



# A Guide to... setting up your own writing club

## Bookbite

A writing club might just be you and a neighbour getting together every now and then and talking about your writing over a cup of tea; it might be a larger group of your friends and family; it might be a local group that already meets at the local library that you can join. It should be whatever works best for you.

### WHAT'S THE POINT OF A WRITING CLUB?

Being in a writing club is great if you:

- Want motivation to write
- Want to gain confidence with your writing
- Want to talk through your ideas for a story or a poem you're working on
- Want to meet up with like-minded people
- Want to get ideas and inspiration for new work.

### HOW DO I SET ONE UP?

To set up a group, you might:

- Talk to your friends and family and see if anyone is interested in writing. You may find it's something other people have been meaning to do for ages – or something they already do! Invite them around for an evening or an afternoon.
- If you're part of something like a bingo club or the local British Legion, ask if you can put an advert on a noticeboard to let people know you're starting a writing club.
- See if your local library already runs a book club. It might be a fun group to join anyway, and members of a book club are likely to be interested in writing too.

- Alternatively, see if your local library or community centre would like to start a writing club, if they don't have one already. If you have a few people interested already they might be happy to let you use the library as a venue, and advertise for more members too.

### HOLDING YOUR FIRST MEETING

There aren't any hard and fast rules for holding a writing club. The important thing is that all members of your group feel happy and relaxed.

If you're meeting at home, have some tea and biscuits ready, or whatever you prefer. Even if you're meeting at a library, take some snacks along. You've got to feed that creative brain of yours!

Decide how long the meeting will last and stick to it. Between one and two hours is probably best, depending on the size of the group. Try and make sure you don't get disturbed. Make sure everyone has pens and paper.

If you're starting with a group with new people, have a round of introductions. Get everyone to say their name, a funny fact about themselves and what they're looking to get from being in the group.

If you're all friends already, tell each other your earliest memory of writing. Was it positive, negative or indifferent? What bearing (if any) have these early experiences had on your writing today?

## SHARING WORK

In a writing group it is very important that everyone feels comfortable and safe in sharing their work with each other. As with any creative activity, writing feels very personal, and we all feel sensitive about sharing it with others.

Let yourselves build confidence over time, and be really positive to each other when you do share. Know that you don't have to share your work every time if you don't want to.

When you are sharing work with each other, be considerate and constructive. Giving feedback is important. Starting a sentence with "I liked the way you..." or "It reminded me of..." is good. Ask questions too. "Can you explain the part when..." or "What are you happiest with in your work?" "What are you not sure about?" can all prompt useful discussion. To give good feedback you just have to be thoughtful and good listeners.

You all might have writing to share straightaway in your first session, in which case, be fair and give everyone the same amount of time to talk about what they've been doing. Let people read their work aloud, or if they don't feel comfortable doing that, suggest someone else read it for them. Another way of showing people your writing is to make photocopies and pass them around.

Play some writing games, and then if anyone wants to share the writing produced in the game, they can. Try and do some writing every time you meet up.

## WRITING GAMES FOR YOUR GROUP

### WHO/WHAT/WHERE/WHEN

As a group, call out a list of 6 people's names, 6 occupations (bank robber, child actor, plumber, bored housewife...), 6 times in history (yesterday, 1066, 2054, 10 minutes from now...) and 6 locations (France, the kitchen cupboard, Mars, a robin's nest...). Write down all the lists somewhere everyone can see, or write them all down individually. You now have 10-15 minutes to choose one entry from each column and combine them into a story.

### TAKE TWO

Secretly choose two very well-known characters from TV or film and combine them in a different story scenario to the ones they're usually found in, then see if the rest of the group can guess who they are when you read your story aloud. For instance, Peggy Mitchell and Rhet Butler find themselves in a jungle. What happens? How did they get there? What *would* Peggy do in a jungle? Have no more than 20 minutes to write something.

### FOOD GLORIOUS FOOD

Take turns to bring in an interesting food object and take 10 minutes to write about it using all your senses as fully as possible. Smell it, taste it, look at it, touch it, listen to it (if it makes any noise, like a fizzy drink might). What memories does it bring to mind?