



Creative Writing Course

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Welcome to the Creative Writing Course!

Lesson 1

Please use this workbook to write down your ideas.

Course Notes

Choosing a Good Idea to Start

What is your book going to be about?

The first advice I would offer an aspiring author is: Make sure they choose an idea that they are passionate about.

If you're going to write a novel, you're going to be thinking of it, working on it, dreaming of it, and talking about it for a long time. So you must choose a topic that really interests you one hundred percent. The topic must be so fascinating to you that you will invest months to explore it. You will be happy to research the facts around it, you will be happy to talk about it at home whilst having dinner, at parties with your friends, and basically live and breathe this topic for a long time, ranging from weeks to years.

I have had times when I thought I had a good idea, but by the time I started to write it, I realised it wouldn't work. I usually file such ideas away into a folder that I can mine later. Sometimes I've had an idea for a short story, and by the time I started working on it, I realised I had more and more material, that it could be developed into a novel. I actually started a whole online series that went on for two years this way. It started out as a short story that I wrote and published on my blog. Many people read it and commented on it, asking for a Part 2. I decided to expand that short story, and it became a series called "In My Dreams It Was Simpler" that I created and co-wrote with seven other writers.

This is why I wouldn't advice a new writer to start writing on a topic just because they are thinking it will bring them fame and money. Or choosing a topic just because it seems to be popular at the moment. Doing that will only carry you so far, because if you're not entirely invested in your idea and committed to seeing it through, you'll get half-way through the writing process and you'll get bored, distracted or miserable. Or all three.

Also you shouldn't feel obligated to write a book on a topic, because it's what people expect of you. That won't help you either. Again, unless you are personally motivated enough to commit your time and energy to the topic, you will quit. There are enough obstacles in the writing process to overcome already, please don't add a boring topic to the mix.

So how can you come up with an idea that you can really get excited about?

You may already have an idea that interests you, or you may need to think about it and brainstorm for a while. Spend time reading books that really interest you, listening to conversations or podcasts, listening to the news on current topics that interest you, reading biographies of people that you admire. Spend time thinking about the topics that come to you or linger in your mind for a while. Let your mind wander and keep your imagination fired up. Before long, you'll start getting lots of possible ideas. Your idea could come from a spark of imagination, from something you read, from an overheard conversation, from a song, or even from a place you visited that inspired you and captured your imagination so much that you felt moved to write about it. Your initial spark of inspiration could be the main character that you love or hate so much that you wanted to dig into their story. It could be a bit of history you discovered and you wanted to find out more. However it comes to you, when you finally find the right idea, it should be something that makes your brain light up more than any other previous ideas you've had.

I've had ideas from many different places. As they say, inspiration can strike anytime, so keep your ears and eyes open. Sometimes I get ideas through conversations I have with people, random sentences in music, from a TV programme, from a short story I read, from looking at a piece of art, or even from a dream.

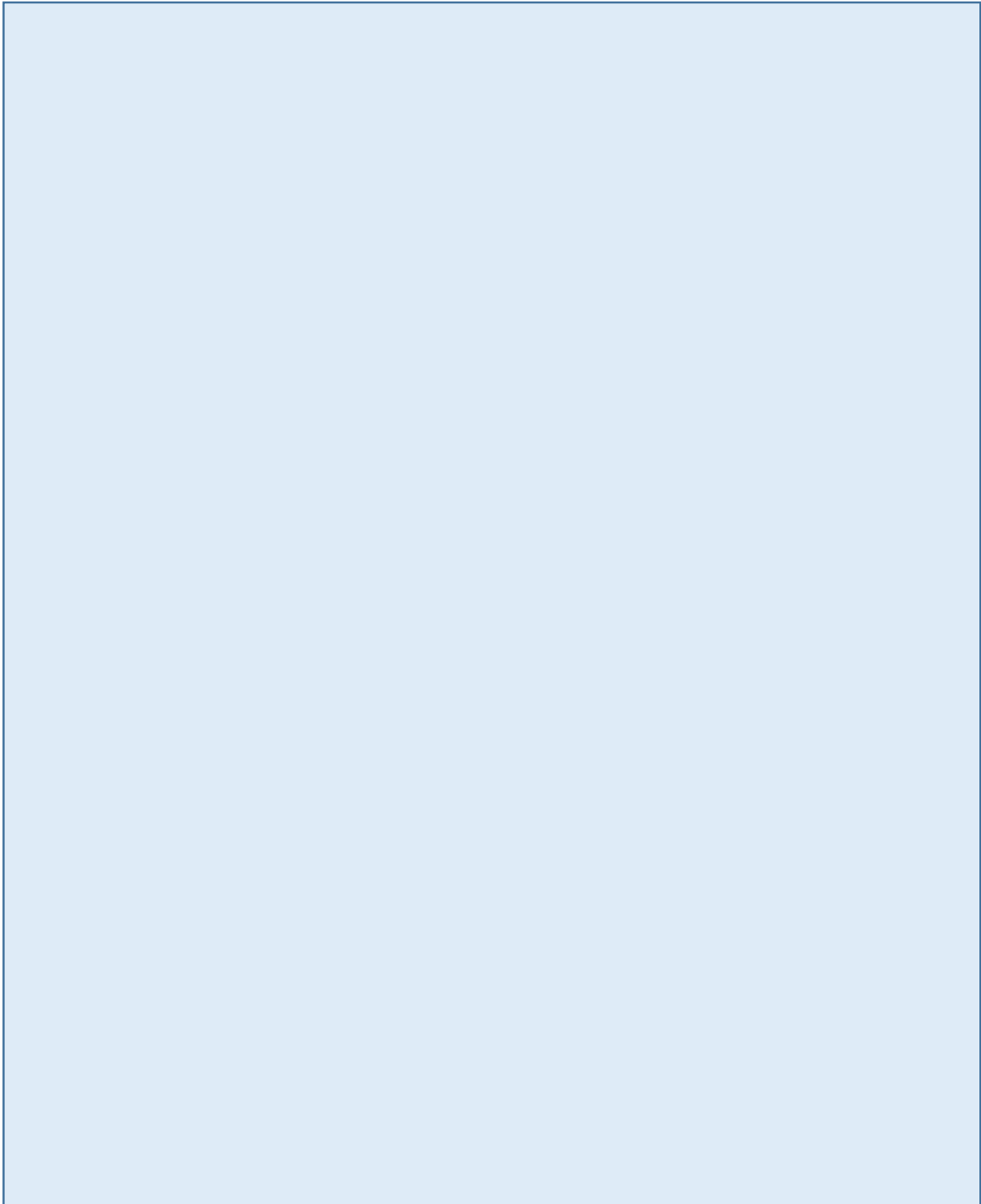
Sometimes, you may have more than one good idea and you're trying to decide which one to start with. Always choose the idea that you're more intrigued in, over any other. Go through all your possible ideas and imagine building a story around it. Does the story appeal to you? Would it appeal to anyone else? Can you see yourself writing on this story, creating characters around it, forming a viable plot? If the answer is yes, then you have a great idea and you should go with it. Start with as much enthusiasm as possible, because it is this enthusiasm that will keep you going until you have written the last word in your manuscript. You may still have the occasional bout of self-doubt, but your passion for your idea will be unshakeable.

Now, let's go into the workbook for this section.

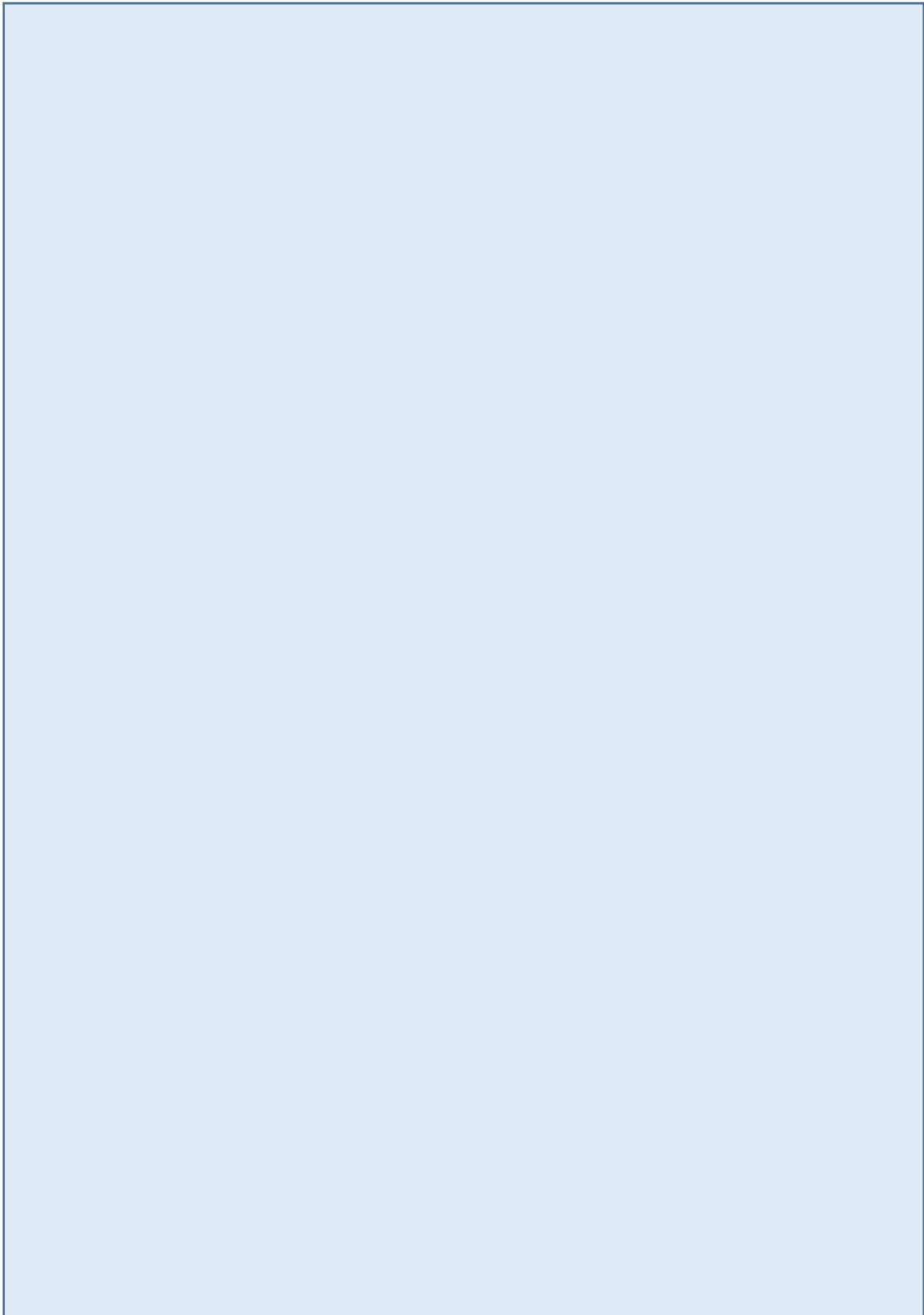
Workbook 1 – Choosing a Good Idea to Start

The first step in writing a book is to start with the basic idea. What is your book going to be about?

Start by writing down some of your previous good story ideas in the box below:



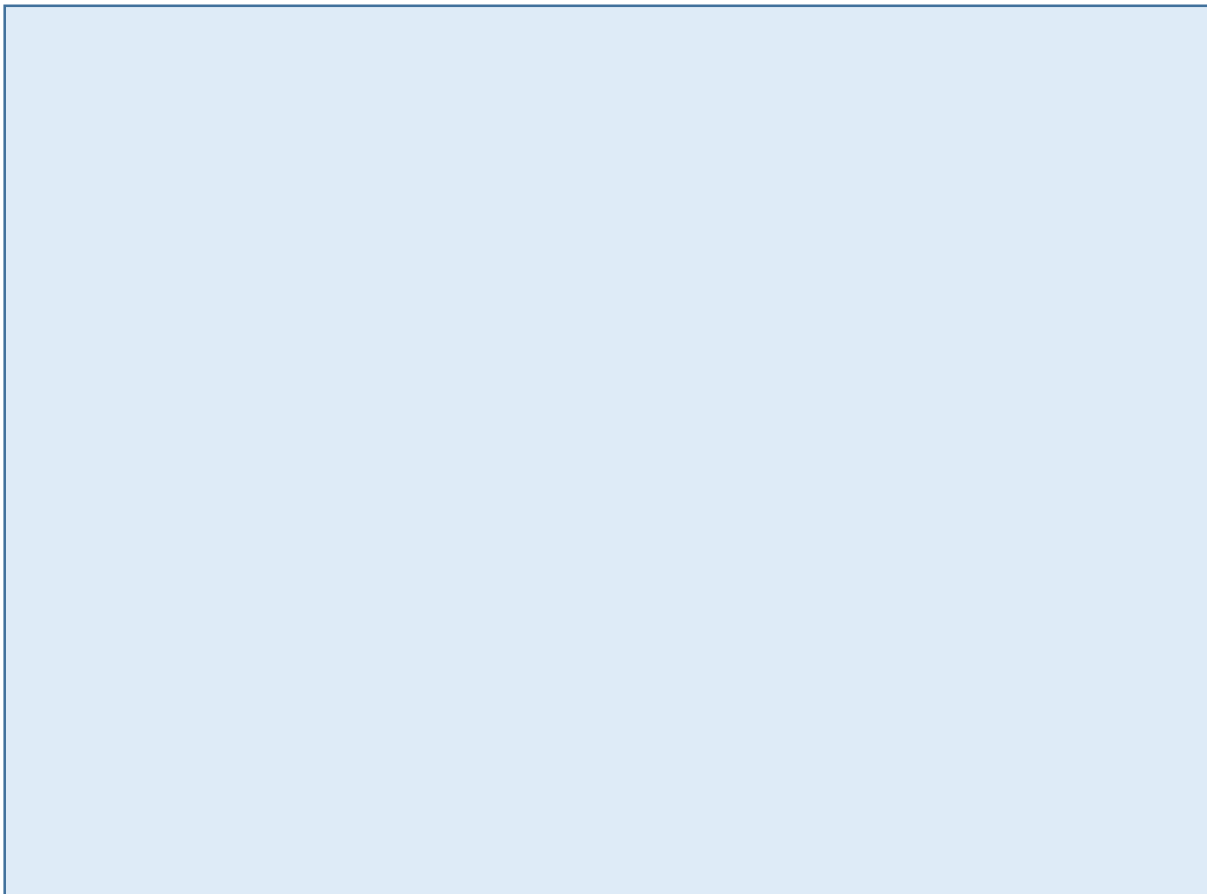
If you have more than one good idea, expand each one slightly:



Which of your ideas is best suited to a short story?



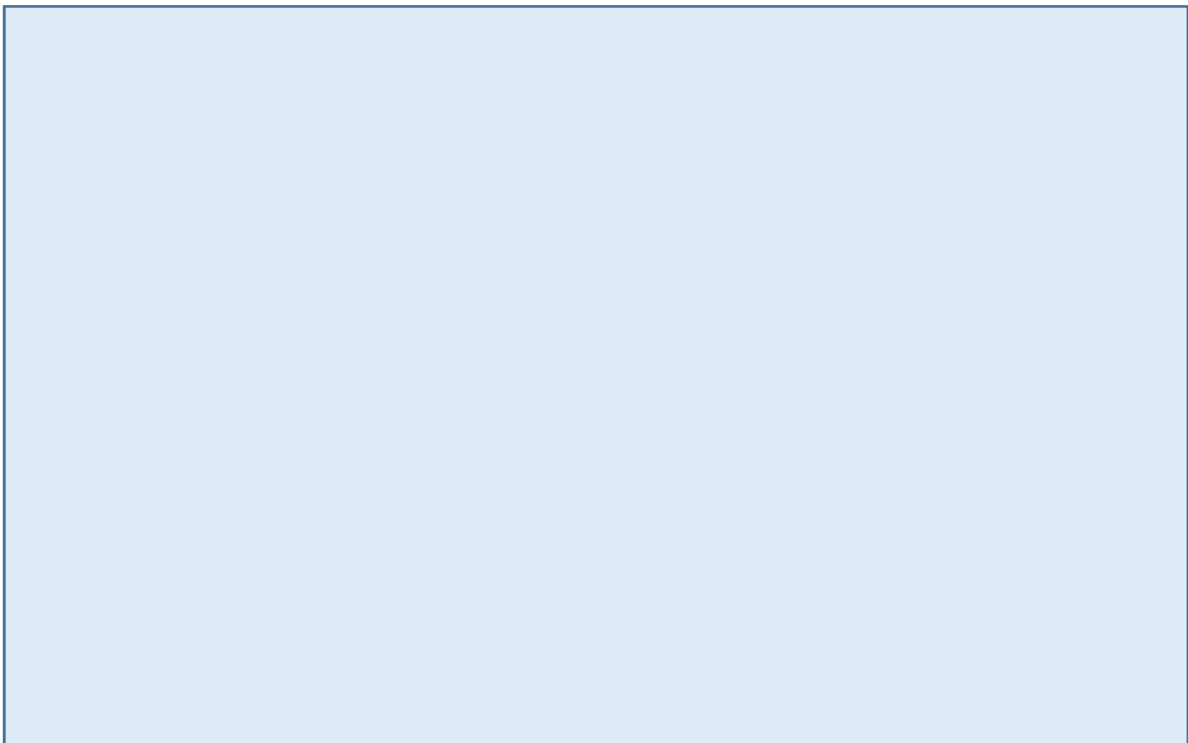
Which of your ideas is best suited to a novel?



If you don't have any specific story ideas at the moment, write down a list of topics or themes that interest you, e.g. family relationships, dating relationships, crime and mysteries, legal debates, office politics, etc.



What are your usual sources of inspiration? Can you mine them for interesting ideas?



Where can you get other good ideas from?



If you're happy with your chosen idea, excellent! What would you do next? How would you proceed?

