

Creative Writing Skills

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Abstract:

Language is no doubt considered as one of the most substantial elements of education and literacy. In India productive skills of language are given significance of which writing is the most preferred one. It is suggested that teachers must in some way make writing a part of the learner's world. Creative writing includes writing and getting it published. The purpose of this paper is to make students, researchers and teachers aware of the simple rules that they must learn to have competence in writing creatively.

Key Words: Creativity, Writing, Skill

Creative writing skill is of utmost importance for future success in different tasks posed by life. It helps a lot in describing and understanding reality in one's own way. Creative writing is one of the highest writing skills and has to be taught at both college and university levels. Introducing creative writing in universities as a separate subject of study has been highly appreciated across the world. Before proceeding to the further and better understanding of the creative writing we should define the notion of creative writing itself. Let it be said that it is impossible to provide creative writing an authoritarian definition. 'Creative writing' comprises of two words, 'creative' as an adjective and 'writing' as a noun. According to Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary 'creative' as adjective means 'marked by the ability or power to create,' while the noun 'writing' means 'the act or process of one who writes.' The word 'writer' is almost synonymous with author. Skilled writers are able to use language to portray ideas and images, whether fiction or non-fiction. A writer may compose in many different forms including (but certainly not limited to) poetry or prose. Accordingly, a writer in specialist mode may rank as a poet, novelist, playwright, screenwriter etc. Thus, creative writing could mean writing that is imaginative rather than imitative. Creative writing is anything where the purpose is to express thoughts, feelings and emotions rather than to simply convey information.

Adele Ramet feels that the term 'creative writing' may be defined as "Having the power to create an imaginative, original literary production or composition." It simply means that the area of creative writing is very vast and almost all-inclusive. In a sense creative writing is a more contemporary and process-oriented name for what has been traditionally called literature, including all the imaginable varieties of its forms. Most of the people feel that creative writing cannot be taught, however, as a matter of fact, one must keep in mind that techniques of creative

writing can be taught. Creative writing, like any other work, can be learned; one is not born a creative writer although the creative faculty according to many people is inborn. But the art of creative writing can be acquired. That is why Nigel Watts, in his book **Teach Yourself Writing a Novel**, cogently remarks:

There is a common belief that because most of us are literate and fluent, there is no need to serve an apprenticeship if we want to become a successful wordsmith. ...That's what I thought until I tried to write my first novel, like a piece of furniture, has its own set of requirements, laws of construction that have to be learned. Just because I had read plenty of novels did not mean I could write one, any more than I could make a chair because I had sat on enough of them.

In her last novel **Daniel Deronda** (1876) George Eliot remarked, "How delightful it must be to write books after one's own taste instead of reading other peoples'." Everybody writes letters, invitations, greetings, applications for jobs etc., resumes, and the like but everyone does not feel that he can be a creative author, who can write books after one's own taste, those that can become best-sellers. Though everyone has a desire to see their name in print yet many people never think that they can be creative artists. They feel that their efforts might not be satisfying either to them or to the readers. They feel it is not an easy task. When you read a good poem or a story or a novel you feel elated and wonder how the writer has arrived at such fine images and characters and situations; how effectively has the writer used language, how natural are the dialogues? Many a time we feel like emulating this sort of success. Such inspiration can lead you towards making attempts at creative writing yourself.

Once you have decided to write see to it that you write daily, no matter what. Horace went to the extent of exhorting writers by saying, "Never a day without a line." Just as a carpenter makes tables and chairs, a goldsmith makes ornaments, a teacher teaches, in the same manner writer writes poetry, short stories, novels, books or articles. The first cardinal principle, therefore, is that you should try to write something daily. It is not material what you write. It is also likely that you would tear out the paper on which you have written something the next day when you try to scrutinize your earlier work. Even great writers in their apprenticeship period resort to this expedient so that they can improve upon their skills. You must not feel shy of writing because you feel that what you have written does not pass muster even with you. What is important is that you should devote sometime everyday for the work that you feel you want to do. Jonathan Fink, Creative Writing Fellow in Poetry, Emory University says, "The writing process teaches you discipline and strength. It 'toughens' you in the best sense of the word, allowing you to recognize the possibilities in yourself and the world around you." Hence, what is important is the building of a habit of writing, rather than the length of actual time you are able to spend on writing each day or week.

Once you have decided to become a writer remember these points. First, you must decide what you actually want to write. It is necessary that you make choice in the very beginning of

your writing career on the basis of your desires, inclinations and aptitude. Never dishearten yourself by thinking that you cannot become a writer. Modest beginning is the sure way to go up and higher. You have to start somewhere. Even great and successful writers have to start somewhere. Many people were greeted by rejection slips in the beginning of their career but they persisted and soon earned reputation. You must go on writing, rewriting, editing, head-bashing then more of the same. Thinking about what you want to write is also very necessary. Virginia Woolf went to the extent of remarking: "I walk making up phrases; sir, contriving scenes; and in short in the thick of the greatest rapture known to me." The important thing is tolerance and perseverance in the creative writer. You must not throw up your hands and say, "No, I cannot do it." Remember this advice by Linda Anderson:

Most successful writers have a high tolerance of raw, messy first drafts and a series of imperfect subsequent drafts. They know that stamina, the ability to stick with a poem or prose piece until it emerges as the best they can do, is as important as whatever talent they possess.

Suppose you want to write poetry. Then you should do the following things:

1. Read some verses of the poet or poets you have always admired and loved and whose style you want to emulate. This does not preclude reading poetry by other prominent poets of English. Read as widely as you can.
2. You must acquaint yourself with modern trends in writing poetry by reading contemporary poetry. This will help you in learning the tastes of contemporary readers.
3. Read something about the various forms or types of poetry which are written in English or the language which you want expression for your talent and ability. In English lyrics, sonnets, elegies, odes and epics and many other kinds of poetry are written. The list provided here is not exhaustive but only suggestive. Acquaint yourself with the basic principles of these and hitch upon the type of poetry you would like to write yourself.
4. Read a short history of poetry and the different poetic trends that you observe in that poetry. Remember all poets cannot be proficient in all forms of poetry; they usually make a choice and stick to it.
5. Read about various stanza forms and techniques of poetry, like rhythm, melody and diction. These technical aspects of poetry are very important or else you would land yourself in immense trouble.
6. You must never feel shy of your juvenilia and early efforts because they are the stepping stones of better work to come. Never think that you are not good enough for the work that you have chosen.
7. Keep a diary in which you can note down some memorable phrases that you come across in others or that occur to you.
8. Read some of the magazines that publish poetry so that you can acquaint yourself with the type of work they like to publish. This will avoid your receipt of unnecessary rejection slips.

Linda Anderson in **Creative writing: A Work Book with Readings**, (quoting Melanie Ashby) says that the poet Ruth Padel, has described the process of creating a poem as a sequence of well-marked stages:

1. Keep a file of interesting phrases and images – add to it when something engages you or has a charge.
2. Block your poem out roughly, consulting your file to see if anything belongs. This is the modeling stage, when like a sculptor, you're gathering materials and working them up.
3. Let yourself be led by how the words want to be. This is the initial stage when you let yourself out.
4. Next, again like a sculptor, trying to see the image imprisoned in the stone, start chipping away and discarding.
5. Learn the poem by heart; recite it to yourself to see if it sounds right.
6. Finally, check every word, comma, line break, and ask yourself if they are a absolutely necessary.

Thus, it can take many drafts to get the poem right. Prose writers are also required to revise their work repeatedly to get the idea right. One of the most prolific of living writers, Joyce Carol Oates, is often thought of as an 'effortless' writer because of her vast output: eighty books, including novels and short story collections, poetry and essays. But the fact is that she writes by hand, starting stories countless times, making comments as she goes, often producing as many as a thousand pages notes for every 250 printed pages, as writer Marie Arana in **The Writing Life: Writers on How they think and Work**, says. Thus, rewriting is a secret of success for an up and coming and even an established writer.

Another point to be remembered by a creative writer is that he should not be impatient and curse himself if he is not able to produce his finished work in quick time. You must not forget that the work of a creative writer is like that of a musician or artist who has to undergo long and arduous training before he can hope of performing in public. Further, they have to keep themselves in constant practice to keep up their art alive. Mastering the art of writing is also a labour-consuming task. After all the writer is expected to write in a distinctive style which would become his 'signature.'

Once a decision has been made by you, you should start your work in right earnest and sincerely. In this connection the following points may be helpful:

1. You must keep strictly the schedule for your writing assignments. Devote an hour or so to nurture your talent every day. Even fifteen minutes daily can be sometimes enough. Unavoidable situations apart you must always devote sometime to your creative effort even if you produce nothing.
2. You must share your creative work with your friends, class mates and peers and even teachers. Their comments would help you in a constructive way.

3. You must insist on these readers of your creative work to give you their objective and candid opinion without fear or favour about your creative efforts. Usually parents are not good critics of the creative work of their children because they always feel good about them. But their encouragement may also help you in improving your work.
4. You must accept even the adverse criticism of people very gracefully and graciously. You must not feel hurt or disheartened if some people do not speak well of your efforts. Such criticism prompts you to work better and improve.
5. You must try to revise your work on the basis of the suggestions and criticism offered by your friends and companions and even elders. This is the surest way to better your performance. You must remember that practice makes a man perfect.
6. Remember that you must make original writing though unconsciously you might echo someone. But do not intentionally plagiarize. You must remember echo and plagiarism are two radically different things.
7. You must keep in mind that while doing serious creative work you must relax as well. This relaxation puts off pressures that tie the mind.
8. Never listen to the remarks that by doing creative writing you are wasting your valuable time.

To become a creative writer you have to equip yourself with many important things:

1. You must earmark a corner in a room in your house where you can do our writing work. Carol Whitely in **The Everything Creative Writing Book**, says, “You need a place where you can write comfortably and where your material will be safe from prying eyes, jelly-dripping fingers (except your own), and constant interruption.” You must not insist on having a well-furnished study with all modern gadgets at your command. Such things can come in due course. Remember such a great novelist as Jane Austen (1775-1817) never boasted of even a separate room to work on her fiction. She used to write on back of envelopes and scarp paper. And when some guest arrived she would simply hide these papers from public view. Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) could not afford a room of her own where she could write. R. K. Narayan (1906-1991) only needed a typewriter in the beginning. His father laughingly called his typewriter a “roadroller.” Since he did not have sufficient space for his writing work at his home he used to go to the students’ Union room in his college to give himself space for writing. Adele Ramet, in her study **Creative Writing** tells us about a Mills and Boon writer that once she had made up her mind to become a novelist, she turned one room of her house into a study, locked the room and forbade anyone to enter while she was working. All people cannot go that far so the minimum requirement is a table with some writing material. The important thing is that you must have some space solely for your writing work.

Another thing to be noted is that different people want different sort of workplace. My daughter could not read or study unless some music was playing in her room. To her sound of music was not a distraction but a welcome companion. This can be so with many creative

writers as well. On the other hand there might be many who would consider such music or any sort of sound as sure distraction.

2. Keeping of a diary is also highly recommended. You must keep a notebook with you on which you can jot down ideas as they come. Many writers insist on keeping diaries. An aspiring writer should make it a point to keep a diary with him always. And if any idea or incident strikes him he should jot it down in his diary though it might not be immediately of any use to you.
3. There is no age to start one's writing career. Literature has been written by all sorts of people, old, young and children. One American writer named Cyrus Colter (born 1910), who wrote the famous collection **Beach Umbrella and Other Stories** started writing after his retirement. There are other many late bloomers in English as well. Many writers have published their first major work late in life. There are many child prodigies as well. They have written books that have found their way to being published. One of the earliest child writers we can reference is Francis Hawkins, who in 1641, at the age of 8, wrote a book called **Youths Behaviour or Decency in Conversations Amongst Men**. Many visually impaired people have also written great literature. The most important names that come to mind are Milton in English literature and Surdas in Hindi literature.
4. Begin your work by re-reading what you wrote the previous day because it would give your thoughts a continuity that is very necessary. It might help you in improving on your earlier effort as well.
5. Novelist Fay Weldon once remarked, "all a writer needs is a pencil and a piece of paper and a corner and nobody noticing and the desire to do it; that is all it takes." But there are a few other tools that a writer will require. Always keep at your elbow one or two good dictionaries, a spelling dictionary and a thesaurus and if possible, some encyclopedia or other reference works. A reference grammar can also be helpful in cases of doubts of construction. In this way you can choose the right word for your ideas.

To be true and honest we can say that the main difference between a creative writer and somebody scribbling a few information articles and then getting them published is the ability to mould and shape language, using it as more than a mere tool for communication. A skilled creative writer can infuse even the most boring subject with life and generate emotion, even controversy. Such a writer can use language figuratively. This skill is self-explanatory for creative writers including poets and fiction writers, but is even truer for academic as well as technical writers.

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