

Fiction writing calls for...

- Talent – or at least, skill in writing.
- Imagination and creativity
- Good, sound English, with adequate spelling, grammar and construction.
- Knowledge of some ‘tricks of the trade’ – certain journalistic techniques and marketing skills.
- Self-discipline

and, above all, **something to say**.

The Course calls on you to ...

1. Read, learn and inwardly digest the various types of popular fiction. Reading and analysing the successful work of others, from de Maupassant to Mills and Boon, will demonstrate to you what makes it successful;
2. Study the local magazines, ascertain what their editors want, and learn to target your stories correctly;
3. Learn where to look for ideas;
4. Learn about themes, plot schemes, tension and conflict, characterisation, motivation, dialogue, etc.;
5. Produce your own plots;
6. Write – and then re-write, cut and edit your work.

You cannot learn to write except by writing!

It's like swimming: you have to jump in, even if the water is over your head and you're not sure you can swim!



TUTOR TALK: Take your time. Don't try to get your next Test back to your tutor by return post.

It makes no difference how long you take to submit Tests – but please adhere to the **ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW NOTES**. Send all parts of a Test together, do not omit anything, and do not send anything extra – unless you wish your tutor to make a special assessment of extra work.

THE BASIC TECHNIQUES OF FREELANCE JOURNALISM

THE BIG FOUR:

1. **CONTENT** – WHAT DO I WRITE?
2. **STYLE** – HOW DO I WRITE?
3. **TECHNIQUES** – WHICH TECHNIQUES WILL HELP ME SELL?
4. **MARKETING** – WHERE DO I SEND MY WORK?

We give a brief summary of these here:

1. CONTENT

WHAT do I write? Unless you have something to say, it is unlikely that other people will want to read what you write.

2. STYLE

HOW do I write it? In good, clear, simple English which the man-in-the-street will understand. Not like a doctoral thesis, a sermon, or a poetic extravaganza.

3. TECHNIQUES

WHICH techniques will help me sell? The Course helps you with points like how to **PRESENT** your work, how to **RESEARCH AND STUDY**, how to give your work **THE PROFESSIONAL TOUCH**.

4. MARKETING

WHERE do I send my work? A study of the available markets, both local and overseas, is absolutely essential for the freelance writer. The more magazines you read, the better. You will soon find that policies and editors and formats change all too frequently. Magazines are born and die within months. Always keep your finger on the pulse of the market!



TUTOR TALK: You can, of course, always read up on the subject privately.

Most of the information you need, however, is right here in the Course. We often find that students submit queries the answers to which are quite clearly set out in the text. So read through your Course again and again as you work your way through the Tests your tutor will set.

SUCCESS ... and failure

By no means everyone who has the urge to write fiction can do so successfully and for publication. Fiction writing is a craft which must be learned, like any other. Our Course is not among those which declare, “Anyone has it in them to write a good short story”. Let’s face it, only a fraction of those who try to write have it within themselves to succeed. We can do our best to teach you the basics and the tricks and the techniques – but success depends on **YOU**.

Have you a natural ability to write – a feeling that it’s a ‘vocation’?

Have you faith in yourself?

Can you write good, simple English without grammatical errors?

Have you the concentration? the determination? the capacity for hard work? the utter self-discipline which lets you mercilessly scrap your most treasured ‘descriptive bits’ or incidents, when you realize they don’t fit into your plot?

Above all, are you willing to learn?

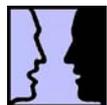
Years of teaching freelance writing have lead us to believe that **LACK OF DISCIPLINE AND SELF-INSIGHT** and **TOO MUCH PRIDE AND EGO** are the main reasons why most students don’t make it!

Can you take rejection?

Don't be discouraged by your initial setbacks – because you will undoubtedly meet them! Many students, after writing **one** story, and having it rejected, just give up.

DON'T EXPECT SUCCESS TO COME AT FIRST CAST!

You may have to write HUNDREDS of stories before you find the formula, the style, the market which suits you.



TUTOR TALK: Our tutors find that they cannot always forecast a student's progress. Sometimes a student whom they did not initially think promising has succeeded through hard work, and by following guidance. On the other hand, apparently brilliant writers may be unwilling to study the market or to follow Tests.

Don't be a drop-out!

It is almost as big a thrill for the tutor as for the student when a story is accepted. Of course, that student might have proved successful anyway -but we like to feel we have had some hand in their success.

Why is this?

Occasionally a tutor is driven to write personally to enquire of a good student why he dropped out. The answer is frequently, "I didn't know *it* was going to be such hard work ..." or "Why should I have to write what editors want?" or "I find I just don't have the time".

So be under no illusions. Fiction writing is a tough, demanding task that calls for hard work as well as a natural gift.

This Course will give you some tips and techniques which may be short cuts to the achievement of writing skills. But **we cannot teach you to write fiction if you have no gift for it**. It's much the same as being taught to paint or to play the violin. We can suggest, counsel, encourage and discourage. We can tell you what is right with your work, and what is wrong with it. But we cannot WRITE it for you. Make no mistake, 90% of the work must come from YOU, the student!

Do you have that gift that enables you to swim through the oceans of chance to success as Danielle Steel or Frederick Forsyth? The only way you can find out whether you have what it takes is to try: to write and write, to work hard, and not to be deterred by rejection slips.

The need for self-discipline

Do not confuse this gift with ‘inspiration’. Never sit waiting to be grabbed by some supernatural force. Writing – unfortunately – doesn’t happen that way. “I got carried away – I simply had to write it.” Yes, this does happen, but even when it does, still you must struggle with that blank sheet of paper. Still you must plot, draft, write, rewrite, cut and edit. You must learn the stringent discipline of cutting your work to a certain length. This can be like cutting off a limb of one’s own body, but it has to be learned. There’s no room for self-indulgence, for pride, for ego, in the armoury of the fiction writer.

Don’t wait until you are ‘in the mood’. It helps to write something -anything – every day, even if you know it is not ‘right’. For when you return to your desk feeling just in the mood to tackle your story, you will have something to get your teeth into right away.

So get into the habit of writing every day. Set your own goals – but be realistic!

WHY DO YOU WANT TO WRITE STORIES?

Many students tell us that they ‘plan to give up work and earn their living by writing’. Frankly, this is not a very likely prospect for any but the talented and lucky one in ten thousand. What’s more, it is a plan that may lead you into a life of insecurity.

You have read of people like Wilbur Smith and Frederick Forsyth who live like kings, but have you ever thought that such people also live a life of continual insecurity?

Insecurity is, as Paul Gallico says, an occupational hazard of writing. One hit won’t keep you at the top. You have a reputation to live up to, and every manuscript you send off will leave you as fearful and hopeful as you were with your first short story. That is why so many successful novelists develop writer’s block. Unconsciously they are scared to write, because they can’t afford to fail.

Writing fiction is not an easy way to make money. The number of stories published in magazines is few. They are not well paid. With the closing down of a number of papers and magazines, with the rise of TV and videos, the local fiction market is limited. Even the occasional overseas success will do little more than bring you some holiday money.