



NEW WRITING  
NORTH  
YOUNG WRITERS



## Generating Great Story Ideas

Writing a story is one of the most exciting adventures you can go on – but it can be difficult to come up with the perfect idea to get started with. Staring at a blank page can be extremely daunting!

There are so many things to think about: where will you set your story? What characters will you create? What is going to happen to each of them? How will your story end? You may have lots of different ideas swirling around in your head, but not be sure how they will fit together.

It's okay not to have every element of your story decided before you start writing; sometimes the best stories will come out of something completely random, or an experiment you tried out. This workshop will help you to understand all of the components of a good story, and how to come up with some great ideas to work on.

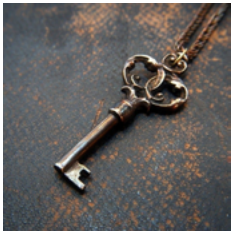
**There are exercises in this workshop that require you to use a dice. If you don't have one, you can download a dice app on your phone, use an online random number generator or even pick numbers out of a hat!**

## Warm Up:

Let's get started with a free writing task. Free writing is a great way to get your creative juices flowing; the idea is to keep writing solidly for five minutes, even in broken sentences or bullet points. It doesn't have to always make sense, as long as you don't stop writing! You'll be surprised at how many fantastic words and phrases you use when you don't think too deeply about it.

There are six pictures below, so grab your dice and roll it once. The number that your dice lands on is the picture you are going to use as inspiration for your five minutes of free writing. Let's roll:

If you roll a one:



If you roll a two:



If you roll a three:



If you roll a four:



If you roll a five:



If you roll a six:



Feeling warmed up yet? If not, roll your dice again and spend another five minutes writing about a different picture. You could even set your dice to one side and choose the picture you really hoped you would get, and spend five minutes writing about that. What is it that most intrigued you about that picture? Did you notice a story forming in your head as soon as you looked at it?

# Get Inspired:

## Extract: *Lyra's Oxford*, by Philip Pullman

Sir Philip Pullman is an English novelist best known for writing His Dark Materials, a set of fantasy books that centre around a young girl, Lyra, and the magical world she lives in. Philip Pullman is particularly good at creating worlds that his readers can really transport themselves into.

[This extract is from a book in the series called \*Lyra's Oxford\*.](#)

Some things to think about

- What do we learn about Lyra's character in the first paragraph? See if you can think of four or five adjectives to describe her personality.
- Pullman does not expect all of his readers to have been to Oxford before. How does he paint a picture of the city? Which sentences do you find particularly effective?
- How do we know that Lyra lives in a world that is not quite like ours? What clues are there?
- How does Pullman build up suspense and a sense of panic in the final paragraphs?

## The elements of a story

Whether you are writing an epic trilogy of books like Philip Pullman has, or a story that is only a page long, there are some things you need to think about:

- Genre: is this a horror story, a romance story, a fantasy story or something else? Not all stories fit neatly into a genre like this, and that's perfectly fine too.
- Location: where is your story set – in school, on a different planet, in the desert? Also think about when it is taking place. Are we 500 years in the future, way back in the Tudor era, or in the present?
- Characters: Who is going to be the main character? Do you want your readers to like them? Does your main character have friends, family members, or enemies that will also feature in the story?
- Point of view: are you telling the story from your point of view, from your main character's point of view, or somebody else's? Think about how writing from different perspectives could create different stories. For example, a bank robbery told from the perspective of the robber would be very different from the same robbery told from the perspective of the old lady who was next in line.
- Plot: What exactly happens in your story, and how does it alter the lives of the characters you have created?

Remember, short pieces of writing do not necessarily have to cover all of these points. You may decide to only have two characters, you may not tell us very much about the location and focus on the plot, or you might leave us guessing as to who is actually telling the story.

## Give it a Try:

Now you understand what kind of things you need to think about to make a great story, and you've seen how well it can be done. But what if you can't think of a good location, or don't know who to have as your main character? Our story generator worksheet is here to help.

You'll need your dice again, and this time you're going to roll it six times, one for each of the rows in the table on the next page. If you roll a two for the first line, the text in box number two is your genre. Then, if you roll a one, you pick the location in box number one. Each time you roll the dice, you are adding another element to your story.

When you have all of your elements worked out, spend approximately 30 minutes writing a story with them.

### Some things to think about

- How can you let us know what your location is without saying it? If you are on a spaceship, can you tell us that the lights on the dashboard are flashing and beeping? If you are in a traffic jam, can you explain that there are car horns beeping all around you?
- Don't start at the beginning – drop us straight into the action. Don't worry, we'll catch up!
- How are your characters going to grow as the story progresses? Readers love to go on a journey with the characters, and like it when they are stronger, wiser or kinder by the end of the story. What is going to happen to your characters to make them evolve by the end?

## Challenge Yourself:

So you left the elements of your story in the hands of your dice! Well done. Here's what you can do with it now:

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Genre	Horror	Romance	Fantasy	Thriller	Historical	Fairy tale
Location	In a school	In the middle of London	In a traffic jam	In a haunted house	At a music festival	At a theme park
Characters	Two best friends	A group of old people	An alien invader	A zookeeper and an elephant	The next prime minister	A mad scientist
Which starts...	With an explosion	With somebody crying	With a fist fight	With a song	With a knock at the door	With a mysterious envelope
And ends...	With a kiss	At the top of a mountain	With a thunderstorm	At the end of the earth	When things fall silent	When the hero dies
And includes...	A pet tarantula	A dance number	A voicemail message	A funeral scene	A bad dream	A birthday present

### Carry on with the story in your own time

Thirty minutes is not very long and you probably haven't finished your story yet. If you are enjoying it and feel like there is more to write, you can carry on with it in your own time and move onto editing when it's finished.

It's completely fine if one element that the rolling the dice gave you just won't fit into your story, no matter how much you try – just leave it out or substitute it for something else.

### Editing your work

Nobody – not even bestselling authors – writes the perfect story on their first try. Editing your work is just as important as writing it, so take some time to go back through what you've written and think about the words you have used, the feelings that your piece creates, the pace of the sentences, and whether anything should be added or taken away to make it even better.

### Follow up exercise:

Our story generator worksheet was designed to fit a range of different genres, but you might already know what topics you like to write about, or have different ideas to the ones we have included. That's great!

The last page in this document is a blank story generator worksheet for you to fill with your own ideas. That way, you can still roll the dice but be more confident that you will always land on something that you really love to write about. For example, if you are into fantasy stories you can fill all of the boxes with fantasy locations, characters and objects.

## Explore Further:

The Internet is a brilliant resource for writing prompts. This Pinterest board has over 11,000 prompts ready for you to get started with!

<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/mandycorine/writing-prompts/>

If you are a very visual person, you might like to take inspiration from photographs and illustrations that you can find online. Here are some great places to try:

[https://www.flickr.com/people/twm\\_news/](https://www.flickr.com/people/twm_news/)

The Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums has over 2,400 photographs of the local area – both old and new – on their Flickr account, which are free to use as inspiration for your stories.

<https://pixabay.com/>

<https://www.pexels.com/>

These stock image websites are full of images on a huge range of different topics. Try typing words like 'landscape', 'castle', 'happy' or 'animal' into the search bar, and see what comes up!

## Story Generator

Are you prepared to leave your next writing project up to fate?

Simply roll a dice once per row to find out your genre, location, characters

and the key elements of your story outline. There are hundreds of possible combinations!

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Genre						
Location						
Characters						
Which starts...						
And ends...						
And includes...						

This workshop was devised by Bridget Hamilton for New Writing North Young Writers.



Bridget Hamilton is a non-fiction writer and audio producer from Newcastle, who works with New Writing North on our Young Writers' City programme.

New Writing North Young Writers is a programme for young people aged 12-19. We run creative writing groups, masterclasses and programmes in schools across the North East. We support young people to express their ideas, to work with professional writers and artists, to create and share new work, and to meet other young writers.

We would love to read your writing! Share it with us on social media using #writingfromhome or by emailing [youngwriters@newwritingnorth.com](mailto:youngwriters@newwritingnorth.com). Search for New Writing North Young Writers on Instagram, Facebook or Twitter, where we will also be sharing regular writing prompts. Each week we will select a Young Writer of the Week whose work will be shared on our channels.

Find other writing workshops and much more on our website [www.newwritingnorth.com](http://www.newwritingnorth.com)

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