

TAKE YOURSELF ON HOT D.A.T.E.S

Writing techniques for creative people

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Creativity takes practise, so make sure you have a nice chunk of time, all to yourself, and try writing a scene that uses these five fabulous techniques: D.A.T.E.S

D: Dialogue

Reveal character, choose vocabulary, ask questions, have fun...

‘Please, Mrs Glock?’ I beg. ‘*Pleeease?* Just give me one more chance. This won’t be like the last time, I promise.’

Mrs Glock arches a carefully pencilled eyebrow. ‘Like the last seven times, you mean?’

I push my face into an expression of innocent surprise. ‘Seven? Are you sure?’

‘Quite sure.’

‘Hmm.’ I frown and start racking my brain for a new plan. ‘That seems kind of high.’

‘No, Wednesday,’ Alfie says helpfully, ‘it’s definitely seven. Remember? You’ve had three blackouts, two meltdowns, one spontaneous electrical discharge and one, um ... inexplicable rain of fireballs.’ Alfie smiles and shakes his head. ‘Boy, remember that one?’

Mrs Glock’s face twitches. ‘I remember,’ she says in a voice like ice.
(From *Wednesday Weeks and the Tower of Shadows*)

A: Action

Use strong verbs, show characters DOING, write slow things fast, write fast things slow...

Cam yelled. Liv dropped Sophie’s hand and ran to the river. Now Cam was running too, but Liv reached the riverbank first, just as Jack’s head burst above the raging water. He was gasping, eyes wide. And he was disappearing downriver, fast.

“Here!” Liv screamed, running along the riverbank. She held out one end of a long branch. “Grab on!”

Liv dodged trees and slipped over roots as she raced. Jack struggled and splashed towards her, fighting the boiling current to reach out for the branch. But it was never going to work. Liv was too slow. Jack was being pulled downstream too fast.

(From *Beneath The Trees*)

T: Thoughts

Show us your character's worries, imaginings, fears, feelings, ideas and plans...

Isaac's stomach tangled into itself. He'd tried wheelies a few times, but they'd never really worked. Perhaps this was the place to learn how. Perhaps this island was the place for loads of new things, like making friends with the bronze-haired girl, for a start. Only, he wasn't sure Mum would agree. What he needed was a plan.

(From *To The Lighthouse*)

Alfie's my best friend – okay, technically my only friend – and I know it's not his fault he's a genius. But sometimes – especially times like now, when my whole future is on the line and I'm trying to concentrate – I wish he could dial it back a little. That's all. You know, just a smidge. I just don't know how to tell him without coming across like a total grouch.

(From *Wednesday Weeks and the Tower of Shadows*)

E: Exposition

Play with language, describe things using similes and metaphor, harness the rule of three...

The river was writhing and raging like a wild thing. Cream and caramel waves seemed to plough through the forest like bulldozers.

(From *Beneath The Trees*)

The quokka stared at him, its black eyes serious as it nibbled a ripe fig held in two furry paws. It looked like a teddy bear crossed with a miniature kangaroo.

(From *To The Lighthouse*)

I sneak a peek at my laptop. But instead of coloured blocks, the screen is filled with dancing monkeys, flying puppies and what appears to be a portrait of Elvis drinking coffee.

(From *Wednesday Weeks and the Tower of Shadows*)

S: Sensory language

Write about things smell, sound, taste, look, feel to the touch, and feel in your heart...

The smell hit Fiona first. Formalin and chemicals, clawing at the back of her throat. Grabbing at her eyes, her nose. It was 1975, her first day at St Thomas's Medical School, and their first class was dissection.

The dissection room was huge, with high windows, bare walls and a floor that echoed every sound. Long stainless-steel tables were distributed around the mopped floor, shrouded in white sheets.

Under the sheets lay, what? Human bodies? Fiona swallowed back the bitter chemical taste, and her fear with it.

(From *Aussie STEM Stars: Fiona Wood, inventor of spray-on skin*)