



CRESSIDA COWELL

Free Writing Friday

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT WRITING AND USING A NOTEBOOK

Q: Does it matter if my notebook isn't neat?

A: No, it's your notebook, and it can be as messy as you want. My notebooks are definitely not neat. (It does help if you can read your own handwriting though, because otherwise you can't remember what you wrote – I do sometimes have that problem).

Q: What sort of things should I write or draw?

A: You can make up your own stories, write notes for story ideas, put down interesting facts that might make a great story (I've written about research later on), drawings, quotes from books or films you like and why you like them. You can create comic strips, or design your own super-hero. You can re-write a favourite story, or write something new for familiar characters. Or anything else you would like to do.

Q: I can start stories but I get stuck and I can't finish them – what do I do?

A: This is very normal, and not something to worry about. If you get stuck, leave it for a week and then come back to it. You might decide that it doesn't interest you anymore, and that's OK too. It's all about practising your writing and your ideas, not about writing a book that someone is going to publish right now. You also don't have to write a story in order – you can write the end first if you want to.

Q: I can write stories but they're not very long.

A: This is very normal too. You have lots of other things to do – I don't have to go to school – so writing short stories is fantastic. You can gradually make them longer as you get older.

Q: I don't know where to start or I get worried when I look at a blank piece of paper.

A: I'm going to give you some starting tips on the next page, but you will have ideas because EVERYONE can tell stories. Sometime a kid will say to me, 'I can't think of anything to write', and I will say, 'you are the kid who I just saw in the playground playing some incredibly imaginative acting game with your friends – when you do that, you're writing a story, you're making a screenplay, you're directing a film. All you have to do is write it down on paper.'

Q: I have ideas but I find it really hard to write them down.

A: Sometimes this is because you're worrying about your spelling or whether you're doing it 'right'. That doesn't matter in this notebook. Sometimes having a different pen is helpful – you might prefer coloured pencils, for example. If you'd much prefer to type ideas and stick them in the book, you can, or you can dictate to an adult. Or draw your idea instead.

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Q: Can adults help even though it's my notebook?

A: Of course – it's your decision. I talk through ideas with my editor, or my husband, or my children, and that's often really helpful.

Q: I like writing stories or doing drawings based on books I like – is that OK?

A: Absolutely – as long as you don't publish them that's fine. I used to write my version of the *Famous Five* called the Famous Six and I used to copy illustrations of Snoopy. Don't get frustrated, though, if your versions don't seem quite right. My Snoopy never seemed as good as the real thing, and I used to think that that meant I could never be an illustrator one day. It didn't mean that, it meant that I was only NINE...

Q: I can't make my drawings realistic

A: Drawings don't have to be realistic. If you look at professional illustrators' work, often it isn't realistic at all. If it's important that the drawing is very lifelike, then you will be able to do it eventually – it just takes practise.

Q: Do I have to write stories like your stories, with magic and mythical creatures in?

A: No you don't. Your favourite books might be based on real life situations, so you could write a book based on real life situations. You might like non-fiction books. You might like graphic novels or comics like *Tintin* or *Asterix*. I like writing fantasy books, but you can write any sort of story you like.

