



The WRITE WAY

Bookshelves groan under a deluge of 'How to write' manuals but as the following Kent-based authors show there really isn't a right, or a wrong, way

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Top tips

- 1 If you want to write your own memoir, start writing things down. We always think 'oh, I'll remember that' and we never do!
- 2 Think about what you would want to know about someone else and apply it to yourself
- 3 Read other memoirs and try to remember what you liked, it will help you write the book you want to write

Author: Marnie Summerfield Smith
Genre: Memoir writer
Location: Whitstable
Twitter: @marniememoirs

Marnie is fascinated by people, which is useful as she makes a living from writing memoirs. She's even had to place an antique screen across the window of her study to stop her watching passers-by, or prevent them seeing her work in her pink fluffy dressing gown, but even the screen's covered in pictures of people she loves.

Marnie spends several months working with each individual. "It's somebody's story so I am totally subjective to their opinion. I lose myself in them, their voice, the way they think about things, their little catchphrases, their psychology," she says.

The length of the actual writing process depends upon the individual but Marnie meets them regularly to discover their story, drawing out memories triggered by sight, touch and smell and then writes it up in instalments for approval.

For Marnie, however, one of the best bits comes at the end, when she sees their reaction to their own printed book, ready to give to friends and family.

There are many memoirs Marnie would like to write, including those of her own mum and Judge Judy, but one she's proud to have written is that of Lance Corporal Martin Crompton.

Martin was engaged to a girl from Kent when he was ambushed by the Taliban. Fortunately his tale has a happy ending and Marnie shares his experiences in *Home from War*.



Author: Bill Lewis
Genre: Poetry
Location: Medway
Twitter: @BillLewis_Poet

According to Bill a good poem is like a kebab. "Imagine you have a whole lot of brilliant images and then a thin skewer that goes down the middle to hold all the images together. The skewer is your rational logical piece and the images are your emotional, empathetic bit."

Bill loves metaphors and could talk in them all day; he also loves conversation and wrote his first two poetry collections while sitting in Medway's cafés – which seems rather apt for a founder member of the Medway Poets.

His current favourite is La Toretta's and it is here, sitting beneath two of his paintings that he now makes notes.

"Every day I try to write one line at least and then I just store them up. Sometimes the lines then like each other and say I want to be with this line and they kind of get married and have children. My poems are pretty organic."

The actual writing is done in his study, fuelled by coffee and set to classical music. Having performed all over the world, Bill's influences vary widely, a fact he also puts down to a pact he made with God when he was 13.

Waking up from a dream in which he was dying, Bill vowed that he couldn't die



Author: Elizabeth Haynes
Genre: Psychological thrillers
Location: Maidstone
Twitter: @Elizjhaynes

Elizabeth Haynes writes fast, very fast. It's a skill she's developed through November's annual National Writing Month challenge, (NaNo), where the aim is to write 50,000 words in just one month.

For Elizabeth it signals the start of a new book and the initial 90,000-word draft of *Revenge of the Tide* took her just 50 days.

She admits this leads to extensive revision but explains: "I always start with the germ of an idea and then see what happens. The more I think about it, the more I try to plot it out, the more bored I become and the harder it is to write."

It's clearly a process that works and Elizabeth's first three novels, including *Into the Darkest Corner*, which won her Amazon's 'UK Best Book of 2011 Award', have all been written this way.

The germ that started *Revenge of the Tide*, which is set near Rochester, came from driving alongside the river Medway and imagining a girl living on a houseboat who one night discovers a body. "Then what if she recognised the body, but couldn't say who it was?" muses Elizabeth.

The way people behave has always fascinated Elizabeth and for the past five years she's worked as an Intelligence Analyst for Kent Police, discovering patterns of behaviour and making hypotheses as to the reasoning behind them.

It's experience that has helped her answer the big 'what if' questions and her own next big 'what if' is whether she will like being a full-time writer.

So far, she says, "it's the best job in the world."

Top tips:

- 1 Read extensively, not just modern poetry but the old and great poets as well. Go back to the Anglo Saxons and the medieval French and read from as many sources as possible
- 2 Make notes, listen to conversations and look out for unusual language
- 3 Be as pretentious as you possibly can and then try to live up to it!

until he had finished reading his book. Then, when he came to the last chapter he went into town and bought a new book, thereby starting a chain-reading session that continues to this day.

As to how long the process takes, Bill says it's difficult to say: "I've got a four-line poem that took me five years to write because I couldn't get the last line, and then some things just happen over a period of two to three days.

"I always revise. If you care about your work it has to be as close to perfect as you can make it."

This dedication is evident in *The House of Ladders* which, Bill says, is his "best collection so far."

Top tips

- 1 If you want to get a novel published then you have to actually write it and get it finished
- 2 Share your work as much as you can because getting feedback, and acting on it, makes you a better writer
- 3 Send work out, often, and to everyone. You only need to find that one perfect person who loves your work

Author: Truda Thurai
Genre: World fiction
Location: Ashford
Twitter: @T_Thurai

For Truda a good writing session is fuelled by silence, sleep and smell. It's a routine she developed while writing *The Devil Dancers*, when every day she would finish her writing session by drafting out the next part. Then, while lying in bed, she would go over it and when she woke up in the morning would say to her husband "just don't speak to me because it's all ready to come out."

She adds: "I would then have breakfast, take a few deep breaths in the garden and go straight to my computer and start."

This process allows Truda to fully engross herself in her novel and she believes that in order to write fiction "you've to get into the part." For *The Devil Dancers* this required full immersion into the world of 1950's Ceylon, a time of political upheaval, and she freely admits to pumping her Sri Lankan husband and mother-in-law for information.

Books, photos, maps and smells played a huge part too and she used spices and a musky perfume that her husband's aunts

Top tips

- 1 When writing, learn to visualise and engage all your senses. Use photographs, food even perfume
- 2 Draft the next day's content and sleep on it. You can train your brain to sort out problems overnight
- 3 Don't edit until you've finished the entire book. Only then go back, re-read the whole thing and make major changes

had worn to transport her to that era.

The story itself started out as pure fiction, albeit one prompted by a family scandal, but Truda says that "when my husband said his father thought a lot of the trouble had been caused by the Buddhist monks, it bowled me over.

"It was then important that I set my fiction in a proper historical context because if I hadn't it would have been a book about an exotic country written by a white woman and that wasn't what I wanted. I wanted it to be really authentic and have the smells and the colours and the feel of the people so you could step into it and say: I understand this place."

Favourable reviews compare her novel with E. M Forster's *Passage to India*, which shows how well she's succeeded.



Author: Mark Oldfield
Genre: Thriller
Location: Tunbridge Wells
Twitter: @CentinelaUK

Discovering your house has been burgled, your laptop stolen and your insurance has lapsed is not usually conducive to writing a novel, but for Mark Oldfield it conjured up the perfect mood to create 'a really bad guy.'

Mark wrote the first two chapters at his kitchen table without planning, the voice

of his male character coming easily, but as he progressed the experience of studying for his criminology PhD and his former role as Head of Research for Kent Probation Service came into play.

Folders full of finely detailed chapter points and mind maps led him from one event to another and helped keep clues and dual timelines intact.

Mark describes the process as being like "jazz improvisation – you've got the chords of a song but then you can improvise over the top."

Top tips

- 1 **Plan:** if someone is going to discover something, how do they know about it, why do they want it and what's going to happen to them on the way to getting it?
- 2 **Plot:** The more difficult you make life for your characters, the more interesting it is
- 3 **Characters:** make them plausible, what would a person with those skills really do in that situation?

Another folder bursting with images helped to create his deeply evocative prose and he explains how slow Scandinavian jazz helped to conjure up his corrupt policeman, while Shakira's seductive *Hips don't lie* fuelled his female protagonist's feisty attitude.

The story's foundations lie in the many trips Mark has made to Spain since 1976. A fluent Spanish speaker, he has made many friends and the reminiscences of two in particular with experiences of the Spanish Civil War struck a particular chord. Signing with the first agent he approached, *Sentinel* has expanded from a stand-alone to a trilogy and will be published on 1 November 2012.

Author: John Butler
Genre: Biography
Location: Canterbury

John Butler doesn't describe himself as an author, a writer or even a biographer but as a 'teller of stories.' It's a role he fits well and his book, *The Red Dean of Canterbury: The Public and Private Faces of Hewlett Johnson*, was chosen by Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, as his 'Book of 2011' for *New Statesman* magazine. It's a book John didn't intend to write.

Having retired from his post as Professor of Health Studies at the University of Kent, John initially read the public archive of Hewlett Johnson, a former Dean of Canterbury, as an alternative to being on the golf course.

However, discovering previously unseen correspondence from both of Hewlett's wives and eminent figures such as Stalin, Churchill and Khrushchev proved irresistible, and John spent two years reading through 12,000 personal papers in a process he describes as akin to 'panning for gold.'

Fascinated by the family man whose commitment to communism made him one of the most controversial religious figures of the 20th century, John started to write a series of essays which subsequently turned into talks.

Following repeated requests for the accompanying book, he began writing Hewlett's revised biography.

John realised his essays totalled 120,000 words, the maximum any publisher would want, but likening it to a portrait, he had "painted the nose and ears and forehead in great detail but nothing else was there."

So, taking the 20 main periods of Hewlett's life as headings, John began the painstaking task of re-writing it in 6,000-word chapters.

While he still finds Hewlett an enigma, in an echo of the 'Red Dean's' belief that faith should be used for social good, John has donated all royalties from this book to the Canterbury Cathedral Appeal. He thinks Hewlett would approve.

Top tips

- 1 Before you end one writing session, always write the first sentence of the next
- 2 If you are drawing material from another source, always take the time to fully record the reference. Accuracy is essential
- 3 Always read your work aloud, if the rhythms of the prose sound right when spoken they will feel right when read

