

- INTERVIEW -

TIPS FOR AN ASPIRING OR STUCK WRITER



For some of us, writing is a beautiful outlet. It brings to life the pictures in our minds and the untold stories within our hearts. We carry ideas, we carry dreams, which in some cases form the foundation of our stories – sometimes unknowingly.

For those writers who wish to start a novel or are in the middle of a great idea, but are beginning to doubt the direction –don't fret! Our fellow writer, book editor and writing coach, Lara Ferrari will provide you with the inspiring nudge you need to whisk you away towards the right direction!

"I'm a cheerleader for new writers and a champion for aspiring authors! I've always loved reading and I'm fascinated by different people and places and cultures, so I see writing (and helping others with their writing) as a brilliant opportunity to explore all of that in a really fun and creative way."

Lubna: *Sometimes we have so many story ideas, how do you pick the right one?*

Lara: *I know exactly what you mean! I have a notebook full of ideas that may or may not ever go anywhere. But, when you think about it, too many ideas is a pretty great problem to have. And it's a really common one. I get asked this question a lot and the first thing I respond with is: how much do YOU love this story idea? Because writing for other people is dangerous: trends pass, the market gets saturated, stories become formulaic and predictable, and – most importantly – writers lose their passion. Passion is what keeps you going. Writing a novel is a long process... Writing your first draft could take anywhere from one month (if you're doing NaNoWriMo) to a few years (if you have pesky life commitments that get in the way). Then the editing starts! And that's all before you have to actually sell your book (if that's your goal). So you have to be sure that you can live in this world and with these characters for a long time.*

The next step is to make sure that your idea is strong enough to turn into a whole novel. That's why I created my 'Idea Tester'. It's basically five simple questions you can ask yourself to work out whether or not it's possible to turn your amazing idea into a captivating premise and, from there, into a solid plot.

Q: *A blank page can be really daunting and how does one actually make a start on a story?*

A: *Oh my gosh, blank pages are terrifying. What I always remind myself (and the writers I work with) is that there is very little chance that the first words you write will end up in the final book. You'll either re-write them before you finish your first draft, cut them completely during the developmental edit, or polish them during the line edit. So why worry about them now? No one else ever needs to see them or even know they existed. Isn't that freeing?!*

As for how to start... I can't tell you that. Every writer is different. And, probably, every story every writer writes will be different. But your general approach will depend largely on whether you're a plotter or a pantser (if you're not sure which you are, you can [take my fun quiz!](#)). Plotters are super organised and like to plan as much as possible before actually writing anything; they usually have their entire plot mapped out so they know exactly how they want to start and where they want to go. Pantser, on the other hand, are much more spontaneous and free-spirited; they usually dive straight in, sometimes at the start but it could just as likely be in the middle or at the end. They might also jump around for a while before connecting the dots. Neither way is wrong. You just have to figure out what works best for you and your creative process.

Q: Is it possible to write more than one story at a time?

A: I do know writers who work on more than one project at once. Again, I think it depends on your writing style... but I don't generally recommend it. In my experience, most writers tend to suffer from 'Shiny New Thing Syndrome', especially when they reach a difficult phase in their novel. And trust me, there is **always** a difficult phase. It's very easy to get distracted by something more exciting. Until another idea comes along and you follow **that** one. And... well, you end up never actually finishing anything.

Sometimes you do need to refill your creative well and get some distance from your novel so, when you feel that way, I'd recommend taking a break and doing something totally different. But if you absolutely **have** to write, try writing a short story instead – a smaller project with an end in sight that won't lead you down a rabbit hole and lure you away from your novel forever.

Q: What's the best way to deal with a writers block?

A: Great question. I am actually working on a resource to combat this very problem right now (watch this space). I've been researching famous authors and their own personal cures so I am currently full of brilliant ideas!

One of my favorite tips comes from Susan Dennard (**author of Truthwitch**), who focuses on her secondary characters when she gets blocked. These poor guys are often completely neglected. So if you can't work out what your Main Character should do next, think instead about what your supporting characters are up to, what they want, how they're feeling, etc. And then think about how that could impact your story.

Marissa Meyer (**author of Cinder**) suggests making a list of at least 20 things you'd love to write about, choose whatever calls to you most loudly, and then drop it into your next chapter as if you'd been planning it all along. Then watch as your characters scramble to adjust to the change!

I would add this: remember to make life difficult for your characters. No one wants to read a story where nothing much happens and everyone is happy all the time. So when you get blocked, just chuck some conflict at your characters. And then chuck some more and see how they react!

Q: Sometimes it can be hard to write with so much else going on, how do you make time? What's the best way to stay organised?

A: Try to think of your writing like a job. Sure, a super-fun job... but still a job. This is especially important if you ever want to turn your writing into a full-time career. So identify when your brain works best and dedicate that time to writing. It might mean getting up an hour earlier or sacrificing another activity but it's important to recognise that your writing is precious to you and not something you should ever feel guilty about. That's also why you should make yourself unavailable for that time. Tell your friends and family so they also understand the significance of this time. Turn your phone off. Use an app to tune out social media for a while. Hang a 'Do Not Disturb' sign if you have to!

Q: What are the top 3 things to keep in mind when writing?

A: The main thing I am always encouraging writers to think more about is 'Why'. **Why** are your characters the way they are? **Why** do they do the things they do? **Why** do they feel the way they feel? There's usually a whole host of contributing factors: how they were brought up, their experiences, their relationships, their personality type etc. Make sure you really know your characters inside and out. That goes for 'villains' too. **Why** are they getting in the way of what your hero wants? What is driving them? **Why** are they the way they are? Nobody does anything 'just because'. There should be a reason for everything. Those reasons might not always be crystal clear to your readers but you, as the writer, should always know what they are.

The second thing to keep in mind is that writing is like knocking over a row of dominoes. Every action should have consequences. Your goal should be to put your characters in awkward positions where they have to make difficult decisions – not because they have two equally lovely options but because whatever they decide will have serious consequences for the rest of the story. Make sure you fully understand those consequences before you carry on writing.

And finally, I'd say that one of the most important things to keep in mind when you're writing is that the world (any world) is a complicated place. Nothing is black and white. No one is all good or all bad. Heroes make mistakes. They even make bad choices. Equally, villains are complex creatures with their own pain and fear driving their choices. Make sure that comes across to your readers.

Q: What's the best recipe for a mind-blowing book?

A: Oh wow... isn't that just the million-dollar, New-York-Times-bestselling question?! I wish I could share the answer with you, but honestly there is no one answer. The 'recipe' (if there even is such a thing) is so different depending on what genre you're writing, what age you're writing for, and simply what kind of books you like! However, one thing they all have in common is characters. I truly believe that readers don't fall in love with plots, they fall in love with characters. So start with someone they can relate to, someone they'll root for. That means **no perfect characters**. I can't stress that enough. Make them likeable but give them flaws. Make them strong but balance that with weakness. And give your readers a reason to feel sorry for them – by being really, really mean to them! Take away the thing they want most. Put obstacles in their path at every turn. Break their heart, break their trust, break their bones! The more they suffer – and the more they triumph over their suffering – the more your readers will cheer them on. It doesn't matter if they're battling depression or dragons; if your readers care about your characters, they'll care about your story.

I recently created a very specific ['mini-website'](#) for anyone who dreams of writing a novel, but doesn't know where to start. It's full of easy-to-follow tips and tools for taking your first steps: how to find an idea, how to check if it's the 'right' idea, how to turn that idea into your all-important plot, and how to stay motivated through it all. You can also take my quiz to find out if you're a plotter or a pantsier, before you download my free Character Profile templates! They'll help you get to know your characters better, figure out their 'why' and identify exactly what will create that vital connection between them and your readers.

For more tips, as well as daily motivation and inspiration for your best writing life, just follow me on Instagram [@writinglaraFerrari](#)

Best of luck with your novel!

Lara

