



The Writing Book: A Workbook for Fiction Writers

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This is a practical workbook that guides writers, step-by-step, toward completing a work of fiction. Free of generalizing platitudes, it instead focuses on the specifics of craft: from getting started, discovering characters, writing dialogue and description, to evaluating the design of a draft, and of course revision. Exercises found in this book are actual techniques working writers rely on. They include speed writing, sorting and grouping, rewriting an incident in various styles, experimenting with tone, voice, syntax, and more. Designed to cover every stage of the process—from brainstorming an idea to the final draft—these practical suggestions help writers to liberate their creativity and to refine existing work. Excerpts from published authors are also included and help to illustrate the techniques taught.

The Writing Book: A Workbook for Fiction Writers Details

Date : Published August 1st 1999 by Allen Unwin (first published 1993)

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Author : Kate Grenville

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From Reader Review *The Writing Book: A Workbook for Fiction Writers* for online ebook

Clare says

This short review is also posted on my blog at <http://inputs.wordpress.com/2009/03/1...>

This is a really excellent work book for people who want to write or who are currently writing fiction. It is an incredibly useful book for people like myself who are running workshops on creative writing.

Each chapter is divided into 3 sections. The first section explains the category - eg character, voice, point of view, dialogue, the second section offers examples and the third offers large numbers of practical exercises which can be used either by the solitary writer or in a workshop.

The other thing I like about it is that it uses Australian material which makes it easier to engage my students who are, of course, all doing the course in Australia. Kate Grenville also writes in an easy conversational style which makes for enjoyable reading.

Zara West says

Great tips for all writers.

Lewlewlew says

excellent for the stuck wannabe writer who needs structured exercises to get moving

Tara Calaby says

This is quite a basic book, really. It was on the recommended book list for my Masters, but I'd personally only recommend it to people without much experience of writing. It's full of activities, but I'm not sure I'd do any of them myself, as they would feel very artificial because they're not in keeping with my own writing process.

On the upside, Grenville has taken her examples from Australian authors, which is a nice change! And I do think *The Writing Book* could be helpful for those new to fiction writing – just not so much to those of us who have been doing it for many, many years.

Jesse Anderson says

This book was full of great advice, excerpts and exercises. I loved the step-by-step process from how to get

started, characters, dialogue, voice, descriptions etc. The excerpts she chose were all by Australian authors which I thought was brilliant. They provided clear images that helped me understand Grenville's intentions for the exercises that followed. I got some great bits of writing that I wouldn't have come up with on my own and I genuinely enjoyed developing what I wrote. A great tool for any writer or English teacher. The best advice she offered is some I'll never forget:

"You're the only one who can know what your piece should be like: other people can only tell you the piece they would have written."

- - -

Getting to know a character is similar to getting to know a person: the pleasure is in gradually finding things out for yourself.

- - -

There's no such thing as an interesting character, only interesting writing.

- - -

A good description can be worth a thousand explanations.

- - -

Life doesn't have a plot: life just has a flow of events. The only kind of plot that life can offer is a retrospective one.

- - -

A secret is a great thing for a story.

Kate Krake says

One of the most practical and down to earth guides to fiction writing I have ever read.

Creative exercises are a dime a dozen, but the value in this book is Grenville actually explaining how a swag of random writing exercises can be turned into a story.

All of the examples Grenville uses are taken from Australian literature, so I was also happy I was also able to pick up a few local reads for the To Read shelf too.

Most inspiring to pick up the pen (or laptop - both!) and get back to writing fiction.

Here's my full and detailed review from The Write Turn.

Kerrie says

I heard this book referred to by a couple of people at a recent writing workshop that I attended. One said that he was working his way through the exercises.

The author writes "this is a practical workbook, a resource for a writer to work through, with an emphasis on exercises and examples."

Grenville encourages the budding writer to begin with what they already have and build from there.

If you are looking for a DIY at home course on writing, a challenge in concentration on honing your skills, then this may well be it. It is interestingly constructed, full of things to try, and may even result in a finished piece: a short story, a novella, or a novel.

For me it just clarified that I am a reader, not a writer.

Buffy Greentree says

The one thing that I really liked about this book was the use of Australian authors as examples. It demonstrated beautifully the breadth and variety of Australian writing.

As to the book itself, it took me a while to work out exactly what it was that bugged me. All the advice is useful, if a bit banal. It wasn't until I started reading 'Story' by Robert McKee, I realised my problem with Grenville's book. McKee states that there are two aspects to a piece of writing: the literary talent and story talent. For him, and for me, story talent is the more important. It is the aspect that gives a work deeper meaning and purpose for the reader. Literary talent is not to be neglected, but is not enough by itself. Grenville is primarily interested in literary talent. She has little to no desire to encourage any true sense of 'story'. Plots she says can be done away with, or if you are stuck for one, you can copy a myth or another tale already told. If you happen to have a plot, great, but don't worry if you don't.

Basically, this book will help you create a piece for a university creative writing class, or perhaps a literary magazine. However, it will not inspire you to write a great novel which will move people with its profoundness or insight into life.

Djrmel says

The writing advice isn't anything that not available in a lot of other books, but Grenville does go a step further by including examples of what she's talking about. Good examples, too, not only of what she's teaching but for reading in general. That could be counterproductive, in that you'll want to read the entire book she's pulled the example from, and that's just another excuse to not be writing, isn't it?

Tawny says

Favorite quotes:

1. "The more you read, the better you'll write."
 2. "Yours is an individual voice because you're an individual, not quite like any other. Whatever good things come out of your writing will happen because of that individuality."
 3. "Punctuation will always be only an approximation of the sound of speech, in the same way that musical notation is only a guide to how a piece of music should sound."
-

Titus Hjelm says

I'm not a fiction writer, but often fiction writing guides offer insights also to creative nonfiction and even academic writers. Grenville's book is no exception: narrative non-fiction writers can learn much about character-building and mood-setting, for example. And revision guidance, of course. But there were no significant 'aha!' moments in this one--especially if you've read any other writing guides previously.

Leinad says

"This isn't yet another 'how to write' book," writes Kate Grenville in the introduction to **The Writing Book**. "In fact it isn't a 'how to write' book at all. This is a practical workbook, a resource book for a writer to work through, with an emphasis on exercises and examples." As such, I found **The Writing Book** to be wonderfully useful and refreshing.

In this book, Grenville walks through various key aspects of fiction writing. The ten chapters are self-descriptively titled "Getting started", "Sorting through", "Character", "Point of view", "Voice", "Dialogue", "Description", "Design", "Revision" and "Submitting a manuscript". Nevertheless, rather than instructing her reader on how to go about these different aspects of writing, Grenville tends to merely lay out the options, offering wise but un-preachy advice. Each chapter contains writing samples that offer ideas, illustrate the options. Many of these samples are very helpful and really quite brilliant works of art.

Though she acknowledges the many types of writing and many ways of going about the craft, I found that Grenville's style was much less plotty and more writing focussed than I'm used to. For some of the early exercises, she wrote some rather disconnected pieces of fiction from which she produced a story which she includes towards the end of the book. "Plot" she writes, "is one of the most artificial qualities in the artificial construct called fiction". She doesn't utterly disown the plot, but suggests that for some writers it may work better to begin with "characters, places, vivid language, and so on" and let the plot emerge in later drafts. This is very different from my style of writing: typically I envisage a plot first (if only a general one), and my writing flows from that. Thinking about it more, though, I wonder if for some of my stories this practice doesn't make sense. Formulating clever plots certainly isn't my strong point, and perhaps I would be better off focussing foremost on the aspects of my writing that I do better, and letting the plot flow out of that.

Another useful chapter, which I in fact read just now, is the one on revision. "Revision" she notes, "should be a complete re-vision". It's not the same as editing: at this stage you're trying to look at your finished draft with fresh eyes, trying to forget what you originally intended and see what you can best do with what you've got. Revision is hard; you've often got to be ruthless; but it can also be the funnest part. She recommends

going back through the characters, voice, dialogue, description and design [plot] and seeing how well they work. Again, it wasn't really a 'how to' chapter on revision, but it was a useful guide, especially as I am now embarking on the revision of a story I have been writing for quite some time.

I won't go through what she says about all the different topics, but for any fiction writers out there, *The Writing Book* is definitely worth reading. It's not a 'how to' book, but I think that's for the best. Writing is an art, not a procedure. Art should not be wholly dictated, formulated. There may be a place for rules and formulae (especially among those of us who are still quite amateur) but those rules are only there to be broken, as we should not forget. Sometimes what we need most are ideas, perhaps a little unpretentious advice and a good dose of other peoples' art for inspiration. That's exactly what *The Writing Book* gives.

Aislinn says

I don't know what I expected from this book but I didn't expect to find it so useful and so strong on technique. It was a great book to read after absorbing all the principles of "Self-Editing for Fiction Writers" (Dave King etc) because Grenville has an artist's approach to fiction: she knows the rules more thoroughly than anyone and she's willing to break them. I'm still learning the rules and I really got a deeper understanding of several aspects of the craft from the examples she used. I haven't tried any of her exercises, except in my head, but I know where to find them if I need them.

Magda says

I've dipped into this book many times over the years I have had in on the shelf. Its the exercises I keep going back for. As titled its a workbook - not a how to write a novel so don't pick it up unless you're expecting to do some hard work. Useful if you're stuck at any stage. The blurb describing the book is just sales spin - its not a how to write a novel from woe to go. Its a workbook for writing skills.

Kate Atkinson says

I read this book to supplement one of my Creative Writing university subjects this semester. I found it very helpful, especially as I was writing my end-of-year short story. It was good in a practical way, dispensing with the theory and other fluff, cutting straight to helpful advice. I would recommend this book to all writers, especially those who feel they have a lot to learn :P Grenville includes exercises which are awesome for combating writer's block, and lots of 'examples' which she writes herself. I was sad to see this one go back to the library - maybe I'll get my own copy...
