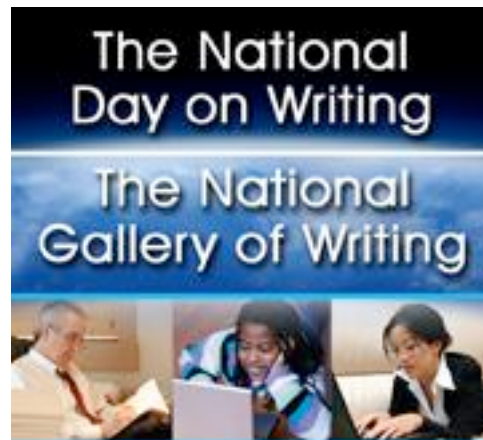


Determining What to Write About

One of the first and most important decisions for every writer is determining what to write about. Making this decision can feel overwhelming often because of long-held notions we have about what it means to be a writer. Many people believe that authors just have ideas that come to them or, worse yet, that authors are so intelligent that they are able to create something unique that has never been seen or thought of before.

In reality, neither scenario is entirely true. Most of the time, authors decide what to write about from examining their personal lives and interests or by examining the work of other authors and making parts of existing material into something new and different.



Writing about things you know and care about is important for several reasons. For one, it usually makes writing much easier: if you are writing from personal experiences, you can spend more energy on adding creative twists to a story that already exists. Second, if you are writing about something you care about, you usually have a deeper sense of the subject and will have more information from which to write. Choosing topics or experiences that you care about will develop a sense of "you" which only *you* can create.

Here are some strategies for coming up with ideas for writing:

- Make lists of topics or things that you are interested in—hobbies, issues, things, places
- Draw a floor plan of your home and make a list of three memorable events that happened in each room
- Make a list of problems that you have seen characters face in movies, TV shows, or books, and use one as the basis for your own story
- Make a list of your most memorable experiences and determine which might be the basis for a piece of writing
- Maintain a personal journal and collect thoughts and descriptions that might be used as the basis for a piece of writing
- Think about "small moments" of life to expand and explore rather than creating large, involved stories
- Read and re-read the authors that you are fond of. Look for places where you can pick up where they left off or think of how the story could be retold from a different character's perspective
- Take elements from an existing storyline from a book, movie, or play and work your own real-life or past experiences in to create a new story
- Make a list of your favorite movies or books and look for patterns in the storylines or look for storylines that can be combined or changed
- Read, read, read—all great authors are readers who constantly look for ideas from other authors

For more information:

Developing Ideas for Writing (Prewriting):

http://www.esc.edu/ESOnline/Across_ESC/WritersComplex.nsf/3CC42A422514347A8525671D0049F395/CE2B510E7D9975AE852569C3006ACCC?OpenDocument

National Council of Teachers of English
1111 W. Kenyon Road
Urbana, Illinois 61801-1096

Phone: 217-328-3870 • 800-369-6283
Fax: 217-278-3761 • Web: www.ncte.org
Email: public_info@ncte.org