your story you must know about human nature. To know human nature, you MUST know about yourself.



Writer, Know Thy Self.

Stories are told/written by people, for people, about people. How on earth can we hope to tell a story if we don't have a clue about...people? And who is the one person that you know better than anyone else?

YOU.

And therein lies a huge problem for us writers.

If we are not willing to embrace every facet of who we are/were/want to be then we will never be able to write that amazing novel. You know, the novel that will outlive you. The novel with fictional characters who get an obit in the New York Times when you stop writing about them. Or fictional characters who get awarded medals 100 years after you first created them. Or fictional characters who are so real that people actually believe them to Be Real People.



Everyone Has a Book Inside Them.

Yes.

A cliché but also the truth. We all have a story to tell.

The other cliché is – Well, some should keep it inside them.

Also, yes.

But why the second cliché?

Because many people burn to write a story. They study everyone and everything. They learn every rule. Their grammar is perfect. Their plot-line is amazing. They can write a phrase so beautifully crafted that it would make the gods weep. They set schedules and keep to them. (!) They are religious about daily word count. They know exactly where to put the Inciting Incident. They produce a denouement that we'd all want to plagiarise. And yet...

And yet...

This whole brilliance leaves its audience cold and bemused.

Maybe our perfect writer with their perfect novel has a hidden blind spot.

Maybe our perfect writer hasn't one ounce of knowledge about himself or his fellow human beings.

Our perfect writer has done everything perfectly apart from one thing. He and we all have a shadow inside as well as outside. And, maybe he did not/could not Walk on the Darkside.



A Walk on the Darkside.

We all have a shadow inside as well as outside.

So – back to our perfect writer. He has done everything - errm - perfectly. But his perfection is all External. We, the reader, are left cold and bemused because we can find nothing to relate to. Nothing that we can emotionally connect with.

Our perfect writer didn't understand a Vital Universal Truth.

When we write our novels, we cannot help but bring ourselves into the story. This is non-negotiable.

Everything that ever happened to us, the good, the bad, the downright evil, will appear in our work.

Some novelists say that writing has been the best therapy ever. Through their stories, they have confronted their dark side.

Okay – if you tell me right now that you don't have a dark side, I will call you out. We ALL have a dark side. Our inner shadow.

Those of us who have already done some spiritual/ therapeutic work on ourselves will have a slightly easier time acknowledging the point above.

Those of us who have never gone 'Where Angels Fear to Tread' i.e. Deep inside our fears and hauntings – will find it traumatic.

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...I once worked with a man who, to me, was the epitome of pure evil. I couldn't stand to be in the same room with him. A co-worker who felt exactly the same asked me if I thought this person was very clever or extremely stupid. To me he was VERY clever. Why? Because he was the one and only person that I've ever had the misfortune to meet who could effortlessly latch on to anyone and everyone's greatest weakness. By small and planned stages, he would feed on that knowledge, store it and then use it to great effect. Whenever he aimed and fired, it was always in such a way that you, and only you, would

feel the immediate hit. But the fallout reverberated invisibly to everyone. Oh, and he turned out to be a Master Blackmailer too.

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Even just writing this makes me feel sick.

So why bring it up?

Because I have a ready-made character here. All the pain and disgust this memory gives me will paint my character in 3D, HD, Glorious Technicolour.

We are everything that has happened to us and every person we have ever met. This fact will colour our story whether we like it or not.



Imagine this...

You have two writers.

Writer One has grown up in a loving, caring family. He did well at school. Got a great job. Married a wonderful woman. He is well-liked, sociable and an all-round good egg.

Writer Two has been mentally, emotionally and sexually abused from a very young age. She has never known love, never been cared for, never had any form of 'normal' relationship. She rarely goes outside of her home.

What kinds of story would these two people write?

Aha! That was my first thought too.

So... why not steal a little advice from Sherlock Holmes?

'Watson - don't take the first cab, or the second. Take the third.'

To me – the first writer could quite easily write a story of great terror and darkness. He crafts a character of the purest pure evil, the likes of which has never been seen before.

The second writer. Now, she has a vibrant inner world and the comic timing of a pure and utter genius. She builds the story to end all fantasy stories.

Hands up all who think that I have just contradicted myself there by undoing the fact that we are all that has ever happened to us etc.

Have I really?

Think again!



Muscle Shock

If you are a weight-lifter you will understand the practise and purpose of Muscle Shock. It is something done when weightlifters become so complaisant about their training that they cease to improve.

When this happens, they deploy Muscle Shock by adding a small but completely different exercise into their routine in order to jump start the next round of improvements.

The paragraph above about the two writers was my form of Muscle Shock. It is soooo easy to latch onto your first idea/thought and run with it. Maybe in the First Draft this is OK. But it only takes seconds to muscle shock your brain out of the easy/complaisant and into somewhere much more daring/exciting.



Getting to Know Yourself helps you Work

Getting to know yourself better not only makes for brilliant characters in brilliant stories, it also helps you get to grips with your best work practise.

We all know about plotters and pantsers. I've done both and much prefer the former.

It took me a long time to discover this, even whilst knowing that I am a brilliant map reader and would be a terrific companion on a road trip because I'd have the route all planned out beforehand. (!)

One of my biggest mistakes on *this* road to writing a novel came from years of trying to fit myself into external frameworks.



External Frameworks

I love software. I loved trying out every single bit of writing software that I could find, Paid and unpaid.

And every single time I used said software, I'd get to a point where I'd throw my hands in the air and shout

'I GIVE UP.'

Next step?

I'd find another writing software programme. The one that will definitely work for me.

Yeah. Right.

Then – after far too many 'I GIVE UP' moments, I suddenly realised what was happening here.

Here was I, trying so very desperately to fit my brain, my thought processes, my methods of working inside an external framework which – no matter how excellent it was – had been written by another person for a generic person and not FOR ME.

Damn and Blast it.

I had this all-encompassing fear that I could not write properly and would never be able to write a novel completely. It used to freeze me mid-sentence. Or, even sometimes, before I had started a sentence.

Then came a thunderbolt.

In an instant the fear vanished. Poof. Into thin air.

The thunderbolt spoke. It said -

‘Here you are trying to squeeze all of you into a tight, rigid, confining set of pre-formed prison bars. Or even worse – a space so wide and unformed that it feels like drowning every time you try to write. How daft.’

And – oh, wonder of Holy Wonders. Does this mean that...?

I AM NOT A USELESS FAILURE.

I am just a writer writing from the outside in and not the other way around.

I am just following someone else’s blueprint and not my own.

I am a complete numpty for forgetting a core truth about myself – I will always and forever fight to the death against restricting rules and regs. (I can’t help it.
It’s my nature!)

From this moment onwards, writing stopped being my daily battleground.



We are not put on this earth to suffer but to learn.

Hard work is supposed to be hard. Hard work is *not* a negative downward spiral with the ability to make you question your own intelligence and sanity and worthiness and...



We learn from the outside in. We write from the inside out.

By knowing yourself you can get on with the task of writing.

If you know that you are very sociable and love structure - Join groups, take a doctorate in writing, fling yourself into all kinds of societies and classes.

If you know that you love the challenge of conquering and taming a piece of software - Crack on and enjoy.

If you do best by reading How-To books - Read Everything you can get your hands and eyes on.

If you know that you need a writing mentor - Go find one.

If you know that you work best alone - Do it.

Know what you are and you will know what you need to learn and how to learn it in order to write your novel.



And then comes the very best bit of all...

You take a deep breath, you place absolute faith and trust yourself, you travel inside and you type ---

Chapter One

With thanks and my very best wishes, fellow writers,

Greta Brookes

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