Writing Without Worrying
Basics

So, you're either a writer, you want to be, or you have some kind of interest in the process or the result. Books are the obvious thing that always comes to mind when you hear about this stuff, but you know; movies, television, video games, music, and even Youtube videos need writing sometimes. It's everywhere, but it's underappreciated and often misunderstood. Let's delve into that.

Let's get a big misconception out of the way first: There's no such thing as originality. Nothing you or anyone else will create will ever be original, but that's not a bad thing. Creativity is not, and has never been, about making something nobody's ever done before. Creativity is about putting cliches and tropes together to create a unique blend out of well-known ingredients. If you try to force originality, you're going to end up with something even more cliched than it otherwise would be.

Something that a lot of people struggle with when it comes to writing is the fact that they feel they don't know enough about writing to actually start putting something down. They have a bunch of ideas in their head, but they need to read a few more books, or they need to read some more guides, or they need to talk to some writers, or something like that. No, you don't, you're just making excuses because you're worried that you're going to put a lot of effort into something that's going to be crappy. Don't worry about that stuff, here's all you need to start:

- A firm grasp of the language you wish to write in. This is the absolute essential element. If you ignore everything else about this guide, DO NOT IGNORE THIS. Proper spelling, proper grammar, proper punctuation, the works. With spell checking there is no excuse for this. It doesn't matter how good or bad your story is, it's this that impacts readability the most: The best story in the world 'ritin lik dis' is never going to be read by anyone, and the worst story written properly can be tolerated.

- An understanding of the conventions of fiction. That sounds complicated, don't get flustered. You know how in a movie, you have that one guy the film follows and he does things and there's a bad guy trying to stop him and they're in a specific place and things get done and people talk to each other? Yeah, all those things have names, and there's things you can do with those things to impact the mood, tone, and meaning of your work. They each come with expectations that you can play straight or play around with to mess with your audience.

- A motivation to write. There is no wrong motivation, and it's different for everybody, but it's important to understand why you want to write at all. For many, it boils down to "I have a story to tell" or "I want to entertain" but your case may not be typical, and that's perfectly good. Once you know your motivation, you can figure out how to achieve your goal.

- A place to write and something to write on. For me, this is just my computer and a combination of OpenOffice and Google Documents.

- An idea. It's not a story until you write it, it all starts off as an idea. Some people like to wing it, some people like to prepare, I do a combination of both. I prepare a vague plan and then wing the rest of it. I never know what's going to happen before I write it out, but I do have a vague idea, and I make sure the story is nudged along in the right direction.

So, you have all that, now where do you start? Let's break down what a story can be made up of.

- Genre. Some people pick this first, at the same time as their idea, and some people have an idea that they then have to fit into a genre. The great thing about genres is that writing in them is like cooking a holiday meal. There's a lot of expectations about a Thanksgiving dinner, but you don't have to play by the rules. You can make something truly unique by playing around with expectations. But, at the same time, some people just want a normal Thanksgiving dinner, and I know that at least for me, I just like food in general, so whatever it is just keep it coming.

- Setting. This usually is suggested by the genre, or sometimes the genre actually is the setting, it all depends. Stories don't take place in a vacuum, they take place in a world, in a specific part of that world, and they leave a mark on the place they happened in. Often, the setting heavily influences the characters you're going to have, and it often has a lot to do with the backstory that leads up to the plot. Note that this doesn't mean a story has to take place in one area only, you can have your characters constantly travelling somewhere new, but if you do that you have to make sure each area is unique or has a reason to be the same.

- Characters. You need a protagonist, but beyond that, pretty much everything else is optional; Main characters could be there alongside your hero, side characters show up occasionally, you need background characters to fill things out, and sometimes the opposing force is a person in the form of your antagonist. But really, you don't need any of that. A story is made by showing people struggling to get something done, but you only need one character to tell a story. That said, most stories are going to have a decent sized cast.

- Perspective. Who's telling the story? Are we seeing the story through the protagonist's eyes? Through an omnipotent narrator? Through a side character's eyes? This can affect how your audience perceives the events as they unfold. I'm partial to showing things through the protagonist's eyes, but there's no wrong way to do perspective.

- Conflict. That may sound a bit misleading, so let me explain. A story is all about someone saying "I need/want/have to do this" and either the world or someone else trying to stop them.

You can break down any work of fiction into that basic formula, but when you see a movie it's a lot cooler than that isn't it? That's because you don't have just one want and one obstacle, no, you stack them, you add as many things as you can and you weave in the other character's goals as well to get everyone involved in the action. In essence, fiction is a math problem, and what you're seeing is somebody writing out the solution. Or if it's a Greek tragedy, rage quitting because mathematics sucks.

- Tropes. As I've already said, fiction is a process of recycling other fiction, so any good writer knows that they need a big collection of tropes and cliches to use in their work whenever appropriate. There's two ways to familiarize yourself with these: Watch a lot of movies and read a lot of books, or use [All The Tropes](). I use the latter, because it's hella' faster. By understanding these tropes, it allows you to analyze any work of fiction and figure out what works and what doesn't work, and then it enables you to apply it to your own fiction. I'd suggest that if you start using All The Tropes, you look up some of your favorite movies, games, or books, and read what tropes are in them. You can branch out from there.

- Meaning. This is optional, and may sound pretentious, but bare with me. Sometimes, a work of fiction is trying to send the audience a message, to provide a commentary on a subject, or to simply make the audience think about an issue to arrive at their own conclusions. Stanley Kubrick was known for doing the third one, Hideo Kojima is known for doing the second one, and a lot of shock films pretend to be deep by doing the first one in the form of cheesy title cards at the beginning or end.

I know this is a lot to take in, but I hope that after reading this far you have an idea of where to start. The important thing to keep in mind is that you're going to suck when you're first starting out, just like how I sucked ass when I started out and how I still do because I'm still pretty new, but you're going to improve just like with any other skill.

Something that writers need to keep in mind is where they're putting their work up for viewing. While visual artists can post their work in lots of places, writers have to be more resourceful. I chose to put my writing on Google Documents and archive it all in one place so it's easy to go from one work to another. If you're posting a multi-part story, an absolute must is to make sure your readers can easily find the first parts.

If you're struggling with creativity, motivation, or need help, then it can help to have friends to bounce ideas off of. Don't have friends? Message me. Just keep in mind that if you bounce ideas off me then I'm going to bounce mine off you, there's two sides to a tennis court.

A big hurdle to get over is that you might be afraid that you're stealing something from another fictional work. That's crazy, it's impossible to steal an idea, and copying only happens when you don't tweak things. Never feel ashamed to "steal" from fiction, you should do it as much as possible. That's how you improve and learn.

If this guide goes over well, or if it doesn't, then I'm going to write more guides on more specific parts of writing. Suggestions and feedback are always welcome, of course.