

DEPTFORD LITERATURE FESTIVAL AT HOME

Four Deptford Literature Festival writers and artists, Laurie Bolger, Nadine Matheson, Tice Cin and Khairani Barokka, have created writing and creative activities for you to do at home, based on their events at Deptford Literature Festival.

Deptford Literature Festival celebrates Deptford and Lewisham's creativity and diversity through words, stories and performance and takes place on Saturday 18 March 2023.

Deptford Literature Festival is run by Spread the Word and is funded by Arts Council England.

deptfordlitfest.com
#DeptfordLitFest



CONTENTS



CREATIVE WRITING AND MINDFULNESS

with Laurie Bolger (suitable for all aged 8+) p 2



OUR EVERCHANGING SELVES

by Khairani Barokka p 7



I KNOW A SPOT: FOOD AND PLACE

by Tice Cin p 13



TIME TO FILL A BLANK PAGE

by Nadine Matheson p 17

CREATIVE WRITING AND MINDFULNESS

with Laurie Bolger



A photo of Laurie, a white women in a lilac sweatshirt, wearing glasses with mid-length blonde/brown hair. She is looking to right and smiling sitting in front of a floral cup and saucer of tea and slice of cake.

Hi! My name's Laurie Bolger and I'm a Lewisham-based writer...I can't wait to guide you through some mindful scribbling. Wherever you may be in the world this one is for YOU!

All you're going to need is something to write with (colours too if you have them!) and something to write on... if you'd prefer to scribble using a phone or tablet you can do that too...oh, and a comfy space to let your imagination do its thing....

The main thing to remember is...

NOTHING IS WRONG

Sometimes it helps to take a few deep breaths...perhaps even meditate a little before putting your pen to paper. Take some time to be quiet and focus on your brilliant body. A bit like you would if you were about to plunge your body into cold water...then, without thinking too hard...dive in!

YOU DO YOU

Move your pen without worrying about being 'right' or 'good'. Messy is best!

You can scribble in whatever way you feel most excited by. This can include: drawing your ideas, writing lists, writing a continuous page of text, trying a rap or story...as long as your pen is moving please do it your way.

DON'T THINK TOO HARD

I write along to music a lot. I love the way the sounds react with my writing and how the artist not only keeps me company but stops me thinking too hard!

TUNES!

Here's a playlist to keep your ideas moving. Find it on Spotify (bit.ly/3ycJLq1) or Apple Music (bit.ly/41NQdkM).

SPOTIFY



APPLE MUSIC



INTRODUCTION

Write down how you are feeling today in one word followed by something that makes you feel calm:

eg...happy bubble bath...sad park bench...messy kettle...excited yoga mat...anything goes!

This is your calm poet name badge. So, who are you!?



ARRIVE

Our next task is to get cosy in your writing space. Grab a blanket or smell you like. Maybe a snack. Whenever you are in the world sit still. Tune into your body, your breath and heart...notice:

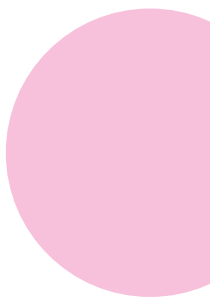
FIVE things you can see (anything in your space)

FOUR things you can hear (you can close your eyes for this)

THREE things you can smell (and this! Really breathe it in!)

TWO things you can touch (feel your clothes on your skin, the seat under you, the quality of the air)

ONE thing you can taste (yum)





WARM-UP

This works well on a totally clean sheet of paper... all we are doing is making some marks so I often ignore any lines or turn the paper on its side so I can really let myself go!

NOW hit play on our playlist or using any song you absolutely love to dance to take your pen for a spin.

As you arrive at the paper let yourself write or draw any scribbles, shapes, memories, maybe a cheeky to-do list so you can really clear your head and enjoy the rest of the tasks without worrying about a thing!

Admire your masterpiece and possibly frame it.



TASK ONE

Now we've got our pens moving let's get our senses involved and have a think about journeys...

Here is a poem by the brilliant Hannah Lowe who is travelling to her favourite place for an Early Morning Swim taking in every single beautiful thing... images, memories and all the senses as she goes.

Read 'Early Morning Swim' by Hannah Lowe: bit.ly/3YoYusu

What happens if you map your own journey either in your head or on the page?... what do you notice?... look above you... below... left... right...

The end destination can be somewhere you travel to a lot... something as simple as the local shop where you buy the good oranges, your dance class or your Gran's house.... all you have to do is notice everything on the way!



TASK TWO

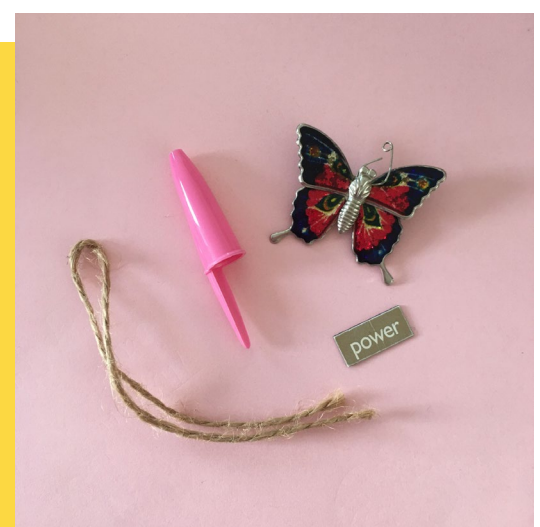
After all that travelling let's stop for a mini-write...

Finding some objects in your space (the smaller the better) and one word of choice, write for three minutes. Try to include each object as well as the word in a mini story/poem.

If you're writing in a group feel free to swap objects and share your instant 'mini-writes'.

Remember a pen-lid can be a tunnel, a petal can be a fingernail and the word flower could mean a star jump!

Lovely.



Picture description: A piece of string, a pink pen lid, a butterfly brooch and a small 'tile' saying 'power', on a pink background.



TASK THREE

Talking of 'things' let's have a read of the brilliant 'A Portable Paradise' by Roger Robinson. Roger is thinking about what Paradise might look like if he tipped it out in front of him.

Read 'A Portable Paradise' by Roger Robinson: bit.ly/41OmHv4

Your mission is to draw your own portable paradise as if it were in a little jar...you can add anything from animals, people, sounds, foods, your favourite hobbies, weather, clothing, memories and souvenirs!

Here's some more inspiration from one of my favourite artists Basia Wesolowska:



Picture description: Three small glass bottles: the first contains a tiny house on top of a rock, the second, a circus tent suspended in a pink cloud above pink and yellow tulips, and the third a wooden house on top of a tall scaffold structure.



TASK FOUR

Let's get visual and use some emojis to come up with some more mini-writes...remember not to think too hard just hop from emoji to emoji challenging yourself to find strange meaning in each....you might find you write a story or stay dreamlike and strange! Go for it!



Poodle dog



Lightning flash



Hot dog



Circus tent



Gaming controller



Ballet shoes



Slice of pie



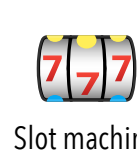
Rollerskate



Clapperboard



Microphone



Slot machine



Yellow hazard sign



Hedgehog



Paw prints



Scooter



Shiny CD



Yellow sponge



Padlock and key



TASK FIVE

This is a lovely poem to finish on...

Read 'Small Kindnesses' by Danusha Laméris: bit.ly/3F1pGqa

After reading 'Small Kindnesses' by Danusha Laméris why not try writing your own note to a stranger and leaving it somewhere. Don't add your name or details, keep it totally anonymous. Write what you might need to hear today... let it go.



You made it! Now go and make yourself a lovely drink or have a bath or find whatever your calm poet name badge says! Breathe in some fresh air! We'd love to see some of your work using the hashtag **#DeptfordLitFest**



ABOUT LAURIE BOLGER

Laurie Bolger is a London-based writer. Her work has featured at Glastonbury Festival, the Royal Albert Hall, TATE, Sky Arts & BBC platforms. Her poems have appeared in *The Poetry Review*, *The London Magazine* & *Moth*.

Laurie has been running creative workshops for the past decade encouraging people to celebrate their own unique voices & is founder of The Creative Writing Breakfast Club, bringing people to write together every Sunday morning, 10am via Zoom.

Laurie has written for major brands, charities & visual artists. She is currently working on her second book, *Lady*, a collection of poems celebrating autonomy, love & her working class Irish heritage.

Website: lauriebolger.com

Instagram: [@lauriebolger](https://www.instagram.com/lauriebolger)

Twitter: [@lauriebolger](https://twitter.com/lauriebolger)



Picture description: A photo of Laurie, a white woman in a lilac sweatshirt, wearing glasses and with mid-length blonde/brown hair, sipping from a china teacup.



OUR EVERCHANGING SELVES

by Khairani Barokka

Hello, and thank you for joining me for this series of writing prompts!

At Deptford Lit Fest, I'll be speaking on disability poetics, which is a vast field, and is a beautiful lens with which to describe how it is to be human. When you take into account the thousands of languages there are in the world with which we can describe ourselves, with different poetic traditions, there is no one single way to describe ourselves, and there is thus no one 'disability poetics'. Furthermore, I truly believe that disability poetics matters to everyone, regardless of whether you identify as being disabled. It is about how we categorise all human beings, including ourselves, in ways that are harmful or nurturing, in ways that open our minds poetically.

To check out more work by deaf and/or disabled poets, I've included prompts to explore work by our communities below, in between the writing prompts.

A part of disability poetics is acknowledging that all of us are constantly changing, mutable; our bodyminds (a term we often use to acknowledge that 'mind' and 'body' are indelibly intertwined, rather than separate categories) surprise even ourselves. All bodyminds are valid bodyminds, and all contain multitudes of poetry in them. The exercises that follow acknowledge our varied and changing kinds of selves. They invite you to reflect on personal changes of all kinds, exploring your bodymind, time, and archives through wordplay; I hope that they will be, above all, be fun and fruitful for you.

I'm mindful that for some of us, certain changes are painful, and I wouldn't want you to write about anything you don't wish to in the prompts that follow – if certain topics regarding change are too difficult, you can focus on, for instance, how your sense of humor has changed (mine has become more wry and barbed with age!) or changes in your mindset or outlook, or fashion tastes, or culinary tastes... There are so many different parts of our physiology and emotional makeup, and how we live in the homes that are our bodyminds.

The following exercises are explorations of the self, our social worlds, and our emotional worlds. What you gain from these exercises will be, I hope, an even deeper knowledge of the self, and the ability to bring more mindfulness to how we think about our own bodyminds, and that of others.

All you need for these are a timer, and whatever device you use to write or record yourself – whether recording your sign language poetry via video, or a pen and paper, or a voice notes app, or any other assistive device that aids in creativity.

Wishing you moments of warmth and joy as you do these! In between, I'm interspersing set times for Disability Poetics Exploration Prompts, to get you better acquainted with journals and sources that focus on disability poetics. These prompts have no time constraints – feel free to peruse the links at will, for as long as you'd like, returning to them whenever you'd like.

Let's start with the first **Disability Poetics Exploration Prompt: Zoeglossia**. Check out the great work this journal and community organisation does. I recommend scrolling through their curated Poem of the Week listings: bit.ly/3LOSXp.

When you've had a look, you can begin the first poetic prompt.



1. SHAPESHIFTING

Exercise:

We are all change personified. Examine photographs or recordings from the past of yourself over time. Choose one to three depictions of yourself – photographs, recordings, perhaps even texts you wrote – from different periods of your past.

These can be as far away from now as a baby photo of yourself, or something you scribbled yesterday.

Set your timer to ten minutes and freewrite about these depictions. Freewriting means you're just unleashing whatever you have in you, without spending time editing – an unfiltered stream of consciousness. Because we are acknowledging different kinds of bodyminds, 'freewriting' can mean speaking into a voice memo app, recording yourself signing, or however you choose to record your self-expression, with whatever senses are best for you.

If you're having trouble thinking of something to freewrite, try doodling or signing or speaking things that may seem nonsensical, just anything that comes up in your mind, or the words 'I'm having trouble writing this', repeatedly, until something comes up.

Questions to think about, that may help your freewriting:

- *What emotions do you feel looking at each? Why?*
- *What was going on in your life at the time your personal artefact(s) was taken? What was different about your life compared to now? What was the same?*
- *What changes does looking at the past tell you about your life journey?*
- *How would you describe each artefact physically – for instance: as a collection of data represented as a voice recording that's super high-pitched compared to your voice now, or perhaps as a series of pixels recorded on your phone and saved in a digital album? How would you describe your artefact(s) in more detail to someone?*
- *How would you describe the part of yourself that is recorded, in as much detail as possible? When thinking about changes, you can think about changes or consistencies with regards to your bodymind, from whether your height has changed to your way of thinking.*
- *Why was the recording, photo, or other archival artefact taken? What does this tell you about the person you were then?*
- *To go even more meta, how we deal with changes to our bodies changes in itself. Has how you've dealt with change shifted from the time of the document(s) you chose to now? If so, how?*

When the ten minutes are up, take a five-minute break – get some tea or water, relax for a bit. Then read through what you've written.

Now write a poem based on your freewriting: about the artefact(s), how you feel about them, what they represent, and how you've changed, or stayed the same, comparing then and now (or each time period to the next, if you're working with more than one artefact).

Disability Poetics Exploration Prompt

Poem-Films and Audio from *Stairs and Whispers: D/deaf and Disabled Poets Write Back* (Nine Arches) was co-edited by Sandra Alland, Daniel Sluman, and myself. It was a multimedia anthology, with poem-films a key part of the book, and the very first anthology in the UK edited entirely by disabled people.

We have a free Soundcloud channel with audio of poets reading from the book:

bit.ly/41N19z5

And also have a free YouTube playlist of the poem-films, with various captioned and audio described versions:

bit.ly/3mxPy6l



2. AN INTIMATE EKPHRASIS

Exercise:

'Ekphrasis' means writing about another artform. Choose an example, whether literary, visual, aural, or any other form of art or media, in which you recognised that a bodymind was 'like you'. If you've never found this in someone else's art, imagine it exists.

This can be a depiction of someone with your bodymind type, or who has elements of your bodymind type (such as a mental health condition you live with, or another chronic health condition), or someone of your gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic background, or age, to name a few examples. Even a depiction of someone with your haircut!

Set your timer to ten minutes and freewrite.

Questions that may aide you in freewriting:

- *What is similar between you and the depiction of the person you chose? What isn't?*
- *Do you think this depiction helps people understand you or your community?*
- *When you observe the depiction you chose, what does it tell you about what makes you feel understood or not understood? Why?*
- *Imagine you are interacting with this person and telling them about your similarities or differences. What would you say?*
- *What does your choice of artwork or depiction say about your thoughts on 'representation'?*

At the end of the ten minutes, take a five-minute comfort break. Come back to your writing, read what you freewrote, and write a poem based on your recorded thoughts.

Disability Poetics Exploration Prompt

Deaf Poets Society, 'an online journal of deaf and disabled literature and art'. They're on hiatus, but have an extensive archive to enjoy, including audio of readings. deafpoetsociety.com



3. AGAINST ALL FORMS OF ABLEISM

People from what I like to call the majority world – others may say 'Global South' or 'global majority' – have a different understanding of ableism than is usually touted by others. Talila Lewis' working definition of ableism, written with the input of other global majority disabled people, is as follows, and it's the closest public definition I've found to how I perceive that word:

able-ism /'ābə,lizəm/ noun

A system of assigning value to people's bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, productivity, desirability, intelligence, excellence, and fitness. These constructed ideas are deeply rooted in eugenics, anti-Blackness, misogyny, colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism. This systemic oppression that leads to people and society determining people's value based on their culture, age, language, appearance, religion, birth or living place, "health/wellness", and/or their ability to satisfactorily re/produce, "excel" and "behave." You do not have to be disabled to experience ableism.

– Working definition by @TalilaLewis, updated January 2022, developed in community with disabled Black/negatively racialized folk, especially @NotThreeFifths.

Read more: bit.ly/ableism2022

From: bit.ly/3YoeFq4

To the ideas listed in the second sentence I would add casteism, and I am sure there are many other culturally-specific markers that mark one as 'better' than another.

Think about how you have been made to feel more than or less than another, through any of the arbitrary values listed above. When have you been made to feel you 'excel' or 'behave' in a way that is 'better' than others, in a way that you don't think is entirely correct? For instance, on my part, colonialism and its persistence into the present has meant my fluency in English affords me more economic opportunities than family or friends who aren't. That this trait makes me somehow 'better' than peers who are fluent in many more Indonesian languages, for instance, is ludicrous. Yet it is a fact.

Exercise:

Set your timer to ten minutes, and really explore the definition of 'ableism' above and how it may pertain to your life.

Some questions that might help you along:

- *What parts of your bodymind do you think society erroneously regards as 'better' or 'worse', and what do you say in response to these norms?*
- *How does society ingrain these false beliefs of superiority or inferiority in people?*
- *How might we unconsciously play into these false beliefs at times?*
- *What might set us right in these moments?*
- *Based on your answers to the questions above, how might you write about your own value system, and your own notion of the beauty and worthiness of every single bodymind?*

At the end of the ten minutes, take a five-minute comfort break. Come back to your writing, read what you freewrote, and write a poem based on your recorded thoughts.

Disability Poetics Exploration Prompt

Wordgathering: A Journal of Disability Poetry and Literature. Chock-full of all kinds of writing, their poetry section is always a delight, and includes audio recordings.

Check out their latest issue here: bit.ly/3IVugHP



4. INSIDE THE BODYMIND

One of the main ways I understand the interconnectedness of all parts of ourselves, rather than a mind/body duality, is when I think about us experiencing strong emotions.

When we're upset, water actually comes out of our eyes – a phenomenon that might actually seem quite strange to other members of the living world, especially ones without eyeballs! – and our whole physiology changes. Our breathing pattern becomes ragged, our voices may crack, our throats may clench. How could one possibly separate 'mind' from 'body' when we think about being terribly sad?

Conversely, when we're joyful, and laugh, the way oxygen moves through our chests changes, our whole face is altered. When we say 'our spirits are lifted', that is echoed in our light we may feel in our bodies.

Exercise:

Set your timer for ten minutes, and recall at least one time when you were experiencing a strong emotion – jot down all the things that your bodymind was doing in the moment.

You could look back to a time you felt calm, angry, sleepy, tired, proud, relieved, the list goes on...

Something that may help is to do an 'imaginary body scan' when you think about what is happening all across your bodymind when you feel something strongly. Choose an emotion or a state of being, and then, starting from the very top of your head downwards, list what is happening to that part of the bodymind.

At the end of the ten minutes, take a five-minute break. Then return to read what you freewrote, and write a poem based on your musings.

I hope you've enjoyed these exercises, and know you can return to them whenever you'd like! Part of change and being human is the understanding that we'll never return to the same writing prompts and create exactly the same kind of poetry. Writing is a way to record our internal fluctuations, and hopefully, help us understand that our emotions are important, and our bodyminds are precious – each of us worthy of love, care, and understanding for each and every aspect of the vessel we live in.



ABOUT KHAIRANI BAROKKA

Khairani Barokka is a Minang-Javanese writer and artist from Jakarta, now based in London, and is Editor of *Modern Poetry in Translation*.

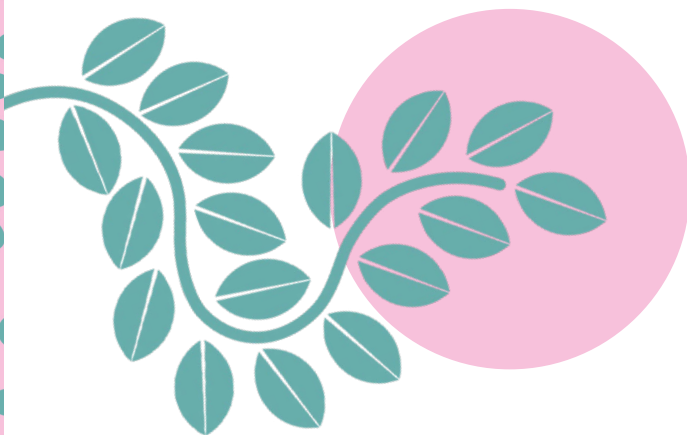
Her work has been presented widely internationally, and centres disability justice as anticolonial praxis. Among Okka's honours, she was a UNFPA Indonesian Young Leader Driving Social Change for arts practice and research, an NYU Tisch Departmental Fellow, *Modern Poetry in Translation's* Inaugural Poet-in-Residence, and Associate Artist at the UK's National Centre for Writing.

Her books include *Rope* (Nine Arches, 2017), *Indigenous Species* (Tilted Axis, 2016), co-edited volume *Stairs and Whispers: D/deaf and Disabled Poets Write Back* (Nine Arches, 2017), shortlisted for a Saboteur Award, and her most recent book, poetry collection *Ultimatum Orangutan* (Nine Arches, 2021), shortlisted for the Barbellion Prize. Her creative nonfiction book *Annah, Infinite* is forthcoming from Tilted Axis.



Picture description: A black and white photo of an Indonesian woman in profile, with short hair, a visible silver earring and dark dress.

Picture credit: Matthew Thompson.



I KNOW A SPOT: FOOD AND PLACE

with Tice Cin



Author Tice Cin smiles knowingly above her head. She is a woman with long brown hair and large gold hoop earrings. She wears a yellow off-the-shoulder dress. She sits on and is surrounded by Ottoman style geometrically printed chairs in a Turkish restaurant in North London. A food fridge with marinated meats is behind her.



INTRODUCTION

Hey, it's Tice Cin, welcoming you to a pleasant table of thoughts!

We often associate the places we know deeply with the foods that make it. What does it mean to archive foods that make a place through writing?

If you consider FoodTok (Food TikTok) and hyperlocal food critics on YouTube like The Chicken Connoisseur – having a strong sense of food's importance can help us to map out our world. Poets such as Romalyn Ante create vignettes of their own culture through the food in their work.

If we look at food imagery from the likes of artist Olivia Twist, or musical explorations of food in ends from people like JME – it is clear that food is a means to capture a picture of our communities.

The way that we can locate the things that make a place is increasingly at risk, due to gentrification, social isolation and labour imbalances, what does it then mean to consider food? Food can be political, food is comfort, food is an everyday necessity.

In some writing, detailed sensory food descriptions can capture an audience and bring them to travel to taste with you, like Edmund eating Turkish Delight in *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*.

Join us to think about food and write with it.



WARM-UP EXERCISE

Close your eyes or turn them away from your writing materials. Build an image in your mind of a sensory food experience – either one that you have taken part in or one that you have noticed in a film or other media. Imagine the sensations of eating, preparing or being around that food item. As the image in your mind builds, ask yourself, what is this food experience revealing about the environment around it?

Feel free to leave yourself some notes after this in case anything intriguing has come to mind.

(suggested time: 4 minutes minimum)



SHORT WRITING EXERCISE: WHERE AM I ON THIS PLATE?

It's always fun for me to start my writing process with a free write. Give yourself 5 minutes where you write without pausing, springboarding from the top with the question 'Where am I on this plate?'.

Allow yourself to write any of the stray thoughts or sensations that come to mind. You can let things get surreal. You can end up doodling. The key thing is not to focus on it making sense, but instead to get the pen flowing with anything that the question sparks for you.

(suggested time: 5 minutes minimum)

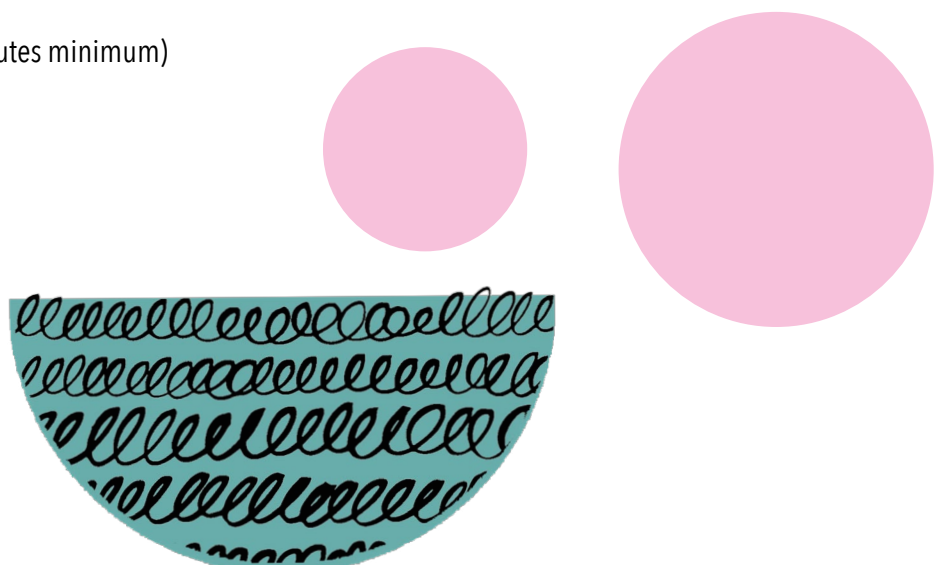


EXTENDED WRITING EXERCISE 1: FOOD AS A CONSTANT

In my essay and soundscape 'Food as a Babysitter' in *Vittles*, I write about the inherent way that food and its adaptability can bring us a soothing constant.

Write about a food item that you have returned to frequently in your time, and what about that makes it a soothing constant. Think closely around what repetition in food can mean.

(suggested time: 20 minutes minimum)





EXTENDED WRITING EXERCISE 2: FOOD TOUR

Find a food video online that you emulate the language of and subvert – so that it is translated for your own audience. Write a virtual tour of a stock cupboard or local food institution, invite us into your space. You can use the suggested videos below if you would rather.

If you are struggling to find a video of your own, here are some you can refer to:

The Pengest Munch Ep. 6: Chick King (Tottenham) bit.ly/41RFKVg

Nigella Bites: Home Alone (S01E04) bit.ly/3kRNPJa

(suggested time: 30 minutes minimum)



EXTENDED WRITING EXERCISE 3: PORTRAIT OF A COMMUNITY

Read 'Group Portrait at the Stopover' by Romalyn Ante. Write a poem or short story that creates a portrait of a group of people, using food to build a picture of their place in the world. In Romalyn's poem she refers to an 'elders' kitchen' as defined by softening tapioca pearls. What details will your portrait include?

Read: 'Group Portrait at the Stopover' by Romalyn Ante

bit.ly/3IXCGi5

(Suggested time: 30 minutes minimum)



EXTENDED WRITING EXERCISE 4: FOOD VS THE WORLD

Songs often write about food as a metaphor for other social considerations – for example 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner' by Black Uhuru, or 'Domates Biber Patlıcan' by Barış Manço. I recently saw a production of 'Bougie Lanre's Boulangerie' by Kareem Parkins-Brown. It is described as 'Putting the "cuss dem" in customer, through ingenious wordplay and graphic visuals, Kareem exposes a world of raging waiters, kind cooks, rude customers and gentrifying pop-ups that will have you laughing and might just make you reconsider how you behave in restaurants.' Recently fashion brand Labrum had a show in Brixton Market, a powerful statement against Brixton's gentrification.

Write a piece that uses food and its assorted condiments to prove a political or social point around something that you, or a fictional you, believe in strongly.

Suggested tunes while you write:

Barış Manço – Domates Biber Patlıcan

Quantic feat. Spanky Wilson – Don't Joke With a Hungry Man

Black Uhuru – Guess Who's Coming to Dinner

(suggested time: 15 minutes)





FURTHER RESOURCES AND PROMPTS

- Read through the *Stay Home Diary* blog found on the Bitter Melon press website: bit.ly/3EWoBAb

Within, read the 13 April 2020 entry by Anna Sulan Masing:

"Home, mothering, food are ideas that (can) be linked and intertwined and get caught up with nostalgia and memory – especially within migrant communities where feeding is often the work of aunties, older sisters and mothers. Food is a way to build a sense of belonging in a new space; coating the air, your mouth, your memories in familiarity. But nostalgia can make static mothers and home, make identity singular."

Create your own food diary.

- Read this interesting article on food, childhood and the meanings we assign to it in *Skin Deep Magazine*: bit.ly/3JhN9WF

"I have savored every bite since childhood, as the recipe morphs into a dish I consume so very rarely in my life."

- Listen to the album *MM...FOOD* by MF DOOM and consider what a wider linked food project could look like.
- Read *The Food On Our Table – London*: spreadtheword.org.uk/read-the-food-on-our-table
- Read artist Olivia Twist talking about food as joyful protest: bit.ly/3mxZ8qx



ABOUT TICE CIN

Tice Cin is an interdisciplinary artist from north London. A London Writers Award winner, her work has been published by Extra Teeth and Skin Deep and commissioned by places like Battersea Arts Centre and St Paul's Cathedral. An alumnus of Barbican Young Poets, she now creates digital art as part of Design Yourself – a collective based at the Barbican Centre – exploring what it means to be human when technology is changing everything. A producer and DJ, she is releasing an EP, *Keeping the House*, to accompany her debut novel of the same name.



Picture description: Author Tice Cin smiles knowingly above her head. She is a woman with long brown hair and gold hoop earrings. She wears a yellow off-the-shoulder dress.



TIME TO FILL A BLANK PAGE

by Nadine Matheson



INTRODUCTION

"Where do I start?" is a question that arrives in my inbox on a weekly basis, and I absolutely understand. Staring at a blank page, whether you're an aspiring writer or starting your next project, is always daunting. You're probably looking at a blank page and thinking to yourself "There's so much space to fill. How do I start?"

I'm going to show you how I start to fill a blank page. It's completely up to you whether you want to start with a sheet of paper and a pen or a new document on your computer screen.

LET'S BEGIN



Nadine Matheson is a black woman with dark mid-length hair. She is looking directly at the camera and smiling and is wearing a forest green coat which is buttoned up with a high collar. Behind her is a textured wall of grey squares separated by blue lines.



WHAT TYPE OF WRITER ARE YOU?

There are two types of writers. You're either a 'Planner', like me, or a 'Pantser'. What type of writer are you?

PLANNER: You plan your story. You know the beginning, middle and end. There is an outline, and you know who your main characters are and how their individual stories begin and end.

PANTSER: You have no plan and you're flying by the seat of your pants. You have no idea how your story ends. This is the equivalent of jumping on the 47 bus with no destination.

The following exercises will help you to fill a blank page whether you are a planner or a pantser.



WHERE WOULD I FIND YOUR BOOK IN THE BOOKSHOP?

This is another way of asking 'what type of book are you writing?'. Fiction usually fits into the following genres:

Crime and Thrillers. Romance. Sci-Fi. Young Adult. Children. Fantasy. Historical. Literary. Erotica. Contemporary.

Decide the type of story that you're writing. It may be the case that your story doesn't fit neatly into one genre. It's ok to have a story that is a mixture of genres e.g. Crime/Sci-Fi.



PLAN YOUR STORY

Let's look at your plot. A lot of writers worry (and yes, you are a writer) that their story is not original. It might make you feel better to know that there are only seven basic plots and that every story is based on one of those plots.

1. **OVERCOMING THE MONSTER:** The hero is threatened by a villain – *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, *The Jigsaw Man* by Nadine Matheson.
2. **RAGS TO RICHES:** The hero becomes rich – *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* by Roald Dahl.
3. **THE QUEST:** The hero goes on a journey – *Lord of the Rings* by JRR Tolkien, *The Odyssey*, *Generation Killer* by Adam Simcox.
4. **VOYAGE AND RETURN:** Your hero sets out to find someone or something – *Indiana Jones*, *Razorblade Tears* by S.A. Cosby.
5. **REBIRTH:** The hero goes from despair to hope – *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens, *Star Wars – Return of the Jedi*.
6. **COMEDY:** A community divided is reunited by love and harmony – *Bridget Jones's Diary* by Helen Fielding, *Good Omens* by Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman.
7. **TRAGEDY:** Your hero suffers a downfall – *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Breaking Bad*.

You now know the basic plot of your story. The next step is to decide what your story is about and to work on your elevator pitch.



WHAT IS AN ELEVATOR PITCH?

Imagine that you're in a lift with another person on the second floor. You have 60 seconds to tell this person what your story is about before you reach the ground floor.

What is your story about?

What does your main character have to do?

Example: *The Jigsaw Man*

"A detective pursues a serial killer and his copycat".

Exercise:

Write your elevator pitch. Can you describe your story in 20 words?

TIP: Look at the description of a book in the bestsellers list. A book is often described in less than 20 words.



THE PLOT

I use the three-act story structure to plan the plot for my novel. The three-act structure works by breaking your story into three parts.

ACT ONE: THE BEGINNING – THE SET UP

- Introduce your main character or characters.
- Establish your inciting incident i.e. What happens to your character to get the story moving? i.e. is there a murder, does the main character break up with their partner, is someone missing?
- How does your character respond to the inciting incident?

ACT TWO: THE MIDDLE – CONFLICT

- What obstacles must your character overcome?
- Midpoint: The big twist. The biggest obstacle.
- Crisis Point: Your character's life has now changed dramatically. How does your character react?

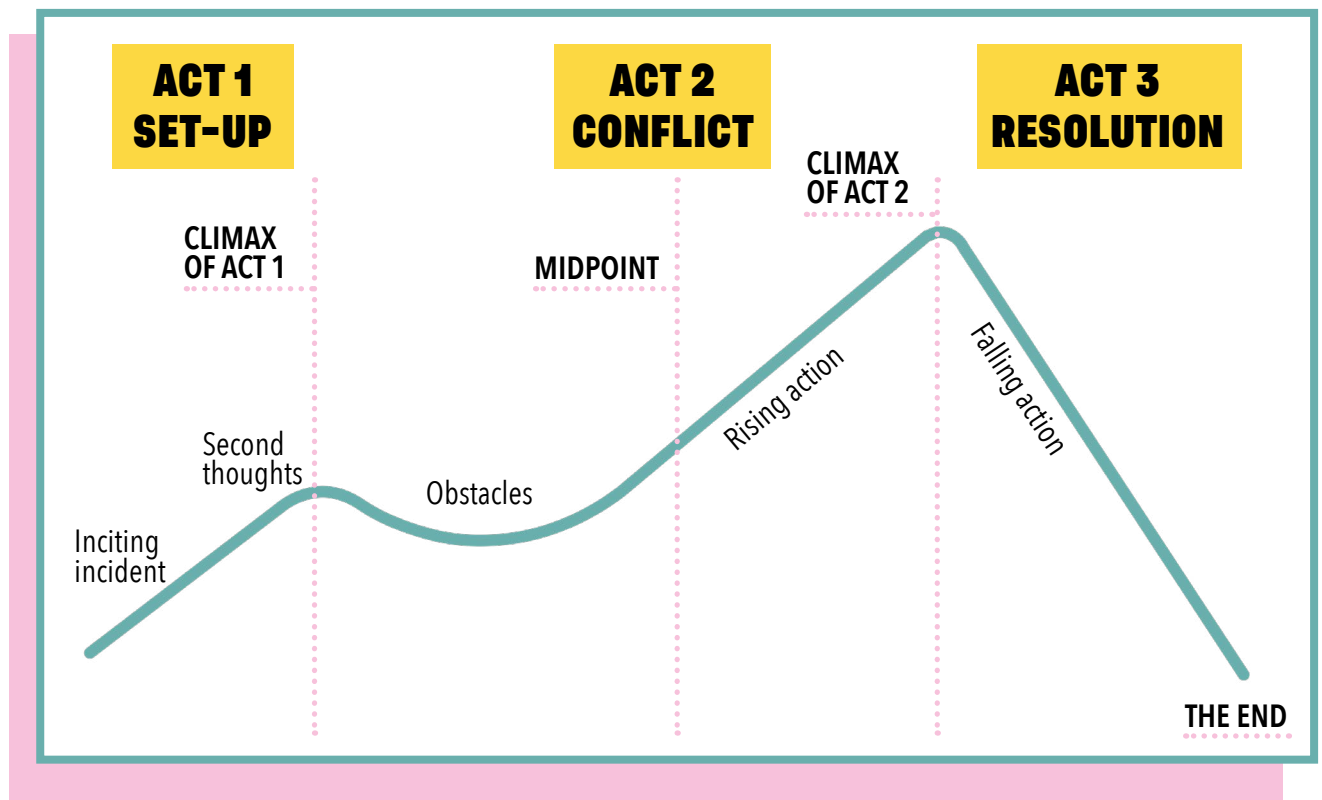
ACT THREE: THE END – RESOLUTION

- Your character faces a point of no return.
- The action descends.
- Your character prevents the disaster that was introduced in Act One and returns to normal life.

Exercise:

Take a sheet of paper and answer the questions in Acts One, Two and Three. There is no time limit. Let your imagination fly.

Complete the 'The Three-Act Story Chart'. There is no right or wrong way. Do what feels right for you.





CHARACTER

It's a good idea to know who the main characters of your story are before you start to write. A character is a person, animal, being, creature or thing in a story.

- *Who are your main characters?*
- *What does your characters want?*
- *What or who is getting in your characters' way?*
- *How does your character change?*

You don't need to plan every single character because sometimes new characters emerge once you start writing your story. Also, you may reach the end of your story and decide to get rid of a character.

Writers use characters to perform, speak dialogue and move the story along the plotline.

Exercise:

Create a biography for your character.

Name, Age,
Physical Appearance
Background

Anything else that you need to know about your character.



SETTING

Where is your story taking place? Setting is the time and place that you choose for your story. Worldbuilding is the process of constructing a world, originally an imaginary one.

Remember that you're the one in control. Your setting can be real or imaginary. Large or small i.e. London or Deptford DLR station.

For my novel, *The Jigsaw Man*, I set the story in Greenwich and the characters travel to various locations in South East London including Deptford and Lewisham and they even take a couple of trips north of the river as the story progresses.

Exercise

Build your world. Describe the setting where your story takes place.

Where are we?

What time are we in? Past, present, or future.

TIP: My novel, *The Jigsaw Man*, starts on the banks of the River Thames in Deptford. Take a walk to your favourite place and take notes, photographs, and videos of what you see, what you hear and the smells. Is there anything that looks unusual or sticks in your mind? Can you imagine your story beginning or ending at this location? And remember that if your location is in a different country – use Google streetview and virtually walk the streets.



FINAL EXERCISE

You've done it. You have enough to fill a blank page.

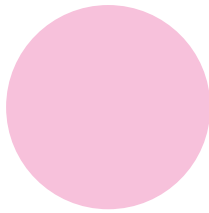
Write the opening of your story.

Write 500-1000 Words

This is not the end....

Not Yet

This is just the beginning.



ABOUT NADINE MATHESON

Nadine is from South-East London and grew up in Deptford. She is a Criminal Solicitor and lecturer. In 2016, she won the City University Crime Writing Competition and completed the Creative Writing (Crime/Thriller Novels) MA at City University of London with Distinction in 2018. In 2019, her novel, *The Jigsaw Man* featuring Detective Henley series, was won by HQ (HarperCollins) in a six-publisher auction. The best-selling *The Jigsaw Man* was published in 2021, has been translated into 15 languages and has been optioned for television. Her novels are based in South-East London and Deptford, Greenwich and Lewisham make a regular appearance. Her second novel, *The Binding Room*, featuring DI Henley and the Serial Crimes Unit was published in 2022 and her third novel in the series, *The Kill List*, will be published this year.

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Twitter: [@nadinematheson](https://twitter.com/nadinematheson)



Picture description: Nadine Matheson is a black woman with dark mid-length hair. She is looking directly at the camera and smiling and is wearing a forest green coat which is buttoned up with a high collar. Behind her is a textured wall of grey squares separated by blue lines.

