

Jane Godwin's 10 tips for Young Writers (in no particular order):

1 Read

The more you read, the more you are immersing yourself in language, and learning about how other writers use language and tell stories. Reading will always make you a better writer, even when you're not aware that it's happening.

Author Annie Proux said, 'Writing comes from reading, and reading is the finest teacher of how to write.'

2 Enter competitions/submit your work to magazines

This will help you polish your work. A big part of writing is re-writing, and if you are entering work in a competition or submitting it to a school magazine or something similar, then you will be more likely to work on it for longer, and do that extra draft. There is so much to think about when you write, and nobody can get everything right in just one or two drafts. You need to think about the structure of the story, the plot, the themes and ideas that you're exploring, the characters, and the language you're using to tell your story. It's a lot to keep in your head all at once! Not even famous writers can get it to work in one draft.

3 Explore the world, keeping your eyes and ears open

Experiences are what provide material for writing. Make the most of opportunities offered to you. When you take on new experiences, it can be daunting, and you won't always have a great time. But as I always say to myself when given the opportunity for a new experience, 'You'll have either a good time or a story to tell.' And it usually ends up being a combination of both.

4 Don't give up

Most writers take years and years before they have any kind of material or commercial success. If you feel compelled to write, if it feels in some way that this is what you should be doing, then just do it! And keep doing it. Don't worry too much about whether you'll win the competition, or get an A+ for your creative writing piece, or get into a creative writing course at university – just write.

5 Try to write regularly/practise your craft

Just as with any other pursuit, you'll get better at writing with practice. Think about voice, and detail, and the relationship between character and action. Voice is the way you are telling your story – the character and texture of the telling. Practising writing will help you discover your unique voice. If you write from the heart, it will be original. Authenticity always feels original.

6 Keep a journal

I don't mean a diary (although keeping a diary is a great thing to do if you want to!), but more a book of ideas, thoughts, ramblings etc. Ideas can be slippery and you can lose them – if you write them down in a journal then you'll always know where they are. If you like drawing, then you could keep a visual journal.

7 Write what interests you

Some people give the advice, 'Write what you know'. I put it this way: Write what interests you. We often explore ideas (and why those ideas are fascinating or interesting to us) through the act of writing about them. I think it's ultimately rewarding to write about something that really interests or fascinates you, something that for some reason has captured your imagination, even if you don't really understand why. And if you don't know all about it then that's fine, you can discover more about it by exploring it through writing.

8 Experiment

Experiment with voice, with different styles of writing, with different types of characters, and with the approach you're taking. One thing I've learnt from being a publisher for many years is that there is no correct or incorrect way to write a story. Some writers plan their stories beforehand, some writers just think for a long time before starting a story, some writers do no planning at all and just see where the ideas will take them by writing the story. It's important to work out the way it works best for you as an individual writer to tell the stories you want to tell. Sometimes it's different for each piece you're writing. Some young writers have one approach when there is a time limit or it's for a school test etc, and a more relaxed way to write when it's just for enjoyment.

9 Share your work with one or two people

It's really helpful to be able to share your work with a couple of trusted people. They might be friends, or family members, or you might be lucky enough to have a mentor or teacher who has taken an interest in your work. You can read your work out loud to someone and ask them to stop you if there's a part of the story that isn't clear to them.

10 Enjoy it!

Like many activities, writing can sometimes be really fun and sometimes it feels like a hard slog. This is the same for all writers. So when you feel excited about something you're writing, or a story is going well, make sure you reflect on that and enjoy it!

Jane Godwin, 2019