



Hi Writers,

If you could just press a button and have your mind start creating a story, wouldn't your life as a writer be . . . simple and easy? *No*. It would be *Boring*. So the good news is that there is no such button, that writing remains—as always—mysterious, a real adventure into the unknown, and that no one—NO ONE—really knows how it works. Not even the most famous or richest writer in the world can tell you where ideas come from, or how pictures flow from our brains, out through our fingers, into squiggles on paper (we call them words), that make scenes, people, animals, adventures, sorrow and joy come alive in a reader's mind. Though any writer, even I, can tell you how to prepare yourself to have ideas for writing.

The first thing is simple: Read! The more you read, the more your mind learns to picture things in your own way. Television makes us all see the same things. Reading allows each of us to find our own ways of seeing. And to write a story you have to see it for yourself. Only then can you choose words that have the power to bring pictures alive in the minds of your readers.

Second, pay attention to your own wishes and dreams. That will give you things to write about that are your own, and that will also interest you enough to keep you going when the road gets rough. By "rough" I mean when you feel stuck, when you're not sure how the story should proceed, what your hero (or heroine!) should do, which road to take when they stand at a crossroads in the dark forest and night is falling and the road ahead is unclear. Then it's time to turn to your wishes. Even when you begin to write a story, what you wish for will underlie all your choices. Place, character, dilemma, themes and action will all express your wishes. Now you have a chance to make your wishes come true. So what do you *wish* would happen? What do you want to have happen? Do you wish you could travel back in time? Or forward? Fly into space, or travel under the sea? Live with dinosaurs, or ride a woolly mammoth? Have superpowers? Create peace and justice on earth, extend good will to your fellow creatures, save the environment, or put an end to hunger and war? Or might you wish to be able to fly? Or travel in a UFO? Or talk with animals? Or get . . . Well, *you* fill in the blanks. Having something that's your own helps you have the strength to start and the determination and courage to continue. No one else can write your story, the one you wish to one day read, no one else in the world. So, it's up to you.

So we could say that writing is a way to make wishes come true. Not in real life, but in our imaginations. The good news is that if it happens there, it *feels* like it really happened. What we imagine is as real as what we remember. And like our memories, it can change us for real. Athletes know this. They learn to improve their real-time skills on

the court, in the pool, or on the field by visualizing—which means imagining. Stories are tools for the imagination and while they may not make us better athletes, they can make us smarter, kinder, braver, and wiser.

Third, pay attention to the world around you. When you're in the supermarket, watch the people you see. Are they sad, angry, or happy? When you're outside watch how birds fly and cats prowl. Watch how trees bend in the wind. This kind of attention will give you the details you need to make your story feel real, like it's actually happening in a physical, not a made-up mental world.

Fourth, find what helps put you in touch with your own ability to see things with your own mind. Is it riding your bike, hiking, canoeing, watching movies, ice-skating, playing ball, listening to music, dancing, drawing, painting, walking the dog, talking to a friend? Whatever it is, do it. You also might want to carry a little notebook along to write down any good ideas that come to you, or any pictures you see in your mind. That way you'll have them on tap when you go back to your writing. For me, reading, watching movies, and riding my motorcycle along winding country roads head my list of things that help me imagine.

If you do these four things: read, pay attention to your wishes and dreams, pay attention to the world around you, and nourish your imagination, and if you like words and stories, you'll never run out of ideas for stories of your own.

For me, that's where writing begins—with imagining. Every book begins as a dream in the mind of someone just like you or me. Writers *see* with their minds before they even begin to write. Then we can choose words that have the power to bring pictures alive in the minds of our readers.

How, then, do you move from your initial idea, your first glimpse, or first imagining of your story, to the actual writing? You have two choices. You can make an outline, a kind of map showing you where you plan to go and what route you plan to take, including notes on what's likely to happen along the way. Once you figure out what will happen, you start to write, filling in details as you follow your map to your destination. Wonderful surprises will happen along the way, but you'll know your basic route from the start, which can be very helpful, and will help keep you focused, on target, and relatively free of worry. A map can help.

OR you can launch yourself into the mist, right out into the unknown, not knowing what you'll find or where you'll end up, but trusting that you're going to have one heck of an adventure along the way, in which courage, humor, perseverance will win the day—for you, the writer, and for your characters.

Either way you'll discover that writing is a great adventure, maybe the greatest. For in a story you can make ANY wish come true, make anything happen, see anything with your mind. It's like you're in charge of the rules of the world. If you can see it, and find the words to bring it alive in the minds of your readers (writing is like painting directly on your readers minds) it's really like you can make anything happen.

In fact, this is why I write—to have adventures I will probably never have in real life, to journey into the unknown of my own imagination, and to make wishes come true. I hope you will, too.

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