A Room of My Own competition

Winning and Highly Commended Essays
A Room of My Own

The future is a prospect that is terrifying to consider. The vast reach of this unknown spans across the decades; fast and unpredictable as it progresses. It can make a life seem so small and insignificant yet that captures my attention. If I’m going to be here for a short period of time, I want to transform the lives of the people around me through my passion for literature. The pure unbridled potential of the universe must be utilised. That is why in my pursuit of writing in the future, I must be bold and unapologetic. Life is far too short and precious to have regrets.

Throughout the various challenges life has posed, writing has proved itself continuously to be an anchor which never fails to keep me grounded. There is something so beautiful and intimate about it. It provides a glimpse into the intricate mind of the author. However, the stories are but a fraction of the lake of thoughts of intangible ideas fighting to be created under their watchful hand. The only restrictions placed on how much of that lake that makes it into the final product is fear.

To write, it is integral that you have some sort of motivation. Sometimes it is monumental, the words refuse to stop flowing and your hands struggle to keep up with your thoughts. Other times it’s the quiet voice that nudges you slightly in a certain direction. Both moments provide essential contributions to the writing process.

Identity plays a major role not only in the formation of key themes within novels but in how we develop during that process. My identity as a black woman doesn’t define my genre. The industry loves to contain people to boxes, it makes them easier to manipulate. The stories are but a fraction of the lake of thoughts of intangible ideas fighting to be created under their watchful hand. The only restrictions placed on how much of that lake that makes it into the final product is fear.

In conclusion, a room of my own is somewhere I craft the stories that my heart yearns to tell. The only limitations I have are the walls of my desires and determination. They are not defined by anything which society claims sets us apart. The more I want it, the larger the room is. The more fear dictates, the smaller the room becomes. It closes in and robs me of the clarity in the air and clouds my vision with doubt. You can’t let anyone, especially not yourself, be constricted. Doing that strips storytelling of the one thing it is meant to be; an expression of freedom and creativity.

Dominique Vincent
18 years old
St Saviour’s and St Olave’s School, London

A Room of My Own

Growing up, split between two cultures and identities I always struggled (and still do) with finding the right words to convey my message whether it was speaking to a person or writing in my books at school. The words I wanted to speak never seemed to leave my mouth when I spoke. My first experience with my inner word battle was when I was in preschool; it was a humiliating but hilarious experience, even when I look back today. Imagine this, a young girl with her mother who isn’t fluent in English, trying to explain to the teacher that I had a serious hay fever issue. I couldn’t find my words, stuck and frozen inside, hoping for the words to tumble out from my lips. A second pause turned into a 10 second pause; awkward. In the end I used actions. My hands, I remember, were dancing along with the noises I was making: ‘achoo, achoo, ACHOO!’. I frantically moved my hands hurriedly hoping that the teacher would just understand me. Finally, she looked at me and said, ‘Do you mean sneezing?’. The word ‘sneezing’ was like a gift sent from the heavens, it was as if I was savouring and devouring the word: a cocoon of ecstasy. This memory was 9 years ago and even to this day I can recall it as if it was yesterday. I gradually grew older and by the time I was at the start of year 4 my vocabulary was still not broad enough. When I spoke in the rare moments of my youth, my words were shy and full of unknown knowledge. Halfway through the year something struck me, it wasn’t physical but intellectual. It was as if a button was flicked on and my whole brain was then flooded with miraculous words. I felt like I was treading on dangerous waters. But it didn’t stop there.

Year after year I am gaining more and more experience, I test my limits, push them to the furthest and learn as much as possible. Honestly, its suffocating. Recently I learnt an ‘inspirational’ saying – ‘Determination today leads to success tomorrow.’ Don’t you think it’s a bit fanciful and utopian like? I’m not going to lie; determination was part of my process but the only time I ever gained success was what was years of brain-achingly steps to failure, agony, pain. In the end, it still felt like I was on the floor, in a boxing match, defeated after being destroyed by an obvious winner standing before me; struggle.

At the end of the day, to me I feel like the only way I can express my sensations, ardour, vehemence is through writing. Writing to me is not judgemental. No one’s there staring at you, no one’s laughing at the mispronunciation of your misspoken manner of speech. What I want is for present and future generations to understand is that, yes, writing may be a dying form of art, but writing is the start of everything.

Jia-Yan Xue
14 years old
The Petersfield School, Hampshire
And why not?

All a writer truly needs is to pepper in saucy jokes hidden between beautiful lines of text. For example, Atonement. I promise you there was no need for us to get that much time dedicated to that letter but as a society we just let it slide because the book was so beautiful. To be frank I believe fitting the white, middle aged man or woman mold helps too. Preferably educated at a top university.

To really get my creative juices flowing I tend to cry in the bath for about an hour and then whip out my flûtê. I think a big part of my influence for what I write is memes coupled with the sense of never truly belonging anywhere. Maybe that’s to do with being a mixed kid, or maybe it’s the constant moving of schools and communities, I’ll let you decide. When I write I love to explore the idea of where we belong, do we belong in cliques (and by extension into wider society groups dictated by our ethnicity and/or sexuality) as the popular chic-flics would have us believe? Or maybe we belong with ourselves as the heartbreaking, gut-wrenching albums of artists like Lorde might suggest.

As a future writer (probably not since I’m more of a science girl) I aspire for fourteen-year-olds in a hundred years’ time to sit in class analyzing my work and ask themselves, what does yeet mean. I want them to marvel at the complexity and senselessness of Gen Z humor and reflect on the fact that this was because we lived in such a panicked and senseless time. When in reality our humor actually just makes no sense whatsoever making it so hilarious.

I have learnt from past writers that so long as I keep my saucy comments and criticisms of this ‘post-feminist society’ hidden in the glorious pomp of setting sunrises and booming silence, whatever stupidities I write are untouchable. The beauty of writing is not found in the words written on the page but rather in the spaces letting you decide as to whether the sentences are running rapidly like a stream or taking their sweet time, stopping at every corner to simply look. Whether they are begging you to stop and pay attention, or gently leaving an imprint on you. All a writer needs is a thesaurus, to choose the words that matter.

A vine reimagined as a haiku:
Whaddup I’m Jared,
I’m nineteen and I never
Learned how to read

Some blackout poetry:
S(he) bel(ie)ve(d)

Inspiration:
You only yolo once
(I’m being sarcastic please don’t think I’m this stupid)

As a great man once said, being bold pays off- a white man who was likely a disgusting misogynist and racist a hundred years ago but that’s excusable because they produced wonderful works of art! Literary gods, I hope this ‘boldness’ pays off.

Martine Maugué
14 years old
Wimbledon High School, London
Eureka

We may fumble through our lives as writers, and on our way we find things that do not necessarily need. What we do need is ourselves. Some may need “A Room of My Own” or being on the move.

It is the tiniest PING you feel in your mind as it floats around. Grasping it is only the first part- then follows the staring into space as you forget that time races by. Soon you begin to lose all sense of space time and reality as your eyes begin to zoom in on that infinitesimally small dot. All that surrounds it is a blank space. I’d call it the black canvas. Something that spreads beyond the fabric of the human mind.

Soon enough that very dot begins to expand as it burns bright almost like the birth of a star. It begins to become quite the presence on that black canvas. Slowly but surely the no longer dot eats up this black canvas colouring it white. Yet our mind struggles to keep it in place. The now white canvas yet again pushes beyond the very fabric of our minds and then it stops. It stops only for a hoard of colours to splatter this canvas, covering every single bit and corner one could possibly imagine. It is only then do we sense the feeling that brands itself in our heads. That sudden shiver. The feeling of Eureka!

All we truly need is our minds; the very ones in which we get lost in and have countless hidden stories on replay. All our ideas bouncing around the back of our heads. If it were easy to, I’d attempt to show the very loop I have in my brain. This will have to do. However, inspiration doesn’t occur when there’s a light breeze passing or when it were easy to, I’d attempt to show the very loop I have in my brain. This will have to do. However, inspiration doesn’t occur when there’s a light breeze passing or when an autumn leaf drifts slowly down into your palm. Neither will it ever happen when the sky turns a wonderful pink and you sigh contentedly.

Mostly - well in my experience - that moment will happen when you’re sat eating chicken in Costa or when your shoes squeal each time you walk because you’ve forgotten to read the forecast that coincidentally happens to scream heavy showers. It may not be always at the best of times, but we mustn’t forget that it’s that idea in which worlds are born. In that we must plant our roots into that very place.

Now, the Eureka! comes with all the beginnings and ends mushed into one. Slowly but surely the no longer dot eats up this black canvas colouring it white. Yet our mind struggles to keep it in place. The now white canvas yet again pushes beyond the very fabric of our minds and then it stops. It stops only for a hoard of colours to splatter this canvas, covering every single bit and corner one could possibly imagine. It is only then do we sense the feeling that brands itself in our heads. That sudden shiver. The feeling of Eureka!

A Room of My Own - Highly Commended

The Aspiring Writer

I first read A Room of One’s Own in August this year. In one night. I was so inspired by the words I read that I immediately sat down and wrote not one; not five; nor ten; but fourteen pages in my diary about all the thoughts it had inspired in me. My mind was a whirr - the essay was an eye opening look into the past. I felt connected to Woolf, Austen and all these other great authors. The feeling of connection and being understood is not one I was well acquainted with, and for the first time I truly considered the idea that I too could be a writer, because if they can do it so can I. In that moment I joined the collective of ‘the aspiring writer’. And then it hit me: I was one of the lucky ones. I could only be a writer because I knew how to write, and I only had the confidence to do so because I knew how to read, so therefore was able to read Woolf’s essay. Which goes to say, the first and most important thing the aspiring writer requires is an education. Not a higher education as Woolf speaks of, simply the basic skills of literacy. We cannot ever hope to be writers if we cannot write - it’s in the job title!

Once these skills have been realised, I say the next requirement is to have access to books (or poetry or plays) in order to learn and be inspired, as I was by Woolf. So the aspiring writer needs either: a) money, or b) a library. Money will buy the books, the library will provide them for free. Next they need a pen and paper, along with an opportunity to share their creation. Not long ago this would have been available through stationary supplies and endorsed publication only, but nowadays a wonderful platform exists in the form of the internet; the aspiring writer can draft and share their works with the world at the click of a button. But they’ll need a computer, which means they require a) money, or b) a library. Money will buy a computer, a library - most libraries - will offer them for free.

The final necessities of the aspiring writer are unlike those previously mentioned. They are not external factors, although they can be influenced by them. The aspiring writer needs also something within themselves - a special spark. A spark of belief, curiosity, story, and desire. Belief they can write. Curiosity for the world to inform their writing. Story formed from curiosity; giving birth to ideas. Desire to scribble down the ideas and make a masterpiece.

Just as the resulting works are multifaceted, so too is the aspiring writer. Their needs, motives, and journey of penmanship could span infinite pages, but here is the essential sponging - an opening to the future of literature. Here is a basic guide to the aspiring writer’s needs.

Rajiyah Ahmed
16 years old
Hampstead School, London

Millicent Bevan
15 years old
Rochester Independent College, Kent
If Only it Were the View

I am sat in my bedroom. I have been sat here for a while, actually. Sprawled out upon the desk in front of me are pieces of paper, pens, pencils, pencil shavings, erasers, eraser shavings and yet… these objects, which are so often associated with “great ideas”, are not leaping into the formation of some literary masterpiece, much to my extreme shock and disappointment.

The sunlight is gushing into the room through the open window, bathing the walls in honey-coloured light. Birdsong is audible somewhere outside, that delicate encouragement from the minions of Mother Nature herself. “Go on!” I hear them chirrup, egging me to formulate some nugget of wisdom to then articulately transfer to the (blank) notebook in front of me.

But nothing happens.

I feel like SpongeBob in that episode where he has to write an essay on ‘What Not to Do At a Stoplight’. Soon I’ll be asking the postman whether he prefers rye or pumpernickel bread in an effort to prevent myself coming to terms with the harsh truth: I am struggling to write. One would think, ‘Surely she has all she needs? Pen, paper, the inspiring view from her window. And yet she cannot write?’

In complete honesty, when thinking about what I may need to become a writer, I keep coming to the conclusion that I do not know.

It seems different for everyone. Maybe someone needs to travel the world and absorb sight upon magnificent sight before finding a subject so captivating that they are able to then write pages and pages about it, whereas another may find it suffice to observe the most seemingly mundane events happening in their vicinity and transform them into eccentric wonders. Maybe someone is content with a pound-store notepad, while another (me) wants a fabric-bound, flower-adorned book to tuck their ideas into.

Regardless whichever notebook one ends up using, it must be filled with something substantial. If one does not know what to write, they will never write, no matter how comfortable they are, as I have so expertly demonstrated here, what with my “inspiring” window view that has ultimately helped me to do squat.

However, if one has an idea, and attached to it is passion and zeal and investment, one will find it positively painful to suppress. As Maya Angelou said; “There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you”. The vision will arise within you, bubbling, frothing, begging to be written. That having been said, the idea will not write itself, unfortunately. As Maya Angelou also said; “Nothing will work unless you do”. One must be prepared to devote themselves to their idea like a new-born child. Dote upon it, nourish it, nurture it. Allow it to grow with the work put into it. There will be obstacles and it will never be easy- one may become impatient and frustrated at times, but at the end of the day one must love it. And then… poof! As if in a puff of smoke, a fully-grown wad of paper is there, on one’s desk, packed away and ready to be sent off to publishers, like a young adult going off to university, their journey only just beginning.

Therefore, apart from the volcanic idea and unquenchable fire driving one to write it, I cannot say exactly what one needs to be a writer. I suppose the rest is up to the individual.

I now have to admit, maybe those birds outside did help me, after all.

Anya Biletsky
16 years old
Nonsuch High School for Girls
Enraptured

To be creative, to become a writer, to be able to work you need only yourself, a pen and some paper.

Nowadays people are as fixated by technology as a dog is to a deer. The dog will freeze, totally lost in its own world. Time will dissolve into the air. Enraptured. The trees hold their breath, and the river will sink into a quiet lulling song.

The deer moves. It runs away.

That time is gone, and where? No one knows. Maybe the deer picked it up and rubbed it off on trees faraway. Maybe the dog has frightened it into a ditch, where it’s now stuck. Maybe it’s just gone, as quick as the summer holidays or the hour in which you have to do your homework before the lesson.

All one needs is a pen and some paper and some self-restraint.

You need a pen or a pencil or ink or nail varnish, to carve those letters and words and sentences and essays into the world’s tough bark. Or to graffiti the underside of motorway bridges, or to construct your final draft onto thick cartilage paper; you need an over sharpened, split HB pencil to scratch out your first draft in the rain huddled under a huge oak tree.

You need a canvas to paint your story, a tree, and a pad of refill paper, your colourful bedroom wall where the paint peels cheerfully in the corners and the colour is starting to fade away. You need to drag your knife across the earth, feel the power. You need to leave scar, even no one lays eyes upon your master piece then you have made it as a writer, because you know it’s there.

Finally you need self-restraint. Not the self-restraint that allows you to leave your sister’s birthday cake alone. Not the self-restraint you wish you had to study for tomorrow’s test, not the self-control that means you have money in your wallet.

Writing is an art. You need the patience of a parent with 5 young children, of a dog waiting to eat a treat, of threading a needle in the dark.

Eva Brand-Whitehead
17 years old
Oxford Spires Academy

My Favourite Four Walls

Often described as the metaphorical ‘Four Walls’ in Theatre, actors transform their art: into realism. Magic. What they personify as breaking the ‘Fourth Wall’- dividing the actors from the audience. Demonstrating a circus act with a glass wall. Only the joke has worn thin, and the auditorium, empty. It’s transparent beams holding together the room, similarly to the beams holding the foundations.

I hear the cascading of the waters approach the rustic oak door. The wind, limitless, blows. The scent of sea air illuminates itself underneath my nostrils: as though it were a lone ballerina taking her final curtain call. The tranquil setting of this serene area sparks infinite joy, inspiration, if you will. Ancient manuscripts from abandoned projects line the shelves, fringed with a perimeter of dust upon their very spines. A large bay window with a gentle oceanic view eases me into the empty room. Its simplistic setting ignites remaining embers that illustrate words, as though they can inscribe into the wallpaper as the ideas spill onto the parchment. I write about life. What it is, could be, its potential.

Its manipulation dissipates through the little grasp we struggle to hold. The sands of time are complex, enriched with experiences. Experience helps us grow. We are an evolutionary species. We are programmed to seek further improvement even after the last line has been punctuated and the last song has been accounted for. Too much is never enough. We are flowers, blossoming upon the new dawn. Coffee is also a necessary fuel to feed our bottomless pits of eccentricity and imagination. Doubt often eclipses writer’s minds; it fogs our vision for a while, but we re-route ourselves to where we desire to be. The room itself and the view overlooks the world, and for a moment, it captivates me. It truly eclipsed the doubt and the voice that made you feel small. A subtle hew of a needle scratches the vinyl, accompanying a mellow satisfaction to the dream that I can live in.

I have it all here, yet I feel incomplete. Peace. Writers seek peace. Our minds, a conundrum of thoughts, concepts, ideas. Too manic for life, for publication. We are all raised to learn with an open heart and an open mind. Sometimes, walls aren’t good enough. They aren’t able to sustain the pressures and the emotions that another human being can. Sometimes, just sometimes, we discover that our favourite four walls are no longer our bedroom, or a villa on an idyllic island built upon happiness, hopes and dreams. Sometimes, they are people that have been next to us the whole time. They have been listening, educating, advising the entire time, carrying the weight of our emotional baggage. Showing us what it means to be human again. A writer does not require a palace, nor a dungeon at the best of times. They require perseverance when they feel compelled to throw the towel in. Encouragement. Support. Sometimes, all we need, are two eyes and a heartbeat.

Abigail Butler
16 years old
Boston College
A Room of My Own - Highly Commended

A Writer's Paradox

To write is to communicate, in one way or another. To communicate, and communicate clearly, it goes without saying that the volume which occupies my brain is not nearly enough space in which to readily and thoughtfully express the non-verbalised thought whose tantalising meaning gets passed through the strainer of English every single time. So a room. Will that suffice?

Perhaps; but then, perhaps not: here, a room is but a synonym for privacy, seclusion and solitude – a personal means to an inherently personal end. Yet such states are near impossible to achieve within the physical confines of four walls and a ceiling these days. For the ever-ubiquitous technology has transcended physicality, it would seem: phones, computers, laptops and tablets represent portals into the world beyond the window, a world of flow and rush, of instant gratification and of oppressive freedom. Social media is forever on my eye and I on it. The continents are at the tips of my fingers. All knowledge is within a few clicks.

The knock-on effects of such ease of access are depressingly evident. I can no longer bare to write a sentence without some dopamine-fuelled surge of desire to check and check and check winning me over. The only answer is strict self-denial – which is, in essence, the very antithesis of meaningful writing. For it is intensely personal thought which one pours into writing, thought which drives the ink to meet the page or the finger to the key. From where are such thoughts derived? One's environment, surely. Too little exposure to the right kinds of information, and what is there to write about? Too much exposure to the wrong kinds of information, and the act of writing becomes an almost impossible task.

Where, then, should I draw the line? Sometimes I think I ought to lock my phone away, turn off the wi-fi, and move to the hallowed desolations of Siberia. But what would I bring with me? The revered works of those gold-plated titans who stand out there in the mists of glittering eternity? Tolstoy, Dickens, the Brontës... their works inspired and gave voice to a generation's perception of love, politics, adventure, nature, freedom and fire. They rush continually down to meet us in a classroom at school, where the characters and ideas mix and mingle with our own.

Herein lies the essence of what I want to achieve. In a world where truth can be what you choose, where good and bad are indiscriminately blurred, where opinion and fact approach seeming synonymity, a clear voice which can be heard is what I strive for. It is the latter condition which seems so impossible to attain amid all the noise.

Yet, in a sense, the noise is my paradoxical subject. It is my inspiration and writer’s block, my words and the empty, blinking page. The power to influence the world seems only to exist outside of it – in a room of my own. 

Whilst my phone is in another.

Alex Garrett
15 years old

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A Place to Run Wild


Would you rather sit down, a pen in hand and ideas bustling in your head, or use a multitude of online typewriters, automatic editors, autocorrect, Google? The choice is yours. However, having a room of your own is an underrated gift. The peace if your surroundings, the nothingness of your still bedroom, or perhaps the buzz of a traffic jam, the drill of nearby construction, the yell of noisy siblings. Whichever one sounds most like yours, you have nevertheless taken it for granted. Let me explain how.

Whether you share a room with three other people or are lucky enough to have one all to yourself, this room is not just a room.

In fact, many would argue that it is not, in fact a room at all. It is a jungle, a cave full of hibernating bears, Victorian England, The Battle of Hastings. It is the street markets of New Delhi, the Eiffel Tower, the London Eye, the slums of São Paulo.

A place for your imagination to run wild. Where Virginia Woolf stated in 1029 that a woman needed £500 (£30,000 in today’s money) and a room of her own to write, I would have to disagree. To put it simply, the only thing a good writer should need is a pen, some paper, and an active imagination. Having said that, a somewhat quiet personal space and a broad knowledge of literature do tend to come in handy.

Contrary to popular belief, you cannot be born a proficient writer. You do not need a private education, bank account boasting seven figures, or world class university name on your CV. You do not need a fancy car, Twitter account with 35 million followers, an IQ of 140, or connections with the Royal Family.

All you need is hope, and determination, to change the world for the better.

Alice Garcia Kalmus
15 years old
UCL Academy, London
Words as Revolution

The first lesson I learned as a writer is that love is conditional. Crowds may cry that this is untrue, particularly in the case of blood-ties and close friendships, but even mass opinion can be faulty, and in fact often is. I learnt this lesson during a phone call to my aunty, no different to any other. I was eleven years old and being told, not for the first time but maybe for the first time with any serious intent, that writing is not a sustainable career, and therefore is not a sustainable hobby. As much as this was marketed to me as tough love, it was in fact evidence of conditional love. I adored writing but couldn’t profit from it, so why would I pursue it as a hobby or as a career?

I found the answer to this question years later, having taken a year hiatus after being asked the question in the first place. I had been unable to produce a sufficient answer at first, unable to compose the symphony that would combine each aspect of the island of misfit toys that I viewed as my criteria for success. In the smell of old pages and the electricity of fresh ideas, however, the answer came rushing at me, a dam finally breaking: we write for influence.

I was fifteen years old when I first read the poem ‘America’ by Allen Ginsberg. I was seventeen years old when I last read it, this morning in my bedroom as an elixir of courage to prepare for a hard day ahead. Poems and books written in the 1950s barely even begin to illustrate the complete vastness of the impact literature and creativity has on our everyday lives, and even in the extraordinary moments of our lives, but they are nevertheless a start. Book burnings were a violent act for a reason: they destroyed ideas, the very essence of humanity.

Ambition is the seed which creativity grows from, and from that stem blooms revolution. In my future, I will need one thing to write, and that will be a spark. In an age of terror and absurdity, we must push revolution and we must push belief. We are told that the decades before us were void of these concepts, but this is quashed by the existence of figures such as Virginia Woolf and Oscar Wilde. To write, we need nothing more than a belief or a revolutionary spirit.

Writing will save us. Words sown on paper will bear the fruit of beautiful recklessness in future generations. In writing, we spread not only ourselves, but ideas and beliefs, and nothing is more vital to a thriving society than diversity in ideas. Now more than ever, we need the world around us to write, and we need writing to remedy the illness inflicted upon the world around us. Words are marketed as poison; rather than the miracle cure we craft them to become. We write to change this.

Courtney Hart
17 years old
New College Doncaster

A Room of My Own

My ability to write starts in my room. A small door leading to infinite ideas, I share my room with my inspirations and experiences. This room I use to escape reality is not physical but a mental, opened cage of the mind. When clouded with thought, I clear the sky of my mind through the rearrangement of words, transforming them to stories. These stories are what I find amusing to write down. Writing is an infinite possibility that requires only an open mind. This is a room of my own.

Everyone can have a room of their own. Whether it is for creativity, problem solving or just for your thoughts. A writer may use their own thoughts and experiences of the world. Their passions and interests, their creativity and inspirations. Their room may be small for comfort or large for space. Cool for solitude or warm for company. This room is where you feel comfort, where you can relax and make stories of your own. This is the room of your own.

I believe the future is unknown, no longer a singular line of possibilities. Future stories could include inventions that are yet to come. Future stories could include new concepts, ideas, role models and cultures. How are we to know what the future brings? Did our past ancestors know or even think about what we might write? Our children’s children may write about the past, or think about the future; but how are we to know? It will be the future room of their own.

Old texts look like foreign words now, but when translated can turn out to be a vast vision of ideas. When observed from a different angle, small details are noticed. Annotating others words helps to inspire the words of another. These different angles form different perspectives, creating different stories. This world has evolved to a diverse living where no person is the same. Everyone has a different life. Everyone has a different room of their own.

Kaiya Johnson
17 years old
Oxford Spires Academy
Qualities required for the future of a writer

I could begin with the basics: with the assets we are taught in Primary School will either make or break our future career paths. To earn any respectable job, we are told we must be resilient, observant, determined and disciplined. From a young age we are trained to become patient, persistent and industrious individuals.

But I don’t believe these qualities will make me a writer.

Undoubtedly, these are beneficial characteristics to develop as they are the traits employers will seek when hiring workers. However, this is a broad criterion that is needed in any occupation, so these skills alone won’t allow me to flourish in a world of fiction.

So, I ask myself: what will?

Passion and creativity.

Maybe these are the easiest answers to provide, but they are easy due to the fact they’re truthful.

As writers, we tend to be independent, described as ‘bookworms’ for the majority of adolescence. We find no discomfort in limiting ourselves to empty rooms with paper, pens and coffee, then scrawling words onto pages until ink is staining our skin. But independence is both a blessing and a burden.

It is beautiful because we are liberated. When we write, we never feel the necessity to discuss our plots or portrayals with others, instead simply composing what we as individuals crave to create. We are free to design facades and conduct essays without rules or regulations.

But sometimes independence is a writer’s enemy.

We are free to render our own decisions, which may essentially sound wonderful. However, we are the ones that decide when to put pen to paper, or fingertips to keys. If a person lacks enthusiasm, they simply won’t write, meaning passion is vital in ensuring a budding writer’s career. Passion acts as a catalyst for motivation, encouraging us to express art in the form of words and phrases. Without passion, we are just individuals with good ideas.

Secondly, creativity is a dominant feature.

As children, we are made aware that our imagination will inevitably be our best friend and the creator of indescribable stories that we feel the need to describe. Being imaginative and creative plays a significant role for all writers, remembering that our favourite novels started as random thoughts.

Often, we can be disheartened because it may seem all worthy plots have already been published, and our own ideas may not appear original or innovative. Yet, creativity allows us to take inspiration from mundane experiences and manipulate them to vivid tales or poems. Creativity originates from an open mind that is able to see an ordinary object and allow it to stimulate the senses.

Amelia Jones
15 years old
Olchfa Comprehensive, Swansea
Prologue to Writing

Where does the prologue to the writing happen? Where do the ideas, the plot twists, the metaphors, the characters happen?

They happen on buses that come twenty minutes too late; on empty carriages on trains at 10.47 and on packed tube carriages on the Piccadilly line. On cycle rides, twice daily, through sweltering sun and over frozen ground. They happen in transit – on the move. Sights blurring past in windows become settings, become sprawling cities, fantastical lands, secluded spaces.

They happen in moments of eye contact, of inside jokes and smiles that dissipate into the October air. And in walks into town in the unending rain, huddling and giggling in shop windows; they happen under duvets in bedrooms at 2am on sleepovers, and in cafes, waiting, still waiting, for coffee to arrive but drinking each other in the meantime. They happen in our bodies, in our minds, in the space between us, where a fully formed character materialises, stepping out of the air and onto the page.

They happen in the time spent waiting, picking the skin around your nails, hanging in the balance. In the craving for something, anything, to happen and the nervous confidence that it will. Soon enough. In this waiting is the rising tension, the twists and turns and time spent not knowing.

They happen in the dark. The quiet. They happen when your throat aches from crying and not crying and crying. When you can’t keep your eyes open. When the words you hear are exactly the words you’ve been dreading. They happen gratingly, slowly, painfully. And from them come moments of rebirth.

They happen in the sun too. In perfect beams of light dancing through the leaves; in the sweet sort-of-silence of birdsong. They happen in hands held, in guitar music and shouted singing, in fireworks, in lemon tarts, in stage lighting, in the coming of evening, in poems, in messages, in karaoke, in board games, in concert halls, in cardigans, in adventures, in certificates, in emails, in takeaways, in London streets, in coffee, in plans carried out and promises kept. Happy endings, and carrying on.

The prologue to the writing is the living. Not just the things that everyone tells you are worth writing about: every word comes from something, someone, somewhere. We need it to write, all of it. And we need ourselves – flesh and blood and brain and pen and pencil – to piece it all together, bit by bit, note by note, and pull out the novels, the poems. Before a room of one’s own comes a life of one’s own.

Katie Kirkpatrick
17 years old
Hills Road Sixth Form College, Cambridge

A Future of One’s Own

You enter a room with an objective in mind. Laptop firming pressed in between chest and bicep and fingers beginning to thrill as you eagerly embark on the next To Kill a Mockingbird revelation. Glasses on, documents begin to generate and... you stop. Think. Comprehend the notion that somewhere deep in the bowels of the internet is your fantasy, written and published before you can even type ‘Chapter 1’. This brings you to the thought that the most indispensable component you need to write with is originality.

Will ideas ever become extinct?

The environment we have created for ourselves have driven us so far and so dramatically to the point where we are able to contribute any plot we can imagine, fiction or nonfiction, and compress it into 280 characters. Suddenly, like the chill of an icy wind, you electrify yourself to this concept and start to forage google for your concept. You type ‘Time travel stories’, scroll and there it was in about 136,000,000 results was at number 8 ‘Highway to The Past’ by Stephen Wagner written in 2018.

In that moment, your confidence descends by a mile. How are you supposed to keep producing your fiction when you feel like the world has already beaten you to it? You label at number 2 that confidence is key. You feel so updated in this media driven world that there may as well be no point in writing because the anonymous typers have now administered how they truly feel about, well everything.

Resting your hand on the top of your laptop screen, it slowly begins to falls out of site until you refrain for a moment. You are in the same boat as everyone else willing to transform into the next JK Rowling. They are all voluntary putting their thoughts out there for nations to judge. Okay, some fail, some fall through and some will miss the brief completely... but you’ve just got to know what works and what doesn’t.

The laptop flipped open nearly uncontrollably and get each thing primed and fixed for writing. The cursor beaten with anticipation.

34 drafts, 183 edits and 729 positive comments to 37 negative comments later, you come to the extent of your writing journey with nowhere else to turn. And there you have it. All you need is belief in yourself and a unique viewpoint on life. How did you end up, I hear you ask? Well, fulfill your story and you’ll discover the truth.

At that instant, your eyes begin to wander the room infixed in finding an idea as refreshing as a cool breeze from an oncoming train. This takes you approximately 38 minutes until you arrive at the debate with yourself whether or not the theory of how the world would be if there were things that had never been invented would be a bestseller. Thereupon you focus on themes like language, time, oxygen, schools, gravity...Tomorrow?

Katie Martin
16 years old
The Weald Sixth Form, Billingshurst, West Sussex
One of the things most young people have in common is their immense fear of disappointing others. Virginia Woolf wrote that “Intellectual freedom depends upon material things” and if writing depends on intellectual freedom then consequentially, all one needs to write is material things. However, in the UK today, intellectual freedom is no longer accessible through material things. While it may allow us to devote time to overcoming our own mental barricades, time does not suffice. Hence, today what one needs to be a writer is courage.

Media will inevitably have an influence on your life. Younger generations feel frightened to present their opinions for fear of backlash due to the vicious ways which strangers often butcher seemingly harmless comments. Despite knowing complete lack controversy is insurmountable, the root of this distress is the fundamental basis that revealing emotions, like those needed to construct good, sincere, sentimental writing, makes you vulnerable. And vulnerability is terrifying.

This fear derives from the inner desire to please others. Validation is a warm, comforting sensation; therefore, we seek it constantly; and when denied it, we are overcome with the suffocating sensation of defeat and failure to belong to a community or to produce something worthwhile. For many writers, their own sentiments are what fuel the plotlines or the conflicts of the characters and to have that criticised equates to receiving unsparing commentary on their own nature. Yet, if one was to refuse being experimental, they might unknowingly rewrite ten classics. No one wants to be accused of plagiarizing an old man with a glorious beard who died two hundred years ago and produced a literary masterpiece that to compete against would be suicidal. Even to attempt replicating the iconic beard is in-fact impossible and would inevitably lead to disappointment.

While inspiration may be drawn from previous great writers, young writers today feel pressured to live up to the standards of complete idolization which emerge from felt when these authors are repeatedly glorified in school. I myself, come from an Italian family and often feel pressured to become the next Dante Alighieri. Unfortunately, the only conceivable change I would make to his historic monument of scripture is that I would rightly remove Cleopatra from the inferno. But the main reason that the dream of becoming like these writers is so unattainable is because of society’s evolution. We as people cannot produce work with those precise themes or that syntax or language because it is never going to be a representation of the author’s own personal style.

Writers today need to forget about desperately striving for approval or imitating great works and remind themselves of their love of literature. By attempting to satisfy others, one represses one’s own authenticity. Nevertheless, one must acknowledge the apprehension in writing, as one’s writing reflects their psyche and exposes them for people to judge as they please, which is why writers today need courage to simply write for themselves.
A Struggle with Immortality

What does a writer need if they are to write? “Money and a room of her own,” according to Virginia Woolf. But what do I need? As someone who is not so much a Writer, as a Going-To-Write, who gets so caught up with the whole business of living that they rarely get round to writing anything down. Someone who plans to finish their story, or poem, or essay “one day,” and not a moment before... What do I need?

The answer seems simple enough. I’m busy, so I need time, just time. More time – an unlimited number of tomorrows. Enough tomorrows that I run out of words before I lose the ability to record them. I need to be immortal...

But I have time. I spend it, every day. Studying, reading, drawing, painting, exploring... And I don’t write a single word.

Why? Because I’m young. Because I’m busy, and I’m tired, and sometimes writing feels far to much like work. And because I’ll have another chance to write tomorrow, when I might have less things to do, and I’ve had a proper night’s sleep.

And if that doesn’t work, I’ll do it tomorrow. Because there’s always going to be tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow...

Until I run out of tomorrows.

And I haven’t written a single word.

All my lifetime passes before I finally put metaphorical pen to paper, and find the courage to carve my existence into the face of the Earth. Give me too much time, and I run out of it.

So I need an end to my time more. The certain knowledge that I’m not going to last forever, that I need to write today because I might not be there to write tomorrow. I need to be mortal...

So, if I’m to write, I need two things: mortality... and to be immortal. Two needs that are so desperately, beautifully conflicting, so entirely human, that maybe, in the end, I don’t need either of them.