

# Creative Writing Write What You Know

## - Save My HSC Show - Episode 4

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### **Transcript**

G'day, guys. It's Paul. Welcome to the Save My HSC Show. What we'll be talking about today is that wonderful thing called creative writing and one of my favourite topics, which is writing what you know.

So firstly, why do teachers tell us this? It must be incredibly frustrating when you hear that. You go, "Well, does it matter? I don't know. It isn't really that much." All these little insecurities would pop up and you're going, "Well, I don't have anything good. So I'll just make it up completely." So I'm going to tell you why your teachers tell you this.

Now, when we think of a famous writer or any kind of books that you've read, quite often what they'll do is they are going to write a story that relates to something that happened in their lives, which corresponds to something they're interested in or passionate about, which then also relates to some issue that they can tie into a scene. So it's all those things working together.

If you don't hate the Hunger Games, the author there has a story line about a girl who's being a part of an oppressed majority and is partaking in something that is very brutal and inhumane. She calls it the Hunger Games. Now that, in itself, is the idea of the Hunger Games and whatnot. That overall theme is probably something that's overarching about the unjustness of the world and how we have poverty and wealth distribution across the globe.

However, she tells it from the perspective of a girl. She has a love triangle. She has a number of things that potentially, she could have had those conversations with people. So until she gets to the more fantastical elements, a lot of those relationships, like with her mother, things like that, what you might find (and

this is conjecture. I'm assuming this is about the writer) is it quite often is lifted directly from the relationships that they've had and that's why they can write those relationships very effectively. I know for my own writing, I do the exact same thing.

I've definitely had students say that they're not the most creative people to which I respond, "Well, that's fine." But I'm someone who considers myself quite creative and very often, I'll write stories that are entirely literal events. So it will be exactly what I did. It will just be exactly that. It's not a fanciful tale. I haven't put anything in and I really think it comes down to how you communicate that.

And the characters that you put into your stories, the settings and the places, are going to be much more believable if these things have happened in your life because you know exactly what happened. You're not coming up with something. You are your own research topic, which is why it's quite a powerful thing to do.

Now, I'll give you an example of how I had done that in my one of my stories. I'm going to give you a little bit of an excerpt from a story where my friend came over and he let me ride his motorcycle around the block and it was quite fun. On the surface, that would be a very, very boring story. What I'll do is I'll actually link the story and where it got posted so that you can see exactly what happened in the story.

So I'm going to read an excerpt from the story and you're going to see how I'll write it and make it a little bit more interesting. It starts with:

"I had just changed her chain and sprockets and after having my hands thick with her grease I was eager to mount and ride her. But that wasn't the way that things would turn out that day. That day, I met another motorcycle."

So as you can see, over here, we have a relationship. It's almost like you've got a scenario with this infidelity, this cheating happening. But really, in the story, all I did was borrow my friend's motorcycle and feel really cool about it. But in that sense, there was this idea of, "Oh, am I doing the wrong thing by enjoying this so much and thinking, 'Oh, maybe I'll get another motorcycle? Is it like cheating on

a person?” That thought process or that conflict in my mind was the inspiration for the story.

So, the entire thing from me standing in my driveway to driving around the block is essentially a literal story of what happened through the lens of cheating on a partner.

I think that’s where it comes down to your own flair and writing style. That will be different for everyone. However, using something that is a unique experience to you is what’s going to make it unique and interesting for you, which is why I always recommend doing this.

As far as finding experience is concerned, I would probably recommend that you look to a few different places. You want to look for things that might be either a little bit painful or a little bit funny or maybe you have friends who you find particularly interesting or entertaining. If you can recreate and attempt to recreate whatever those scenarios were, those stories can be a little bit interesting.

What I would also recommend doing is I know the teachers say you go away from clichés, but superimpose some sort of narrative cliché over a storyline that you guys have made.

For this story that I’m linking here, we’re just talking about the infidelity plotline. The main thing about making sure that you don’t screw up the cliché is you must take a left hand turn at some point. You have to have a cliché element and then rip it away from there because you can’t give the reader what they expect to read. But a lot of the times, cliché plotlines become cliché plotlines because there are only so many plotlines that can exist in a narrative.

That’s why I say learning how that process works is very important. And get people to read your story to make sure that you haven’t slipped too much into a cliché and you’ve allowed it to be a unique story of your own.

In that sense, I’ll give you an example of how that could work based on something that’s occurred in my own life. This is a very embarrassing story, so

I'm going to be very upset if everyone teases me. But what I did for a very long time in my youth was I was one of those people who were terrified of getting into the water, the beach or any sort of water for that matter because I always thought of it being too cold to get into the water. So I'd dip my toes in and I'd run away. I'd dip my toes in and I'd run away.

Now, that was okay when I was a seven year old and it was all good and well, but as I grew to be a 100 kilo male, that started to get a little bit ridiculous and probably was quite entertaining for most people to see.

So at some point, I decided that this is ridiculous. I need to figure out why I'm doing this. And it turned that there were a lot of other things that I was always holding back on, whether it was going for jobs that I felt worthy of or doing things that I was afraid of like going [inaudible 00:09:11] or mountain climbing or something that genuinely scared me. I would always hold back on things.

Over time, I eventually started to figure this out. I became less afraid of doing things and experiencing fear – or experiencing fear and consistently doing things in spite of that fear.

So what the result of that was I was on a friend's yacht one day in summer. I generally would not have dived into the water because it would be something that seemed a little bit scary and if someone generally dips their toes, they wouldn't do that. But I had done a lot to work on myself and to grow. And at this moment, I remember looking at the water. It just looked beautiful and inviting. I had this feeling to just dive in and feel that water. And without hesitation, I just went head first over the highest point of the boat, just standing on there and I went head first into the water.

It was almost like diving in was this cleansing moment, this quintessential changing moment that defined the new me. To me, that was a really beautiful moment that meant a lot for me and I would imagine if I wrote a story and a narrative arc around that, it would work because it was real to me. It was an experience that I was afraid of that gave me anxiety. There was a conflict within me that I dealt with.

So my storyline could potentially just be that boat and I could do a narrative where I talk about the things I had been through and the things I had been afraid of and then have the climax of the story as me just diving in and being washed by that water

That's the sort of thing that makes an amazing story. It's those moments where we truly change or realize that we have changed.

I would invite you to reflect on your own life and figure out what you can bring up, what stories you have from your life that really defined who you are. If need be (I just mentioned this), this is like that hero's journey there, that cliché of crawling and fighting your own fears. If you write that directly, it's a giant cliché. But in the context of it being incredibly meaningful to someone, it's very beautiful and that's the thing that a marker is going to identify with, particularly if you can link that very closely to discovery or something that you learned about yourself.

So I hope that's been a helpful podcast today. Creative writing is probably my strongest thing as far as teaching is concerned because it's very much connected to how we experience the world and communicate that experience. So if you do have any questions, feel free to e-mail through. I'm happy to look at works and comments and give you feedback on it.

Again, thank you. I'll chat to you guys next time.