

Part I. What Should I Write About?

Ideas can come from almost everywhere, but everyone needs a nudge now and then. Our focus for now is on getting creative. Don't be afraid that you're "doing it wrong." I promise: you aren't. Never be afraid to make mistakes.

"Nothing will stop you from being creative so effectively as the fear of making a mistake."

– John Cleese

God, the ultimate Creator, planted creativity in you and wants to see it, and you, grow. You never know how he'll use your creativity, so don't hide it away or misuse it. Even in writing about something sad (or scary, or...), we can and should be lights in the world.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

- ☞ Pray for inspiration and then be attentive for an answer.
- ☞ Go outside. In good weather, maybe go for a walk or a run. Ride your bike or go to the park. If the weather's no good, bundle up and go outside anyway. Even a short stroll outside can be enough to inspire new ideas.¹
- ☞ Really LOOK at the world around you. We're constantly surrounded by nature's lovely (or weird) details, such as fallen trees, tiny waterfalls, or surprisingly pretty (or unsurprisingly scary) bugs. Try to see things you see all the time in a new way, and you might find inspiration for a new story.
- ☞ Create something. Anything. Spend some time creating something in with a medium other than words: make up a song, draw or paint a picture, sculpt or carve something. One creative activity often leads to another.
- ☞ Listen to sounds you've never noticed before. Really make an effort to notice the sounds around you, and don't take them for granted.
- ☞ Combine two stories you know into one and come up with a new ending for your creation. Re-tell the old stories to fit the new ending.
- ☞ Tell the same story from two (or more!) different, alternating points of view.
- ☞ You and a friend start stories at the same time. Then, switch and complete each other's stories.

Other Potential Inspirations

Consider these areas of your life (or someone else's). Expanding on them may help you develop a story.

- ☞ Family. Think of a favorite story (the time Uncle Dave got chased by a bear) or tradition from your family.²
- ☞ An artifact (examples: an arrowhead, ring, ticket stub). *Where did it come from? Where has it been? How did you get it?*
- ☞ Special place: special room, attic nook, inside of a tree, scary closet.
- ☞ Brother, sister, or special relative. Remember: think small. Focus on one aspect of that person, or one experience you had with him or her.

- ☞ Your place in the family. Are the oldest? The youngest? A middle child? An only child? Adopted? What sort of experiences or feelings has this position led to?
- ☞ A best friend. Think about an old best friend—did you ever get in trouble, or have an adventure together?
- ☞ Moving. Did you leave behind a best friend when you moved from your old house?
- ☞ Disaster. A disastrous time you had at camp or on a family vacation.
- ☞ Embarrassment. Perhaps a horrible haircut (or another mortifying experience).
- ☞ An injury. Did you ever have to go to the hospital?
- ☞ An important first. Perhaps your first day at coop, the first time you rode a horse, etc.
- ☞ Pets. Talk about a favorite pet, or a pet you once had.
- ☞ When your family changed. For example, what was different when your brother went off to college? Or when grandma came to live with you?
- ☞ What you are (or used to be) afraid of.
- ☞ The worst (or best) day ever.

Prewriting Strategies

Here are a few more strategies for fostering your creativity:

- ☞ Create a writer's notebook or journal. The notebook gives you an easy, informal, no-pressure way to start thinking about a topic. They're great for recording new ideas before you forget them.
- ☞ Talk Over Your Idea. Get together with a friend or sibling to kick around an idea you're thinking about. There's a little danger here—if you talk too much you can talk the mystery out of an idea. A little talk goes a long way.
- ☞ List Ideas. Lists are a great way to gather material. The idea is to generate ideas. Don't worry if some ideas are better than others. And don't worry too much about getting the ideas in the right order.
- ☞ Make A Web (or Map). You may have done this before. Put the main idea in the center and make a "spoke" for each connected idea.
- ☞ Make A Simple Timeline. This idea can be very helpful for writing stories. Jot down when each important event happened. Now, where do you want to start the writing? At the beginning of the timeline? In the middle? At the end?
- ☞ Three by Three by Three. Give yourself three minutes to write three ideas on three different topics. This process is great for generating ideas.
- ☞ Free Write. Give yourself five to seven minutes to jot down ideas, words, fragments related to a topic. Your pen should never leave the page. Don't think—write! Let your pen (or keyboard) go wild. Whatever you do, DON'T EDIT! Later, go back and circle any parts you want to use.

Important Note: Don't use each one of these ideas each time you write! Some will work better for you than others. For now, try them out and see which ones work best for you.

Part II: Tips on Creativity

Creative Mode vs. Critical Mode

When we write, we are generally in one of two different states of mind—either **Creative Mode** or **Critical Mode**. The table below shows some differences between them.

Creative Mode	Critical Mode
Accepting	Skeptical
No rules!	Some order is necessary
Possibilities first, purpose second	Purpose first, possibilities second
Playful and experimental	Careful and deliberate
All the time in the world	Time is short
“It’s all good”	“Must be good enough.”

You can probably think of more examples. Both modes are useful in their own ways. In Creative Mode, we generate ideas and are most open to new possibilities. It is the best mode to be in when writing or brainstorming. In Critical Mode, we are harder to please. That doesn’t mean Critical Mode is bad. In this mode, we are better able to spot what needs improvement or reject whatever isn’t working. Being in Critical Mode helps with revising, editing, and proofreading a piece of writing.

Remember this: it is nearly impossible to be in both modes at the same time. They interfere with each other.

Being creative is very difficult in Critical Mode because you will find the problem with every idea that comes along. Writer’s block happens to everyone, but you will make it far, far worse if you let your critical self take over when it’s not appropriate. On the other hand, revising a piece of writing in Creative Mode is often a bad idea because you keep adding new ideas, regardless of whether they’re really necessary or work with the established storyline. Then the story becomes a sprawling mess. You NEED the Critical Mode to prune away everything that doesn’t fit.

Getting Into Creative Mode

Very young children often live in Creative Mode. You’ve seen it: they accept ideas easily and love using their imaginations. One book even described how 98% of toddlers in one study scored at “genius” levels for creative thinking. Only 18% of 13–15-year-olds scored that highly. Why? The older kids’ critical minds were developing, no doubt—just ask anyone with a critical older brother or sister! But seriously, we learn that not every idea we have is a good one. It’s natural, and thank goodness it is! Some of our ideas lead us into trouble, can be dangerous, or are just plain terrible.

So our challenge is to be more like little children when we want to create—not wild or ridiculous, but able to turn off our Critical Mode enough to enter Creative Mode. Here are some tips for getting there:

Tip #1: Choose Your Place.

Pick a special place where you will do your writing—a place where you will not be disturbed by other people or distractions. Any room will do as long as you can concentrate fully. Ideally, you should not have a TV, cellphone, or any



device with an Internet connection in your space, because they can be too distracting.

If you don't have much chance for solitude where you live, you can perhaps find it outside or in a public place such as a library, park, or restaurant. Anywhere you won't be disturbed by people who know you will work.

Whatever place you choose, consistently using it as your writing place will help you develop the habit of being more focused and creative there.

Tip #2: Set Aside Time to Write

Decide on a set period of time in which you will write undisturbed. Ideally, try for at least 60 minutes because it can take some time to get yourself into Creative Mode.

Some writers get up before the rest of the family and make that their writing time. Some choose a time after everyone is in bed. Others designate one day a week as their writing time. It's up to you and your parents.

The point is to be as consistent as possible in having your writing sessions at the same time each day/week, again to develop a positive creative habit. You can train your mind in this way to enter Creative Mode more easily.

Tip #3: Take Your Time

Often the best ideas emerge slowly, so don't necessarily take the first idea that comes along. Take time to let the various ideas sit with you before you reject any.

For instance, maybe you write an outline for a story, but there are gaps where you're not sure what should happen. Don't be in a rush to fill them. It's okay to leave some areas blank for a while. By the time you get to that spot in your first draft, the right choice may be much clearer—or an even better idea will have come along.

Tip #4: Have Confidence

Be confident in your ability to write your story. Great ideas will come to you if you give yourself time, keep trying, and don't look for what's wrong with every idea you have. Feel free to make mistakes, and remember: don't try to be creative and critical at the same time.

Similarly, try not to judge your first draft until after you've finished it. Stay out of Critical Mode until you reach the revision stage.

"If you're not prepared to be wrong, you'll never come up with anything original."

—Ken Robinson

Tip #5: Humor

Ever noticed how, when you get laughing with friends, great ideas just keep coming? Silliness and absurdity can put you into Creative Mode faster than anything else. Often a silly or ridiculous idea can be a stepping stone to the next brilliant idea, if you don't reject it out of hand. Remember, although it can be hard work sometimes, writing should bring you joy. Don't take the fun out of it by getting too serious!

Tip #6: Follow the Strengths and Talents God Gave You

Sometimes when people start writing, they try to write what they think they "should" write, rather than what interests them.

For example, if your friends all like fantasy stories about hobbits, you may have accepted the idea that adventure fantasy is the only genre worthy of being written. However, it may be that your talent and passion lies in comedy or mystery or science fiction or another genre your friends think is no good. So what? Go ahead and write what interests you, what you'll have fun writing.

God gave you your talents and interests, so embrace them. Be willing to explore new genres. You may discover that some interest you more than you expect.

If you write what you love, chances are others will love what you write.

¹ Ralph Fletcher, "Tips for Young Readers," <http://www.ralphfletcher.com>.

² Suzannah Windsor Freeman, "What Should I Write About? Finding Inspiration," <http://writeitsideways.com>.

³ Glen Strathy, "Creativity Tips to Enhance Your Fiction Writing," <http://www.how-to-write-a-book-now.com/creativity-tip.html>.