

WRITE WHAT YOU KNOW

Guidance sheet

Write What You Know

The age-old advice to ‘write what you know’ can seem limiting at first glance. How can you write about life in space if you’ve never been an astronaut? Or describe deep-sea diving if you’ve never done it? What about creating believable characters like mermaids or a robots, when they’re clearly outside the realm of personal experience?

The first thing to remember is that writers carry out in-depth research - just try not to fall down any rabbit holes - I’m very guilty of this! But every great writer spends time learning about their subject. Research can be part of the fun! Start by jotting down your ideas and when you hit a gap in your knowledge, dig a little deeper. Read books, browse online resources or even reach out to experts to gather the details you need. Experts and historians are often more than willing to have a chat about subjects that ignite their passion.

Second of all, remember that fiction allows you to invent. Don’t know what life on another planet is like? That’s fine, no one else does either! Use your imagination to create a world that fits your story. You can make up the rules, the setting, and the details to suit your plot.

Finally, you might already know more than you think. Even if you’ve never been a mermaid, you can draw from real-life experiences. A competitive argument between your mermaid and her sister? You can write about sibling dynamics. A robot falling in love? Most of us have felt love in some form, so write from that understanding and perspective.

Writing what you know doesn’t have to limit you. With a mix of research, imagination and your own life experiences, you can write stories far beyond what you thought was possible.

Explore your interests (Mind map exercise)

Around the mind map, add all the topics, hobbies, or areas of knowledge that excite you or that you know a lot about. Have a good think about:

1. Subjects you’re passionate about (e.g., space, animals, history).
2. Hobbies or activities you enjoy (e.g., cooking, sports, gaming).
3. Life experiences or skills you’ve gained (e.g., travel, family dynamics).
4. Use this as inspiration for your writing. Your unique perspective can bring these topics to life!

Feel free to fill out the mind map as many times as you need in order to refine some of your noted ideas, and remember, these are not set in stone. This is simply an exercise to get you thinking about all those ideas that spark your interest, out in the open.

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