



ROYAL  
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# CREATIVE writing

## WRITING TOGETHER WITH ALISON MOTT | [ALISONMOTT.COM](https://alisonmott.com)

Welcome to the first of my writing activities for Royal Voluntary Services' Virtual Village Hall.

I'm Alison Mott, a writer and writing coach with over 25 years' experience of getting people to flex their creative muscles and write. These activities aim to encourage you to be creative whilst we're having to spend time at home.

I'll be giving writing prompts and sharing examples of texts by myself and other writers to spark your imagination and give you ideas for pieces you might like to create yourself. You might want to write family stories or memories from your own past, made-up stories, poems or limericks. There are no rules about what you **should** write – whatever you choose to do is okay!

Many of us have hang ups about our writing - often because of things said to us in the past - perhaps about our handwriting, our spelling and grammar, the way we word things or whether our work is good enough.

If that applies to you, please park your worries. This is just a fun, no-pressure activity to get you thinking creatively for an hour or two and no-one is going to judge what you've written. You don't even need to **write**, if you don't want to - you could record your stories into a voice recorder instead.

And you don't need to show your work to anyone if you don't want to, either. But I'm hoping that you will – that you'll enjoy creating your stories so much that you'll want to share them with your family, your friends, or with us on the RVS Facebook page.

So, get yourself **paper** and a **pen** and let's begin!

## ACTIVITY ONE

Today's prompts are about **ourselves** – or, more specifically, about **you!** We're going to begin with an activity about your **name**.

### Names important to us.

- They're part of our identity and how we're perceived by others
- They place us in a particular culture or point in time (think Li Wei and Omar, Luciana and Dyfed; compare Bessie to Lizzie, Hal to Harry, Kitty to Catherine)
- Think how we feel when people get our names wrong
- Think of the nicknames we're given and who by, whether friends or foe!

### In 2010, The Washington Post said:

*'A person's name is the greatest connection to their own identity and individuality, [...] the most **important** word in the world to that person. It is the one way we can easily get someone's attention, [...] a sign of courtesy and a way of recognizing them.'*

## **Think of your own name.**

Is there a story about how you got it? Is it a family name passed down generations or were you named after someone particular? *(My mother was given a name my grandmother saw in a novel!)*

Do you know what you might've been called if you'd been a different gender? *(I would've been named Paul if I'd been a boy)*

Do you have a nickname? Who gave it to you and why? Who uses it and who doesn't? *(Sometimes people call me Ali – and I hate it! It reminds me of Ali Bongo, a magician popular when I was a child.)*

## **Spend ten or fifteen minutes writing a story about your name.**

Just an anecdote - a paragraph or two will do.

Don't over think as you write, just let the main facts of the story flow out. You'll halt the process if you worry about tidy handwriting, full sentences, correct spellings or grammar. You can go back and tidy those up later. For now, simply lean into the creativity and let it come out of you as it is.

See what you can do!

## **ACTIVITY TWO:**

How did that go? Did you manage to come up with a story? I hope the activity got your creative writing muscles warmed up and ready to go. Put that piece to one side for now - you can go back and work it into something later.

For the next bit I'm going to get you to write a list of facts about yourself. Lists are an excellent way to begin a piece of writing. They help you generate lots of ideas which can be pulled across into something bigger afterwards, or, very often, the list itself can be tidied up and used as a poem.

Again, as you write, don't think too much about what you're doing. The idea is to learn to be comfortable with scribbling, to go with the flow and just keep going. This isn't what we're taught to do at school but it's actually what writers do – get ideas down on paper first, then go back and use grammar and spelling knowledge to work the scribbles up into something a reader can understand.

A really handy trick – which doesn't sound like it'll work but believe me, it does – is to set a timer whilst you write. It can be the one on your phone or an old fashioned kitchen timer (I got mine from a well-known UK supermarket for less than £2).

The ticking noise of the timer induces such a sense of panic that you don't have *time* to worry about what you're writing. And as you're not allowed to stop till the buzzer goes, if you run out of ideas, you start adding seemingly daft ones to your list, just to keep going. Often, these turn out not to be so daft when you go back and look at them – in fact, they're often the most creative of all. The more you write, the deeper you go into the well of your memory and the more unusual and interesting the jottings you pull up out of it.

So, write as many ideas as you can – 10 are workable, 20 would be better and 30 really excellent. Challenge yourself to get to excellent!

### **First, some questions to prompt ideas on the topic of 'you':**

- What roles did you have in your childhood family? Son or daughter? Oldest or youngest? Helpful child? Favourite? What about now, as an adult?
- What jobs have you done? What roles and skills do you have from those jobs?
- Are you a member of any clubs or societies? What activities do you do there? What roles do you have in the group?
- Are you a member of a faith community?
- What hobbies are important to you? Are you a knitter, painter, musician, golfer?

- What things are important to you and your day to day life, now or in the past?
- What might friends and relatives say about you and what you're like?

Beginning with **'I am,' 'I can,' 'I love'** and **'I was'** can help. You can use their opposites, too – **'I'm not,' 'I can't,' 'I hate,' 'I wasn't'** or **'I no longer.'**

So, set your timer for **7 to 10 minutes** if you have one, pick up a pen – and write!

## **CHECK-IN:**

How did you do? Hopefully, you came up with a good - if rough - list of ideas about yourself, the many sides of your character and the things you like to do. But if you didn't, don't worry – you can always add to the list as you go along.

As I said before, what you choose to create from this list is up to you. You could write from your own perspective as 'I', or in third person from someone else's' viewpoint – telling the reader about you as 'she' or 'he'.

You could write a poem or a piece of prose – that is, a memory or a story. Or you could try several different styles of writing and see which works best for you!

Here are a couple of texts which might give you ideas of what to turn your notes into.

First, poems which use 'I am' and 'no longer' sentence starters to help shape the finished piece:

I am Sam.

I am ...

A mother of two a wife  
daughter

a bubbly person five  
foot tall.

I am ...

British

Bangla  
friendly

emotional

kind and hard working.

I am Sam.

I am a ...

happy singer

doggy walker

messy cooker

couch potato

funny wonder

by Liz

I am Alison.

One of eight children.

A mother, sister,  
an aunt and a friend.

No longer a daughter,  
an orphan now, sadly.

Half Londoner,  
half Yorkshire.

Of Viking descent.

Not a morning person,  
not naturally punctual.

Allergic to gluten and a  
lover of tea!

I am Alison.

Welcome to me!

Here's an **acrostic poem**, where each letter of my name is used to begin a sentence. I've written it in third person, as if someone was talking about me.

Alison -

**A**lways smiling, rarely sad.

**L**oves chocolate and cake (unfortunately!)

**I**sn't afraid to show emotion.

**S**eldom loses her temper, though

**O**ccasionally, perhaps, she should!

**N**umerous friends – very lucky.

Give yourself a good chunk of time to work on this and off you go!

### **ACTIVITY 3:**

The final activity is called **Compass Point**. It's a piece in four parts, each focussing on a different place. The pattern works well as a piece of poetry, but can be done as paragraphs, too, if that's what you prefer.

Choose 4 places significant to you. Sort them in order of when you first went there, then write the following for each:

1. the name of the place
2. why and how you went there (and perhaps with whom)
3. A physical description of the place the last time you went there
4. how you would feel if you were suddenly magicked there

When writing up your ideas, begin each section as follows:

1. To my North ...
2. To my South ...
3. To my East ...
4. To my West ...

Here are some examples to give you an idea of what I mean:

### **South**

to the Odeon Cinema  
to escape the humdrum life for  
the joys of Hollywood and glamour.  
To see Mamma Mia II.  
Very happy.

### **West**

to my garden  
to escape into the outdoors  
and enjoy the flowers.  
To tidy the veg patch.  
Contented.

### **North**

to Spain  
for the joy of the country.  
Last with my husband to recover  
from an operation.  
Now, like happiness filling me.

### **East**

to India  
my spiritual home  
for rest and peace.  
To see old friends.  
Happy.

*by Jeanette*

To my north is Beeston, Nottingham.  
I went there with my father to visit my gran –  
on the bus, later in Dad’s car.  
Beeston is a small town in the Midlands where  
British Telecom was born and one of the few  
railway stations that Beeching closed but re-  
opened. Now I would be lost as so much has  
been modernised and has an excellent tram  
system. There is more antisocial behaviour  
than there used to be and I might feel a bit  
threatened.

To my south is Bakewell, where I lived as a  
child. It is a delightful hub in the middle of  
Derbyshire but now has so many tourists that it  
is hard to park, shop and move around. I  
wouldn’t know anyone now.

East is Paris.  
Went at seventeen to run away with a broken  
heart. Stayed two years.  
Fantastic architecture, skyline, language,  
culture, everything.  
Love it and would be happy there forever!

*by Jean*

## **FINISHING OFF**

Okay, go back to all the pieces you’ve written and see what you’ve got.  
This is the time to slip into editing mode and tidy them up to the best they  
can be!

As you work through each piece, ask yourself:

- Am I repeating myself anywhere?
- Are there any unoriginal words or phrases I could swap for something more imaginative or descriptive?



- Could I take out any small, repetitive words (just, really, very, that, then) to make the piece sharper and clearer? (*Pretend you're paying by the word to put them in a newspaper and need to make the bill as small as possible!*)
- Am I clear about what I mean? (*Do you know something so well you've missed out information someone new to it would need?*)
- Do I mention items or habits a younger reader wouldn't understand? (*For example, think about the differences between doing the laundry in a twin tub many years ago to doing it in an automatic washing machine now. Would a younger reader need a little explanation?*)

Read the piece aloud and see how well it sounds. Ideally, it should sound like your spoken voice, as if you're telling the story to someone you know. Reword any parts your tongue trips over as you're reading them out.

When you're happy with it, decide what you want to do with the piece. Is there someone you'd like to share it with?

Why not type it up and share it on the Royal Voluntary Service Virtual Village Hall Facebook page? Or record yourself reading it and upload it as an audio file? We'd love to hear it!

### ***In the meantime - happy writing!***

With many thanks to the members of my writing groups who allowed me to use their work in this handout. Ownership of their texts remain with them. All remaining text © Alison Mott, April 2020  
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