

For Review Only

DON BOSCO

IMAGINE ALL THIS

Marshall Cavendish  
Editions



# IMAGINE ALL THIS

HOW TO WRITE YOUR OWN STORIES

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## IMAGINE ALL THIS

HOW TO WRITE YOUR OWN STORIES

Ever wanted to write your own stories? Here's a fun and inspiring guide to get you started. This book will help you use your imagination in clever ways and turn your ideas into a great story experience.

All the basics of writing fiction are covered:

- how to create captivating characters
- how to build a rich storyworld
- how to plan and plot
- how to write scenes
- how to manage your creative process
- how to explore different genres, and more

This book also contains creative journal pages, specially designed to help you capture your ideas, chart your creative journey, and finish that story or book that you've been dreaming about.

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## Note to readers

Hello. This is a book about writing your own stories. YOUR OWN. And not anyone else's. It takes you on a creative journey through your unique imagination, and guides you in making up your own special worlds, filled with captivating characters doing exciting things in intriguing places rich in atmosphere and activity. All this and more.

Read this book, imagine along with it, and use the journal pages to write down your ideas. Yes, you can write in this book, especially those pages with a pencil icon at the top. Take this book everywhere you go. Keep growing your imagination, and use the individual chapters as your guide along the way, until you've completed your story.

Write so that you can delight us, make us feel good when we have a very bad day, and teach us how to fall in love even when we're scared. Write stories that matter. Have fun. Happy writing.

Don

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Chapter 1

# Introduction

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But why write stories? Start here.

When you were younger, you liked stories.

We all did.

And you can still remember them. Some of the stories, at least.

Definitely the ones that convinced you there were different worlds out there. Or places with magical creatures.

The ones that told you about earlier times when adventure was a way of life and people believed in miracles.

Long, long ago and far, far away.

You liked stories with heroes. Maybe dragons. Wicked stepmothers. Pirates. Talking animals. Castles. Dungeons. Caves. Tree houses. A chocolate factory.

As a child, you'd especially like the stories that introduced you to interesting new people. Characters. You wished that you could meet them, or that they were somehow, against all common sense, related to you.

It was make believe, but it felt so real. So good.

Can you imagine?

You remember those stories. Maybe not the actual words in the books. But the pictures are still there in your head. The feelings are in you.

Stories enter us through words, but they leave us with pictures and feelings.

A good story, once we know it, becomes a part of us. It sits in our memory, right alongside our birthday parties and moments of regret and the stuff we secretly long for.

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Spiders spin webs, birds build nests. Human beings make up stories to pass around.

Webs, nests, stories. They're alike. They create connections. They hold us together.

A story is an arrangement of related visions and feelings, carefully organised, and passed on from one human to another. If you changed the order, if you messed up the arrangement, you changed the story.

The dog bit the boy.

The boy bit the dog.

The boy saved the princess.

The princess saved the boy.

They saw the rainbow and then the world ended.

The world ended and then they saw the rainbow.

The ordering of story elements is like a secret code. It gives us a way to see, to think and to feel.

But where did this story code come from?

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Stories were there at the beginning of our race.

People back then noticed the seasons changing, and came up with stories to explain why.

They observed differences in behaviour, how some people were outstandingly brave, while others were notoriously cowardly, and came up with stories to explain why.

They saw someone filled with so much love that he or she risked everything to do something difficult, even dangerous. And they came up with stories to explain why.

When they travelled, they saw unfamiliar animals, and they came up with stories about how these creatures were once human beings but were transformed into beasts, cursed, after making the gods angry.

When a child saw a rainbow and asked why, they made up a story.

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Our ancestors would sit around after hunting, after digging, after fixing their stuff, after mating, after wandering around, after fighting, after beating the life out of their enemies, after trading, after looking out for danger, after crying because someone had died, after making a weapon, after fighting off invaders, after staring at the sky and the sea and then the stars or maybe the darkness that came when

the moon refused to show itself. After they were done with all that, and they realised that there was still an emptiness inside them which needed to be filled, they would sit around, maybe out in the open, maybe in a cave, likely around a fire, and settle down to end their day with a sweet story.

They sat around a fire and this fire gave them light with which to see, especially in the darkness of the cave.

This fire also gave them heat which they could feel. The heat on their skin, on their faces, on their arms and legs.

Also, if they were in a cave, this fire threw shadows on the walls around them. Made the shapes move and dance and flicker.

If they were out in the open, the fire would throw shadows on the ground, make them dart around, as if these shadowy forms were visitors from another world, here to join the listeners and share the story.

The fire created a sense of magic. Always it seemed alive, felt alive, made the world around them come alive.

Stories are supposed to be like that too.

Sharing stories felt so good that our ancestors couldn't stop doing it. Generation after generation they would sit around and make up more stories and share them.

Stories to remember the good times.

Stories to remember the bad times.

It still feels good today. Which is why we continue to do it.



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A clever storyteller was a prized member of the tribe. A good story, even told for the hundredth time, but told with cleverness and emotion, with freshness and enthusiasm, could help you forget your pain, survive the cold, ignore the rumblings of an empty tummy, find the courage to go to war, or just calm you down enough so you could go to sleep after a rough day.

A clever storyteller could awaken hope, love, ambition, zeal beyond reason.

Or sadness, rage, fear.

That's why, for a long time, people thought stories were a form of magic.

In those primitive days, magic was anything that could affect your feelings in a strong way, or change your perception of the world around you.

After all, how did the storyteller plant those images in your head? Make you see those foreign lands, as if you had been there yourself? Bring to life those mesmerising characters, as if you had encountered them in the flesh? Stir in you those feelings of love, hate, wonder, surprise, curiosity, hope, anger, sorrow, regret, forgiveness, and more?

In those very early days, stories were told using pictures, objects, gestures, songs, symbols, dances, music. Until, over 5,000 years ago, humans invented the art of writing.

From handwritten stories, we later developed more efficient ways to print the words, so that they could be shared with even more people.

So that the fire could be felt by others, across space and time.

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Stories are a sign of civilisation. Before this, people treated one another badly. They lived in chaos. They often spent their evenings alone, or in small groups. It was natural to be selfish and mean. Antagonistic.

But in order to share a story, you can't be alone. You need listeners. You need to organise them. You need people to stop fighting or quarrelling long enough to listen to you.

You need people to behave respectfully. To participate. You need them to acknowledge that there are others there with them, listening to the same story.

Sharing the same fire.

Imagining and feeling the same things.

Why write stories? Companionship.

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Stories follow life. More than that, they follow our emotional needs.

The earliest African stories, from 8,000 years ago, were mostly about hunting, fighting and magical events.

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As the people travelled around the continent, they exchanged stories, and over time, many generations, they mixed them all up. One popular type of story was the trickster tale, in which a small animal outsmarts much larger opponents.

When humans moved out of the open plains and caves, and into cities, as they found new ways to organise themselves, they found new ways to tell stories.

They also found new stories to tell.

Ancient Sumer, five thousand or so years ago, was the first great city in the world. Imagine all those people living together for the first time. Human life was so complex that they invented writing to help keep track of the world around them.

Or worlds. They loved stories of gods and goddesses, and sometimes of outstanding kings and warriors, who had the power to defy reality and transform the landscape. They admired one god in particular, who was very clever, and especially creative, who had a special way with words.

Around this same time, 4,000 years ago, the Egyptians told similar stories, and also stories of the afterlife, all sorts of strange adventures in the land of the dead.

In India, they told epic stories about the struggles of both mortals and deities, and encoded these tales with ideas about the secrets of the universe.

The early Chinese told stories about their first emperors, how they tamed the land and developed the sciences, how they were always generous and just.

The Greeks told stories about a great war between them and their enemy, which lasted ten years, until the Greeks built a gigantic wooden horse and hid inside it, and tricked their enemy into dragging this inside their own city walls, after which the Greeks emerged at night and killed their unsuspecting enemies.

The original people of Australia created a collection of stories about travelling across the land. Each story would focus on one path or journey. It would describe landmarks, dangers, places to rest, the vegetation, and so on. If you could string the right stories together, you could find a path across the land, you could keep yourself alive. You could walk on and on and never get lost.

- 

Some storytelling traditions leave room for others to interact with the stories and create their own versions.

Folk tales are like that. Fan fiction too.

New stories are now created and shared at a faster and faster rate than ever before. Yet they still somehow seem just as familiar.

Over thousands of years, storytelling has evolved into a rich and powerful art. It can still feel like magic, but in truth it's really more science. Its inner logic has become increasingly accessible. If you understand its basic rules, the story code, you could do wonderful things with it.

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Some people think this story code is like a virus, jumping from one human brain to another, shaping our thoughts in its image.

Stories are addictive, did you know that? The right combination of words and phrases and sentences, creating the right mental images, could set off a powerful trickle of neurochemicals in our brains, as potent as anything we can imagine, and change how we feel in an instant.

This process happens so quickly that we don't always realise it. It's science but it feels like magic.

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These days, you can sign up for story writing classes everywhere. There are also all sorts of online videos that teach you how to create your own fiction.

It seems like anyone can write stories. Even robots. Did you know that there's already software that can generate passable stories? Everything from news snippets to short fiction. And likely soon, full novels too.

But the more we read stuff written by robots, the more we will end up writing like robots. Many stories these days already seem so robotic. All words and no wonder.

That's the challenge for you. For us. How to make better stories in the age of artificial intelligence. How to write fiction that's not just a string of story information, but a feast for the imagination. A riot for the heart.

Something really human. That connects us.

So write your stories. Take up the tradition that our ancestors started thousands of years ago, sitting around the fire, making up tales that were too fantastic to believe in, yet too enjoyable to ignore.

Take us where the robots can't follow. Imagine something new. Really feel it.

That's your story.

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## JOURNAL TIME



*Make a list of stories you really liked.*

*Pick your top five stories.*

*What exactly did you enjoy about them?*



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Imagine combining all your favourite story elements. What sort of unique stories would you write?

**The love, the laughter,  
the dreams that we need,**

**they might be waiting  
in the next story we read.**

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## Chapter 2 Story ideas

**Q: But how to write stories?**

**A: Two dogs and a bone.**

You start with a basic story idea about a dog that wants a bone, but then another dog turns up and wants the same bone. So they fight.

There are many variations of this that you can try.

And there are also many ways you can make this setup more interesting.

Like having remarkable characters, fascinating locations, a priceless bone to fight over, by creating all sorts of other intriguing situations around this main contest, and so on.

But at the heart of the story, it's always two dogs and one bone.

That's what you need to keep your story exciting. To have it moving forward on its own momentum.

The word "conflict" means quite a few things: a battle, an armed contest, a struggle, incompatible ideas.

Two dogs and one bone equals conflict.

In your head, imagine the two dogs facing off, with the bone between them.

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They're growling, they're anxious, they're angry, they're worried, they're determined to win.

The dog on one side, this character is your Hero. The person we're more invested in. The one who represents our point of view. She might be our avatar, even.

The bone in the middle, that's your Prize. This has to be valuable. Not in terms of money, but significance. Does it save a life? Does it correct an injustice? Does it create a new opportunity that's desperately needed? Does it save a reputation? Does it remove an evil? Does it remove a curse? Does it change the future? Does it change the past? Does it make the present more bearable? If the answer is "yes" to any one of these questions, you know you've got a Prize that's worth writing about.

The dog on the other side, this is your Villain. This is basically the Hero's opponent. Not necessarily anyone evil or bad. Just a person who wants the same thing as the Hero, with the same level of desire or more. And often, with an even better reason too.

For example, if your Hero is a schoolboy who wants to take the day off to participate in a big skateboarding competition, and his mother is determined to make him attend piano classes instead, then for your story she's a great Villain. They fight to decide if the schoolboy gets his Prize for that day, which is to go skateboarding.

In a good story, the opponent is often better qualified. Or stronger. Or smarter. Or more prepared than the Hero.

From the start of the story, this second dog, also known as the opponent, also known as the Villain, should seem to have a better shot at the Prize.

It is only closer to the end that the Hero manages to get her act together and make an inspired attempt to win.

Hero, Prize, Villain. Fight.

That's the start of your story idea.

When two dogs want the same bone, there's a dilemma. Which character will get it? Which one will give up first, and back off? Which one will fight to the death?

Feel your body tense as you think about this, as you imagine this happening.

Feel your chest tighten, feel your breathing quicken.

Feel the muscles on the back of your neck get tight.

That's the power of conflict. You feel it.

Fights. Quarrels. Competitions. Rivalry. Settling of scores.

These are the meat of drama, the core of stories.

Stretching all the way back to our caveman days.

Conflict arouses us. We're curious. We have our own idea of how this should work out. We get emotionally involved. We take sides too.

You've seen examples of this in movies, in books, in real life.

Child versus child.

Child versus adult.

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Adult versus adult.

Woman versus man.

Father against son, mother against daughter.

Father against son, Darth Vader versus Luke Skywalker, that's the emotional heart of the first Star Wars movies

Stepmother against stepdaughter, Wicked Queen versus Snow White, that's a classic fairy tale that never gets old.

•

To develop your story idea further, you take this Two Dogs, One Bone idea and you organise a plot around it.

A simple storyline, one that presents enough of a conflict to make your story interesting, goes something like this:

In a [type of world], a [type of character] wants [a prize] because [highly personal reason], only to face a [type of character] who [reason for opposing]. [Main story question about the main character]?

Let's break this down.

**In a type of world** — what sort of world does your story take place in? Eg, a school, an office, a restaurant, a small town, a big city, an alien kingdom, a long forgotten realm, and so on.

**A type of character** — this is your Hero. What sort of person is your main character? What role does this character play in the storyworld? Eg, a student, a lawyer, a mother, a girl with no job, a woman who needs to do something awful to pay the bills. Is she someone important? Is she old or young?

**A prize** — this is usually an object, or an opportunity, which signifies the start or end of something important. Like a weapon, or a bag of cash, or a person, or an experience, such as an interview with the boss or a day trip to see the ocean. This prize should be identified clearly at the start of your story, and the two characters' strong desire for this should be clear too.

**Another type of character** — this is the opponent, the Villain, who has a good reason to want the same prize, and will act to ensure that the Hero does not get it.

**Reason for opposing** — why does this Villain want to block the Hero from getting the Prize? Is the motivation personal or professional? Does it arise from fear, greed, hate, indignation, duty, love?

**Main story question about the main character** — this is why we're reading the story. To find out what happens to the main character, the Hero. This story



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question helps readers decide if they might want to stick with your character to the end of the story.

For example, if the Hero has to fight the Villain over parking space, you could try coming up with different story questions to see which one inspires the best ideas.

“Will the Hero get the parking space?” This is the most obvious story question, and also often the least interesting.

Instead, try something like, “Will the Hero manage to control his temper, even though he’s arguing with a really obnoxious person?” This has a lot of comic potential.

Or, “Will the Hero recognise that the Villain is actually his ex-girlfriend from high school, she’s now the CEO of a big cosmetics company?” This has great potential for suspense, irony and personal drama.

In a [type of world], a [type of character] wants [a prize] because [highly personal reason], only to face a [type of character] who [reason for opposing]. [Main story question about the main character]?

Use this template to come up with a few different story ideas. Make them all interesting enough that you’ll actually want to finish writing the stories just to find out how they end.

This setup does so many things at once.

First, you establish a contest, which creates a sense of anxiety and urgency.

Second, there’s suspense: which dog will win?

And third, our emotions are aroused: which dog will we want to cheer for?

This short sentence, with your story details filled in, conveys the tension for your story. It sets the stage for the contest to be played out. And the Prize is like a ball that that they fight to get possession of.

When you write your story, it’s like you’re writing a commentary of this contest. Keep your readers on their toes, keep them trying to guess the outcome, all the way until close to the end.

Now would be a good time to figure this out for your story:

Who are your two dogs?

What is the bone?

Start a new document on your computer. Or find a fresh page in your notebook. Create three columns, so you can start to write down your ideas.

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HERO	PRIZE	VILLAIN

**Column 1: Hero (H)** — This is your main character. Someone we find likeable, who still tries to do the right thing where possible.

**Column 2: Prize (P)** — Something simple yet significant, that determines your character's happiness or safety or faith in the world. This is what they're fighting about.

It should have emotional, physical and symbolic value. Establish at the start of the story why the Villain really wants the Prize, and show how it'll be at the Hero's expense.

The Prize could also be valuable to more than just the main character. This allows you to get more characters involved, and thus create more complications and conflicts.

To flesh out your idea, think about:

How does the Hero find out about the prize? Why does the Hero want the prize?

Why is the Prize so difficult to secure?

As long as the Prize is tangible, you will be able to describe it clearly, and also the character's connection to it.

Here's an important thing to remember: your readers should want the Prize too. Write your story in a way that makes your reader develop emotional feelings for it.

**Column 3: Villain (V)** — This does not have to be an evil person. Just anyone with the ability to take the Prize away from your main character.

- 

**Hero, Prize, Villain.** This is the outline that gets you started. It sets up your story like a puppet show, a wrestling match, a soccer game, a tug of war.

Here are some examples of this applied to three different genres.

Remember this:

In a [type of world], a [type of character] wants [a prize] because [highly personal reason], only to face a [type of character] who [reason for opposing]. [Main story question about the main character]?

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## EXAMPLE 1: Thriller

**Hero** — Joan Yang, undercover spy in the middle of an anti-terrorist mission

**Villain** — Zissy K, leader of a hacker group, looking for ways to get rich fast

**Prize** — a black briefcase containing information about all the young spies currently undercover

**Story idea** — In a futuristic London, an undercover spy has to locate a black briefcase because it contains information that will expose her identity, only to face the leader of a hacker group who intends to sell the briefcase to an enemy organisation for a large sum of money. Will the undercover spy manage to protect her cover?

- 

## EXAMPLE 2: Horror

**Hero** — Kenji, high school student and volunteer at animal clinic

**Villain** — Draghul, an ambitious demon sent to Kenji's city to recruit children for his master's army

**Prize** — Yuko, Kenji's five year old sister who loves to collect pink watches

**Story idea** — In a quiet Tokyo suburb, a high school student needs to take care of his five-year old sister after their parents die in a car accident, only to face an ambitious demon who is determined to kidnap the girl to join his master's army. Can the high school student protect his sister?

- 

## EXAMPLE 3: Romance

**Hero** — Yanne, a singer in an indie band who gets selected to tour Asia as part of a popular girl group

**Villain** — Jay, the guitarist in Yanne's band and also her boyfriend, he made plans with her to record a new album together that school break

**Prize** — Yanne's freedom to choose her own path

**Story idea** — In a high school for gifted young musicians, a singer with an indie band wants to tour Asia as part of a popular girl group because she's trying to find her own path in life, only to face opposition from her boyfriend, the guitarist in her current band, who insists

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that she stays back to record a new album during their school break. Which will she choose?

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Come up with lots and lots and lots of story ideas. You don't have to develop all of them. Just have fun. Over time one or two of them might feel especially promising. These are the ones worth working on.

- 

If you ever feel like you don't know where to start, here are three familiar story models you could consider. They're all from the Bible. They've survived many centuries. And they're still being used today by writers all over the world.

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## **The first model: David versus Goliath.**

David is a young shepherd boy who, against all expectations, singlehandedly defeats the giant warrior Goliath.

Think: Young versus Old. Weak versus Strong. Underdog versus Champion. Newbie versus Veteran.

This is especially great when writing stories for children or young adults.

The David and Goliath of your story can be male or female, it doesn't matter.

Make your David strong, tough, determined to survive difficult situations, willing to move forward even when facing scary odds, determined to save her tribe, committed to changing the course of history. Talented, with good intentions, and a simple understanding of right and wrong.

Make the opponent formidable, with a great reputation, fierce, perhaps known for cruelty and violence, if that's appropriate. Strong and clever but complacent and selfish.

- 

## **Second model: Moses versus Ramses.**

Moses tried to save the Jewish slaves from Ramses, the tyrannical ruler of Egypt.

This story model is similar to David and Goliath, but this time between peers, or rivals.

The Moses of your story is an underdog, armed with faith and courage and loyalty to his tribe.

The Ramses of your story is powerful, but surrounded by fickle followers, and uses trickery to intimidate and confuse. Ultimately this weakness is exposed and exploited.

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## About the author

**I buy books  
and books  
and books,  
they cheer me up when I'm blue.**

**I write books  
and books  
and books,  
so you can buy them too.**

DON BOSCO writes thrilling books for children and teens. He founded the publishing studio SUPER COOL BOOKS in 2011 to develop original stories inspired by Asian legends and pop culture. He has been a featured speaker at writing festivals and media conferences. He used to play the guitar a lot. He lives and works in Singapore. His website is [www.supercoolbooks.com](http://www.supercoolbooks.com).