

Get your Ideas Into Words and Your Words Into Print

A Guide for Young Chicago Writers

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Chicago Writer[™] Books

A Guide for

Young
Chicago
Writers

From Brainstorm to Bestseller—
Get Your Ideas Into Words and
Your Words Into Print

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Chicago Writer

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Writing Your Stories

Writers get inspiration from almost anywhere and anything. Just as your ideas are uniquely yours, so is your writing process. Although it is helpful to learn how successful writers write, you won't succeed until you find your own special process and your own unique voice.

One way to learn what works best for your writing is to look at one topic or subject from different angles: facts, feelings, investigation, and imagination.

Here are some techniques to help you get started.

Just the Facts

Factual writing is most like journalistic writing with the who, what, where, when, and why of the story taking center stage.

It is the style a writer uses to describe events or observations—what happened at the concert; how the school's new dress code will be implemented; where to find the most popular jeans at the best deals.

The writing is factual and precise. The writer doesn't make guesses or interject opinion.

Try this» Describe something that happened to you in the last two days. Include who, what, where, when, and why. Keep it to about three paragraphs. Write it in the first person (e.g., "I saw" or "I heard") or third person (e.g., "The car stopped" or "The music blared"). Keep it concise and factual.

Feelings

Writing about feelings and emotions puts the human factor into your human interest stories. Evoking feelings draws the reader into the story and makes him care about your characters.

The best way to incorporate feelings into your work is to describe the actions or reactions of the characters to reflect the emotion you want to convey.

For instance, rather than say, "I was scared," it is better to write, "My stomach fell and my palms began to sweat when the car stopped unexpectedly on the darkest part of the road."

When you evoke feeling rather than state it, you allow your reader to feel what you are writing about. They participate in your story.

Try this» Take the story you wrote from the last exercise and add feelings and emotions. Describe both the internal and external reactions of everyone in your story.

Investigation

Investigative writing uses interviews or research techniques to teach the reader something. It's the type of writing you do when your teacher assigns a term paper or a research report. It includes quotes and citations of sources.

This is the style of writing used in the academic and scholarly fields. An investigative story can include history, statistics, geographic origins, first person experience, and current news items.

The writing is factual and provides a context to better understand an idea or concept.

Try this» Take one aspect of the story you wrote from the first exercise and investigate it. Write a few paragraphs about this concept that will help your reader better understand your initial story. For example, if you wrote your first story about a car accident you witnessed, investigate the safety record of one of the cars involved or the accident experience at the site of the crash. If you wrote your first story about waiting in line for concert tickets, investigate how online brokers have changed the way people buy tickets or the growth in the type of music you were going to see.

Imagination

This writing is pure dreaming. It is what science fiction, fantasy, and paranormal fiction is made of. It doesn't have to make sense. It doesn't have to have any basis in reality. It is the most creative type of writing.

Try this» Rewrite the first story you wrote in an imaginative way. Create scenes that couldn't possibly occur on Earth. Make it whimsical or make it wild. Go nuts!

Pulling It All Together

Some of the best writing incorporates some of all of the previous techniques.

If you're writing nonfiction, accuracy of your facts are most important, but you also want to present your information in a creative fashion that will interest your readers.

If you're writing fiction, your creativity and the flow of your story are most important, but you also want to know enough about your characters and their world to keep the story credible and your readers hooked.

One last assignment:

Try this» Write a new story or article incorporating the techniques you've learned. Test to determine what combination works best for the subject matter or type of story you're writing.

Other Tips to Improve Your Writing

- Read! The more you read, the more good writing you'll be exposed to.
- Try other genres. If you write nonfiction, try poetry. If you write fantasy, try historical fiction. Stretch your imagination and you'll stretch your talent.
- Take a class. Learning something new is a great way to grow and become a more interesting person and a more interesting writer.
- Study how other writers write. Read a biography of your favorite writer. If you hear of writers speaking at a local book store or library, go and ask them a question about how they write.
- Volunteer. Write for your favorite cause. Not-for-profit organizations are always looking for help to spread their missions.
- Keep writing. The more you write, the better you'll become.

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