

# *Creative Writing*

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Some links at the end of each article may or may not work.

## **1. How to Jumpstart your Next Writing Session**

**by: David Parton**

I have always enjoyed writing. Sometimes it's a problem for me to just sit down and write something. There are days when I choose "procrastinating" over "proactive." Putting things off is common with everyone. I am very gifted in this area. ;)

Here are 4 areas to focus on to jumpstart your next writing session.

- Concentration
- Preparation
- The First Word
- Use your notebook

Concentration:

There are way too many distractions. Cell phones ringing, blaring car alarms and unexpected visitors are just a few things that can disrupt your concentration. It then becomes easier to justify not writing today.

The best thing to do to encourage creative writing is to make it a ritual. Find a nice spot to write, maybe, in a quiet room in your home where you will be left undisturbed for a period of time. Set a time to work; a scheduled time to write. Stick to it.

Keep reference books and materials close to hand.

Focus on one idea at a time.

View your next writing session as an opportunity; an opportunity to do something you enjoy. It can be fun. And when you are having fun nobody ever has to tell you to "concentrate!"

Preparation

Once you have your topic: Google it. Read everything you can online and offline related to your idea. Search the net for testimonials, reviews and articles about your topic. Brainstorm related sub-topics.

Give it a rest. Let your subconscious mind percolate and play with the information you provided. Get some exercise. Some of my best ideas come to me while I am out walking around in the evening.

Getting Started

Where to begin? That blank page staring back can be intimidating.

Just dive right in there!

Type the word "The."

Type the next word (the first thing that pops into your mind) and the next word.

At this point, quality is not important. You just want to create a "flow" where the words come easily.

Don't stop to edit. Save all your corrections for the second draft. Resist the impulse to rewrite. That

will only interrupt the flow and is another way to avoid the task at hand.

If you are like me you will have a 2nd, third and fourth draft. You have to get your first draft completed before you have anything to rewrite! Stay focused.

Carry a Notebook

As a creative writer, you will be “hit” by odd ideas and notions in the oddest of places.

Maybe you are stuck in traffic or brushing your teeth when inspiration strikes.

You could wake from a dream and have a killer idea.

“ I’ll remember that.” We say to ourselves, but when next we write there is no access to that memory file.

Just use a notebook. Jot those things down as they come to you. It only takes a moment.

Capture all your of your ideas as they transpire. Who knows? One of them may be the “Next Big Thing!”

- David Parton

### **About The Author**

David Parton

Now You can Expand your Opportunities with FREE Tips & Resources about Affiliate Marketing, Making Money from Home, Website Development & Self-improvement for Both Sides of Your Brain!

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## 2. How to Write Bad Poetry

by: Stephen Earley Jordan, II

So you've decided to crown yourself with a title that a million other people (just like you (yes, just like you!)) give themselves every day. Some people believe giving yourself such a title is equivalent to, and just as beneficial monetarily, as naming yourself Queen of England. But, there is no grace, rarely enough publicity, and only the title of Court Jester seems to be becoming for you because you are a fool among others.

What is this sacred title? Poet.

Why does titling yourself a "poet" make you a Fool? Well, it doesn't, not in and of itself. But if you've only been published online, never in print—that could be a sign of your well-earned Fool status. To be blunt—that is a sign that you write bad poetry.

Why would these sites accept your work if it sucked, you ask? Maybe to raise their quota, maybe to get more submissions of the site's particular interest, but mainly to actually HAVE something to post—most (but not all) sites are desperate for submissions. Or maybe they're out for a profit. Come on, who among us HASN'T had something accepted by the National Library of Poetry, and then gotten all the brochures for expensive products featuring our work?

The Webmaster vs. Editor Problem: Go to any website, check it out. Can you find someone with the title of Webmaster? How about editor? Or, still yet, Webmaster AND Editor? A Webmaster does not, by any means, mean Editor. Simply because someone is a webmaster (someone who controls the site, updates the postings, etc. . . ) does not mean that the person is an EDITOR (someone who corrects the work, proofreads, re-writes, re-words, etc...) of the work posted on the site. In many cases, webmasters who are disguising themselves as editors are giving real editors a bad name. A webmaster, will too often post submissions "as is" and not give a damn about the content or presentation. However, if a site has someone who can both edit and be a webmaster then the site is moving in the right direction.

This is the main problem source. Building a website, and getting work "published" on a website is so easily done by anyone whether they have talent or not that it de-values the word "published" and lessens the role of an Editor.

Granted, the internet IS a great marketing tool for promoting your work, getting your name in the public's eye, and getting writing experience, but have you ever asked yourself why your work is ONLY published online? Perhaps it is because no discerning EDITOR has ever seen your dribbly poems, except in browsing the web for bad poems to laugh at.

Here are a few tips that will help you to get your work published online. Hey, I figured if you're going to be a fool about getting your unpolished work published on the internet for the world to see, I'd give a few tips to help your bad poetry stay that way, since you seem to like that way best:

1. Place the word "Love" in your title. That's a major plus!
2. Be straight-forward, don't use symbols, metaphors or anything that will make the reader think. Readers don't have time to think.
3. Focus on form—(sonnets, villanelles, haiku). Since you think in form, write in form.
4. Keep your poem in a rhyme-scheme. Why? Well, EVERYONE knows that all GOOD poems rhyme, the rest can be disregarded as a post-modern mess!
5. Only write in YOUR point of view. Write exactly what you believe, never try to portray the image of someone else. Better yet, start the poem with "I".
6. Keep your poems untitled. Readers love to be creative and imagine what the title should and

could be.

7. Write in the same place. If you write in your bedroom—always write there; if you write outside under a tree—always write there---why try variety and ruin a good thing?
8. Don't ever base a character in a poem on someone you actually KNOW. Heaven forbid you get the piece published, and have to explain to the person—"this is you".
9. Read, but if you don't like a poem or a poet—just toss it. Don't even question why you don't appreciate the work.
10. Have no structure. Poetry is about limitless expressions, right? So in that sense, make your lines and stanzas as long as you wish. Just write exactly how you feel!
11. Don't keep a journal. Journal causes too much self-reflection and you want to write for the moment, not yesterday.
12. Use clichés as much as possible. People like to read familiar phrases.
13. Not every line of a poem is important. Just make sure you have a good first and last line.
  14. Poems don't progress, that's the difference between a story and a poem. Poems aren't suppose to take you on a journey to learn.
14. Submit your poems to only websites. That way, you will never have to face the fact that your poetry SUCKS, because it will only be read by the friends and relatives to whom you give the site's URL, and your friends will never tell you that reading your poetry is greater torture than letting a small, sharp-clawed guinea pig walk on their sunburned skin.

If you follow these guidelines, and start writing, you will be a "poet" in no time. Remember that poetry HAS to rhyme, and remember that the less you practice the better you are.

Joking aside—you might want to try doing exactly opposite of the "tips" in the list. And, since many webmasters (who are titling themselves Editor) aren't doing their job, it's up to you to learn to edit your work before you embarrass yourself.

(This article is not commenting that ALL online poetry is not well-crafted. But the poorly crafted poetry far outweighs the well-written by a landslide.)

### **About The Author**

Stephen Jordan, a Medical Editor in Greenwich, Connecticut, currently lives in New York City, has five years experience within the educational publishing industry. Stephen was a freelance editor with such educational foundations as Princeton Review, The College Board, New York University, and Columbia University. Away from the office, Stephen promotes his creative writing, painting, and his home-based freelance business OutStretch Publications. Stephen holds two Bachelor of Arts degrees in writing and literature from Alderson-Broaddus College of Philippi, West Virginia.

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### **3. If The Viewpoint Character Is A Secondary Character, Have You Established Who He is?**

by: Nick Vernon

Creative Writing Tips –

I have said above that if a secondary character tells the story of the main character, then the spotlight should be kept on the main character.

This shouldn't be taken to the extreme though.

In other words, you don't just write the story of the main character without telling your readers a bit about your secondary character.

Unless the reader understands the reason a secondary character is telling the story, it will seem peculiar that the main character isn't telling it himself. It is, after all, the main character's story.

So, the following have to be answered...

- Who is this secondary character?
- Why is he telling the story instead of the main character?
- What is his connection with the main character?

Weave in some information about the secondary character so we can gain a better understanding of his role in the story

#### **About The Author**

Besides his passion for writing, Nick Vernon runs an online gift site where you will find gift information, articles and readers' funny stories.

Visit <http://www.we-recommend.com>

## **4. Interviewing an Author: Don't Be Left Speechless**

**by: Stephen Earley Jordan**

Edited by Jenny Wilson

Joyce Carol Oates. Langston Hughes. Anne Sexton. F. Scott Fitzgerald. Nikki Giovanni. The names of authors (dead and alive) can go on and on. But I'll let you have first pick!

You are in a room with some of your favorite authors. About ten of them. However, you are only allowed to invite one of them to Starbucks for a couple of chocolate mochas. Just you and your favorite author. It doesn't matter if the writer is deceased—use your imagination! After all, you're a writer, right?

Oh dear, who shall it be? Should it be William Shakespeare with his purple pantaloons; Sylvia Plath who now vows to use an electric oven instead of gas; or should it be Maya Angelou and old playmates from her broken-hearted brothel?

Finally, you have selected an author.

You take him (or her) to Starbucks. You order the mochas. You sit down. As you open your mouth to ask the author questions nothing useful comes out.

What's the problem?

Often times we'll chance upon moments when we can interview an author. And, with technology nowadays, methods of research and brainstorming have changed slightly.

### 1. Research the Author

Ask yourself, "Is the author self-published or published in a traditional publishing house?"

Actually, does it really matter?! No. Why? Because you're going to need to treat all authors the same—with much respect. Be laid back, and in turn, the interviewee will become comfortable and open-up to you.

After all, whether published or not, we're all human. Before the interview, however, use your investigative reporting skills and attempt to discover as much as you can about the author. Surf the Internet for any hidden agendas internet-published writings the writer may have. Not only do you want to know about the author's book, but the personal life as well. Find out what makes the author tick.

### 2. Research their genre and subject matter

Does the author write poetry? Historical nonfiction? Dramatic nonfiction? Children's literature? Discover how easy or difficult it is to publish in that particular area of writing. Before you meet up with the author, you must know their genre, as well as the basic themes. If the author writes only historical nonfiction—what's their subject matter? Pre-civil war? Early African Slave Trade? Cuban artwork? Compare and contrast authors in similar subject matters.

Learn as much as you can while you can. And, at the same time, be sure to formulate an opinion about the subject matter, whether it be pro or con. This will allow you to ask more in depth questions.

### 3. Don't Interrupt

Remember to ask your question then shut up. This isn't a time for you to reminisce of your (waning) writing skills. This is moment for the author to be in the spotlight. Listen to their responses, and make sure that you have a rebuttal question prepared in the back of your head.

After you are away from that particular topic, be sure to go to your next question. Though you may have your list of questions—it's okay to ask the questions out-of-order. Actually, I highly recommend

to adlib the questions. This will make the questions seem a bit more unforced. In short, treat your interview as if it's just a regular discussion amongst friends.

Above all, I highly recommend to record the interview. Before you display your trusty hand-held recorder, ask the interviewee for permission to record them. Keep and label all used tapes with the author's name, date and location of the interview. You never know when that once self-published novelist will become the next Best Seller.

### **About The Author**

Stephen Jordan has five years experience within the educational publishing industry. Stephen was a freelance editor with such educational foundations as Princeton Review, The College Board, New York University, and Columbia University. Away from the office, Stephen promotes his creative writing with his home-freelance business OutStretch Publications and his artwork. Stephen holds two Bachelor of Arts degrees in writing and literature from Alderson-Broaddus College of Philippi, West Virginia

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## 5. Is The Theme Reinforced In The Ending?

by: Nick Vernon

Creative Writing Tips –

By now you should have an idea that your theme has to reach its conclusion just as your story does. But our theme has to do more than reach its conclusion – it has to be reinforced in the end and by doing this, it will strengthen all that we have said in our story.

So if we took a theme...

‘Persist and in the end you will succeed’

And I showed my character working hard to achieve his goals, persisting, even if at times those goals seemed unreachable, then I would’ve showed that all his hard work did pay off in the end. By having him succeed, it would reinforce the theme that had been running throughout the story.

Let me further illustrate this point by giving you a more detailed example.

The theme is...

‘Persistence pays off’

The story is about a writer, who has been writing short stories for years, but has not succeeded in getting published yet.

In your story you will show his persistence with...

- How he makes time to write, even when his day is already full by his full time job and other responsibilities
- How his every thought is consumed by his writing
- Showing him sending story after story to publishers
- How he doesn’t let the fact that his family believe he’s wasting his time, distract him from his purpose

Simultaneously I will place him in win and lose situations - Losing when his stories are rejected - Winning when he receives encouraging notes from publishers.

And in those instances where he is winning, I will show gradually that resistance is starting to pay off, till I reach the end of my story where I will have one of his stories accepted for publication and thus bring my theme of ‘Persistence pays off’ to its conclusion.

By showing the reader how persistence is paying off, I would have reinforced the theme in my ending.

Is your theme reinforced in the end of your story?

### **About The Author**

Besides his passion for writing, Nick Vernon runs an online gift site where you will find gift information, articles and readers’ funny stories.

Visit <http://www.we-recommend.com>



## 6. Is The Theme Running Throughout The Story?

by: Nick Vernon

Creative Writing Tips –

It's no use coming up with a theme and not using it. Short stories are about a character or characters and about one situation or happening in those characters' lives.

By concentrating on that one thing, our stories are focused. You will need to focus to maintain a level of intensity and sticking to the theme enables us to do that.

Let me give you an example...

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### Scenario One

Let's say your story is about a young man (main character) who is being harassed (one situation) by the school bully (secondary character.) Let's place the setting in grade school.

Now if we focus on that single happening and in our story say....

- What started the bullying
- What the main character felt, confronted with this problem
- What the main character did to overcome this problem
- If the main character won or lost against the bully...

Then we'll be focusing only on that incident which is what our story is about.

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### Scenario Two

Now if we took that situation further and in our story said that this character grew up and was bullied in high school and then later by a colleague...

That will be listing three incidences, which will weaken our story because we are not focusing.

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Remember a short story is short.

We don't have too much leeway to develop too many things so we have to be selective with what we choose to concentrate on. Short stories work best when they span over a short period of time.

Like in scenario one, this incident might span over a couple of days or a week, where in the second scenario, it spans over a number of years. The shorter the time span the more intense the story.

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Your theme should begin at the beginning, run through the middle and conclude in the end. So let's put a theme to the first scenario...

'Strength Comes From Within And In The End Prevails.'

How can I have this theme running throughout my story?

Initially I will portray my main character as a weak individual. But I will excuse his weakness, by saying perhaps that...

"He comes from a closely knit, loving family and initially doesn't know how to deal with such a conflict."

As my story progresses, I will gradually show his inner strength and I will do this through incidences, which will show his maturity, like...

- He helps out by caring for his younger siblings and contributes with the housework.

And

- I can show him cutting the neighbours' lawns or delivering newspapers before school to show that he contributes economically too.

If I do this, my ending (when he wins against the bully) will be believable because I have developed his inner strength. My theme would have run its course.

Is your theme running throughout the story?

### **About The Author**

Besides his passion for writing, Nick Vernon runs an online gift site where you will find gift information, articles and readers' funny stories.

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## **7. Learning to Question your Elephant Child: Who, What, Where, When and Why** **by: Stephen Earley Jordan, II**

Having problems writing? I don't know why. San Francisco Chronicle columnist Jon Carroll writes up to five columns a week. After all, if he can write five columns, you should be able to write a five-lined poem-but that does not seem to be the case.

How does he do it? Carroll claimed to recite lines from Rudyard Kipling's "The Elephant Child":

"I have six humble serving men

They taught me all I knew

Their names are what

And where and when

And why and how and who."

I'm more than sure that two incentives for Jon Carroll are 1.) Creating deadlines and 2.) His salary! Yes, we writers DO get paid every now and then!

Basing my philosophies on those few lines of Kipling's "The Elephant Child", my advice is to "Simply Ask Questions". Rummage through some old work (whether it be poetry, nonfiction, or fiction) that you've written and use the following techniques to enhance your skills. And, then, ask yourself the following questions.

**WHAT** is the underlying theme?

Try to come up with a single-word or phrase to describe your story. Perhaps one reason your story has not been effective in the past is that you have too many intertwining stories. This, in turn, can cause confusion for the reader. So, ask yourself, "What is my story about?" And, give yourself answers such as: Desolation, Lost Hope, Self-Confidence, Racism, Attained Dreams, etc. If you can KISS (keep it simple stupid), then your readers won't MISS your point.

As practice, read some of the great contemporary writers and ask yourself the same question-"What is the underlying theme?" Describe the book in one word or one phrase, instead of using a high school book-report technique.

**WHERE** does your story or poem take place? Knowing the setting can allow you to be a bit more descriptive with your work. Does your poem or prose take place in Alaska? Florida? China? Yugoslavia? Hawaii? Kentucky? Each of these places is, perhaps, equal opposites of the next. To know your setting you have two choices-- 1.) Be a good researcher; collect pictures and read as much as you can about the location, or 2.) Take a road trip! Nothing can be grander than to spend your weekend visiting unknown territories.

**WHEN** did the events take place in which you are writing? If you're doing factual reporting-this is especially a MUST-DO. For instance, if you read a news article a reader wants to know when Ms. Johnson's house was burglarized. Did it happen June 20, 2001? June 20, 1984? Did the events take place when it was winter with ten inches of snow? Or, better still, did the events take place at Virginia Beach mid-August?

**WHY** did the events take place? Is there a conflict within your character? A lot of times character's (and real people too) have problems only because their conscious is "eating them away". Is this the case? If so, why does your character feel so guilty that he made such decisions? Perhaps the events that take place are only cause-effect. Most always people cause their own mental downfall and breakdown. Always know why your characters complete every task and why the events take place.

How did the events happen? Too often people will say, "I had a car wreck today..." But, do they leave it at that? No, no, no. You must always tell how the events happened. Were you driving in the incorrect lane, but still feel it's not your fault? Did you skid uncontrollably on a patch of ice? Maybe, you wanted to avoid the slow-moving tortoise that crossed your lane? If other characters are involved, it's important to get their perspective in dialogue. Maybe they feel the events happened differently.

Who did the events happen to? Who your events happen to is one of the main focuses. You have to choose your characters carefully. Why? Well, it would change a story completely if you wrote of a 68-year old cheerleader. Your work would be a different story if the character were an autistic adult. How would the events change if, let's say, the main character was indeed the Elephant Child, child of the deceased Elephant Man? Be creative with your characters and allow their personalities to work well for you when creating your piece.

Sometimes writers can use techniques that allow them to disregard some of these steps. Oh, Really? -You question. Yes. For instance, a writer may know the intentions of a character, a location-but you may not want to put it in print. My suggestion is that you KNOW all the answers to the above questions to make the work have more substance. By knowing all the answers you can create images, people, and scenarios by using symbols and customs of a particular area.

### **About The Author**

Stephen Jordan has five years experience within the educational publishing industry. Stephen was a freelance editor with such educational foundations as Princeton Review, The College Board, New York University, and Columbia University. Away from the office, Stephen promotes his creative writing with his home-freelance business OutStretch Publications and his artwork. Stephen holds two Bachelor of Arts degrees in writing and literature from Alderson-Broadus College of Philippi, West Virginia.

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## 8. Making Freelance Writing Niche Types Fit

by: Roxanne McDonald

### Our Freelance Writing Needs Defined

We must make freelance niche types fit our needs, wants, values and lifestyles, and we also must make ourselves fit freelance niche types. Of our waking hours, we work more than we do anything else. I keep this in mind when college students come to me concerned about what to do for a living, and I tell them (because I want them happy) to do what they love. I also tell them (because I believe in the truth) to do what they are good at.

The same goes for freelance writers. If we are talented, we have a chance. If we have a severe work ethic we have a better chance. And if we are devoted enough and relentless enough (and—ahem--masochistic enough) about writing for a living, we will be able to put on our vitaes that we are indeed professional writers. But in order to do and be so, we best find the freelance writing niche types or type we will be spectacular at, staking out a corner in the niche market, one which we'll bring passion to every morning as that damned alarm (later a wonderful thing) sounds.

### Niche Defined

From the Italian-derived French for *nicchia*, "a shell-like recess in a wall," a niche is an inset, concave enclosure. It is this little enclosure we freelance writers need to find, study, practice, and own. It is the small area of specialty we make ours and offer to those in need. So the smaller (and therefore the less competitive) the better.

We in the freelance writing business and those of us working to get into it have plenty of industries to work with:

- Advertising
- B2B (Business to Business)
- B2C (Business to Customer/Client)
- Entertainment
- Finance
- Medicine
- Non-profit
- Publishing (online/offline)
- Recreation
- Science
- Research/Marketing
- Real Estate
- Technology

### Niche Types Defined

And for every industry there are tens of freelance writing niche types:

- Creative Writing- I'll say again from my lofty loft of opinions that I believe all writing is creative, as it is generative. My point is affirmed when we look at all of the kinds of writing projects a creative freelancer can do or get into, from magazine articles about bushwackers and George Bush to books about needlepoint and pine cone needles and needling family members to...
- Ghost Writing- Ghost writing is a popular preferred choice of many clients, even those who have hung out a writer shingle (or banner) and outsource the assignments, collect them, pay us

(hopefully well), and put their own names on the work, be it a booklet or a book, a piece of web copy or a piece of ad copy.

- **Proposal and Business Plan Writing-** For profit or not, businesses need writers to create proposals that show need and get that need satisfied—monetarily. As there is with all freelance writing niche types, with proposal and plan writing a freelancer has the skill sets and experience to prepare documents that will be convincing enough that if the client needs hot soup sold in hell the writer will be able to deliver. I have written two successful proposals and a number of grant proposal reports (that ensured continuation of the grant). They are somewhat interesting, but only to those writers with a particular finesse for a cross between technical and creative/dynamic writing.
- **PR (Public Relations) Writing-** PR writers do concept copy or concept to completion work in a number of media, writing ad copy, doing the layout, and designing such items as brochures, newsletters, press releases, media kits, and more, to achieve the ultimate goal for the client: name branding.
- **Technical Writing-** Involving everything technical, from professional, consumer, and user manuals to white papers, technical writing depends upon a writer's ability to organize, synchronize, structure, and develop the details of technical content.
- **Web Content Writing-** To meet the client's goals of web presence and online branding using highly trafficked, "sticky" websites/pages, the web content developer or producer writes what are known as KRPs—keyword-rich pages. This particular wave of freelance niche types was discovered (years ago) to be most beneficial as SEO, search-engine optimizing/optimized/optimization, text (or content).

While I also specialize in mental health/disability writing and creative and memoir writing, web content development is one of my favorite freelance niche types. To get the keywordphrase keywordphrase construction clear, engaging, and entertaining while keeping it from doing a hideous grammatical/ rhetorical pileup is a challenge I look forward to every morning.

Hey, it beats the alarm clock jangling, signaling the dread of having to punch a card at a factory or see the boss off to work so I can clean her toilets and scrub her floors. Of course, there's no shame in those jobs.... I did them for years to get through grad school. But that's more to do with the other definition of niche: "the status of an organism within its environment/community, affecting its survival as a species."

And besides, I love writing so much, much more. It's a much better fit, one I wish for all of you who adore the writing process as much as I adore it.\*

### **About The Author**

N.H.-born prize-winning poet, creative nonfiction writer, memoirist, and award-winning Assoc. Prof. of English, Roxanne is also web content and freelance writer/founder of [www.roxannewrites.com](http://www.roxannewrites.com), a support site for academic, memoir, mental disability, and creative writers who need a nudge, a nod, or just ideas...of which Roxanne has 1,000s, so do stop in for a visit, as this sentence can't possibly get any longer....

## 9. Mission Possible: Get Published with Goals, Guidance and Persistence

by: Stephen Earley Jordan, II

You send me an e-mail. You tell me you've written over three hundred poems since you were 16 (in your teenage angst stage). You mention the novel you've completed and it's really good (it really is!!!), and the novel-in-progress. You mention how the International Library of Poetry has published one of your poems. (But, whom haven't they published?)

However, all your work is stored away, hidden from the public eye on a black little disk.

You have one mission: Getting published.

"How do I get published?" you finally question at the end of the e-mail.

At times, I ask myself the same question.

Is this mission impossible? To many, it seems that way. If you stick with me, I'll make the publishing process slightly simpler.

On this mission, you'll need three things: Goals, Guidance, and Persistence.

An unmentioned New York City college (as well as other schools, I'm sure) offered a course on "How to Get Published". Various bigwigs from major publishing houses in New York City were guest speakers on many occasions.

A writer-friend of mine felt it would be a great opportunity to network and finally understand how to get her works published in magazines, and various books. I was hesitant, and suspicious of the course's objectives, so I didn't follow the friend's lead. I was far from disappointed about my decision. You'll soon discover why.

Getting published isn't as hard as you think. But, when you're a beginning writer getting published seems as difficult as James Bond jet-skiing along the River Thames with five barges heading his way.

As a beginning writer, I feel, the main priority should be getting your name out there in the public's eye. Understand that, at times, you'll have to accept the free issues instead of cash payment. Before you consider publishing though, you should reassure yourself a rejection slip won't lower your self-esteem and cause you to never pick up a pen, or stroke another key at your keyboard. Hey, trust me, rejections happen to everyone! Here are a few suggestions to better your chances of getting published:

1. Write, Write, Write. This is the obvious one. You need to write all the time. Too many writers say, "I have a novel about . . ." And the novel sounds spectacular. But, when I ask if I can read it, offer suggestions, the writers finally admit, "Oh . . . I haven't started on it . . . But the title of it is . . ." I despise working with an enthusiastic, talented writer who simply won't write. Don't waste your breath! Whatever you do—write your work first, and then speak about it so you won't look/feel like a fool.
2. Edit, Edit, Edit. If you feel your work is perfect (or as good as you can make it), keep in mind—nothing is perfect! That's what editors are for! If you are a college student, ask a professor to read it at his/her leisure. If you're already in the workforce, ask a well-read co-worker to edit it. Or, since you've some extra cash to spare, hire an editor. Many places, like OutStretch Publications, for instance, offer extremely reasonable prices for editing/proofing services.
3. Share Works with Others. This is when a workshop comes in handy. Students—take a creative writing course. Or, if you're not in school, give copies to about 5 or 6 acquaintances in advance. Then, schedule a "reading" at your place. Allow the guests to give suggestions and talk about your work as if you're not there. Remember, all criticism is helpful criticism. Remember to ask questions about the shaky portions of your work.

4. Websites: Build a website and add your writing to it. Or, even easier, find some of the online places like poetryboard.com, or some of the AOL bulletin boards where writers you don't know can critique your work, and people like me (who have a publication) may find your work and ask for your approval for publication. (This is a very rare occasion, but it does happen.)
5. Here's the TRICK: Mass Mailings! If you happen to see 2, 3, 4, or even 5 publications that don't mind simultaneous submissions and accepts work similar to what you've written, send your work to all of them. Sure, sending out a mass mailing of submissions will guarantee more rejections, but you also better your chances of getting published. Remember, include SASE with each submission or 9 times out of 10 you'll never hear from the publisher/editor. (Some publishers like you to include your e-mail address nowadays for quicker responses.)
6. Keeping Track. Keep track of all of your submissions. Be organized. A simple database program is perfect. In the database, list 1) the date you submitted work, 2) the publication and its address, 3) the works you submitted, and 4) the date you receive an acceptance/rejection slip.

If, for some reason you DO get a rejection slip. So what? Just think of it like this: Perhaps the publication wasn't right for your writing. Better still, everyone has his or her own opinion, so the editor simply didn't favor your particular style. Someone else out there probably appreciates your style of writing. Perhaps your submission was received past their deadline. Big deal. Send it somewhere else! Remember, though, writing can always be improved.

Now that you've read this, let me tell you something. This is everything my writer-friend learned from the writing course. Seems simple, eh? And, what's even better, unlike my friend, you didn't have to pay a course fee!

This mission doesn't seem so impossible now, does it?

Grab the goals of getting published, the guidance I just gave, the persistence with mass mailings and get yourself published.

Good luck with your publishing endeavors!

### **About The Author**

Stephen Jordan, a medical editor, has five years experience within the educational publishing industry. Stephen was a freelance editor with such educational foundations as Princeton Review, The College Board, New York University, and Columbia University. Away from the office, Stephen promotes his creative writing with his home-freelance business OutStretch Publications and his artwork. Stephen holds two Bachelor of Arts degrees in writing and literature from Alderson-Broaddus College of Philippi, West Virginia.



## 10. Realize Your Book's Potential: Join (or Form) a Writer's Group

by: Seth Mullins

It's a long road we writers travel between our initial ideas and a fully realized novel or even a short story. Few of us possess the genius to fully flesh out every aspect – from character development and plot weaving down to the gritty details of setting and action – which is one reason why the critics can point out flaws even in books that are considered to be classics.

Every writer has his or her own areas of expertise. Consider the benefits, then, of joining forces with others who are apt to have different strengths and weaknesses than you. This is what I find appealing – and, sometimes, even essential – about writer's groups.

The first benefit of being involved in a critique group is the simple encouragement. If you and your fellow members agree to meet, say, one evening a week – and each bring in NEW material to read – then that keeps each of you motivated to write. Completing a novel can feel like such a nebulous goal. The end could be years down the road, provided we aren't de-railed at any point between now and then. It's a much more feasible ambition to churn out another ten pages to read next Tuesday at your group meeting.

The input of fellow writers can be invaluable in pointing out strengths, weaknesses, and inconsistencies in our work. If you're a novelist, then you're probably aware of the degree of concentration that's necessary to hold a dozen characters and as many plot layers in your mind at all times – and how easy it is to overlook smaller details in the midst of that.

Thanks to the feedback I received in my own group, I was able to identify the “shin busters” in my first novel – like when I had a single character dragging a moose across the plains, or my heroine's eyes appearing as differently colored between chapters three and eleven. It's best to find these problems early on before we submit our books to those less forgiving editors and agents.

For shorter works, like stories, articles and essays, the feedback we get from our group lets us know how effectively we're communicating our basic ideas. If we can “sell” our argument to everyone in our group, we'll be that much more likely to sell the piece to a magazine or e-zine editor.

A couple of tips for running your group smoothly: (1) Stick to a time limit for each member's reading and response time. When one person dominates the discussion for too long it can provoke the others' resentment. (2) Discuss only what members have WRITTEN, not what they PLAN to write. This is a critique, not a collaborative writing session. We can talk about the merits of this idea or that indefinitely, but if nothing is put down on paper then it's really just a fancy form of procrastination. We're here to help each other with revision, not brainstorming, and to motivate everyone to stay productive.

If you're still not convinced about the merits of this approach to polishing your craft, then consider these two works, now both blockbuster films, which sprouted out of a single writer's group: “The Lord of the Rings” and “The Chronicles of Narnia”.

“The Inklings”, in England, once boasted both J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis amongst its members. Lewis' space fantasy, which began with “Out of the Silent Planet”, was the result of a gentleman's bargain he made with Tolkien. And Tolkien acknowledged more than once in his correspondences that he would probably never have finished his own masterpiece if not for Lewis' encouragement.

Consider that for a moment. “The Lord of the Rings” wouldn’t exist if J.R.R. Tolkien hadn’t belonged to a writer’s group.

Seth Mullins is the author of “Song of an Untamed Land”, a novel of fantasy in lawless frontier territory. Visit Seth at <http://authorsden.com/sethtmullins>.

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Seth Mullins is the author of "Song of an Untamed Land", a novel of speculative fantasy in lawless frontier territory. His nonfiction includes dissertations on the craft of writing, as well as the inner meanings of mythic and fantasy stories.

## 11. **Savage Nature: The Life of Ted Hughes**

by: **Paula Bardell**

One of the most important poets of the post-war period, Edward James Hughes (1930-1998), was drawn towards the primitive. He was enchanted by the beauty of the natural world, frequently portraying its cruel and savage temperament in his work as a reflection of his own personal suffering and mystical beliefs - convinced that modern man had lost touch with the primordial side of his nature.

Born in Mytholmroyd, a remote mill town in West Yorkshire, Ted (as he was known to his friends and family) was enormously affected by the desolate moorland landscape of his childhood, and also by his father's vivid recollections of the brutality of trench warfare. Indeed, his father, who was then a carpenter, was one of only seventeen men from his regiment to have survived at Gallipoli during the First World War.

At the age of seven his family moved to Mexborough (also in Yorkshire), where his parents opened a stationery and tobacco shop. Here he attended the local grammar school, where he first began to write poetry - usually bloodcurdling verses about Zulus and cowboys - before doing two years' national service in the Royal Air Force. He later won a scholarship to Pembroke College, Cambridge, where he started reading English Literature but switched to archaeology and anthropology, subjects that were a major influence on the development of his poetic awareness. Here he immersed himself in the works of Shakespeare, W.B. Yeats and read Robert Graves's "The White Goddess" (1948).

Following his graduation in 1954, he moved to London, where he had a number of interesting jobs, including zoo keeping, gardening and script reading for J. Arthur Rank. He also had several of his poems published in university magazines. In 1956 he and some Cambridge friends started up a literary journal called *St. Botolph's Review*. It lasted for only one issue but at the inaugural party Ted met his future wife, the then unknown American poet, Sylvia Plath.

Much has been written about the Hughes/Plath relationship since that first portentous meeting, but few can doubt that these two brilliantly creative people were enormously attracted to one another, almost from the moment they were first introduced. Within just a few short months they were married and living in the USA, where Hughes taught English and creative writing at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. And before the year was out, he had won an American poetry competition, judged by W.H. Auden, Sir Stephen Spender and Marianne Moore. Hughes once said of this contented period:

"We would write poetry every day. It was all we were interested in, all we ever did." – Ted Hughes

Plath assisted him with the preparation of his first collection, *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957), a work that was quite extraordinary in its treatment of natural subjects. He continued to live in America for the next few years, being partly supported by a Guggenheim Foundation grant, before returning to England in 1959. He then went on to win the Somerset Maugham award and the Hawthornden prize for his second book, "Lupercal" (1960); confirming his reputation as one of the most important poets of the post-war period.

The next few years of Ted's life have since become the subject of much biographical speculation. However, the simple facts are that he and Plath had two children and moved to Devon in 1961. Their marriage began to disintegrate shortly thereafter and Hughes started an affair with Assia Wevill. He split from Plath and she committed suicide in her London flat in 1963. In 1969 Wevill also killed herself and their child. He married Carol Orchard in 1970 and spent the rest of his life trying to protect his and Plath's children from the media. Hughes published only children's poetry and prose in the years following the death of his first wife.

His next major work was "Wodwo" (1967), which took its title from a character in the medieval

romance “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight”, and highlighted his increasing interest in mythology. He travelled to Iran in 1971, where he wrote the verse/drama “Orghast” in an invented language. Some of his other collections include “Crow” (1970), “Cave Birds” (1975), “Season Songs” (1976), “Gaudete” (a long poem on fertility rites, 1977), “Moortown” (1979), “Remains of Elmet” (1979) and “River” (1983).

Hughes was also one of the originators of the Arvon Foundation and was awarded an OBE in 1977. In 1984 he was appointed Poet Laureate and went on to publish “Rain-Charm for the Duchy and other Laureate Poems” (1992). Then in 1995 he composed a poem about Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, for her 95th birthday, likening her to a six-rooted tree. He also wrote many reviews and essays, some of which were collected in “Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being” (1992), “A Dancer to God: Tribute to T.S. Eliot” (1992) and “Winter Pollen: Occasional Prose” (1994). In addition to all this he also wrote many wonderful plays and books for children, including his remarkable fantasy “The Iron Man”. And when, just months before his death, Hughes released “Birthday Letters”, a collection of poems about his life with Sylvia Plath, it became an immediate bestseller throughout the English speaking world and was widely praised for its searing honesty.

Ted Hughes died of cancer on 28th October 1998, having just been appointed to the Order of Merit. Andrew Motion followed him as Britain's Poet Laureate.

### **About The Author**

Paula is a freelance writer who has contributed articles, reviews and essays to numerous publications on subjects such as literature, travel, culture, history and humanitarian issues. She lives in North Wales, is a staff writer for Apsaras Review and the editor of two popular online guides. You can read her résumé at: <http://www.paula-bardell.com>.

## 12. Ten Tips For Budding Authors

by: Kevin Hart

1. For me the most important tip is to write, write every day, 365 days a year. Remember practice makes perfect.
2. Very few authors are published on their first attempt; it's a hard slog and you'll often want to pack the whole writing business in. It's then you've got to remember patience and perseverance.
3. If you are serious about writing as a career then treat it as such. If you wanted to be a doctor, lawyer, plumber, chef then you'd expect to have to learn the trade. Why should writing be any different? It will pay you to visit workshops and listen to what successful authors have to say. Learn from the masters.
4. I'm a member of a writers group and for me it is essential it helps feed me. Also visit sites like [www.abcwritersnetwork.co.uk](http://www.abcwritersnetwork.co.uk) where you will learn about current creative writing contests. Use these contests to help hone your skills. If you are involved in promoting creative writing locally let them know they will advertise the event for you free of charge.
5. In my early days of writing one of my main faults was my failure to accept criticism. This was one of the problems my writers group helped me overcome.
6. Be cautious of loved ones who tell you that your writing is 'marvelous,' quite often they don't want to offend. I've found it best to avoid showing my work to close family until I've had it tested elsewhere.
7. Don't become a writer because you think it is an easy option. It is not. It is hard work. To become successful you have to work 365 days a year. There are very few other jobs that demand that sort of commitment. Maybe after you've hit the big time you can drop that down to six months in the year – maybe.
- 8 Carry a note book. If you get a sudden idea write it down. Ideas are like dreams they are very soon forgotten, but ideas are also like oak trees they can grow mighty big.
9. Believe in yourself, if you have what it takes to be successful then you will succeed. If you haven't then you'll soon know.
10. Finally Maeve Binchy gives this advice 'write as you talk.' Also write about what you know. I know that's old hat but its true nevertheless.

Good luck

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### About The Author

Kevin Hart is a published author and chair of Armagh Creative Writers. He created and maintains the highly successful web site <http://www.abcwritersnetwork.co.uk>