

FACT SHEET NO. 3

Getting Started in Writing

Perhaps you're a student with a flair for writing, or an older person with some leisure time on your hands and a desire to explore your creativity. Maybe you have an interest in writing but have never put pen to paper - or maybe you've written quite a few pieces but don't know what to do with them. Getting started in writing can be a daunting process, but take heart from the fact that all of the world's most successful writers were "novices" once! What you do with your writing skills depends largely on the time and energy you devote to their development. And regardless of whether you are aiming to write for a hobby or as a profession, your success will be determined through a combination of talent, commitment - and luck! There are no rules for starting out in writing, but here are a few suggestions you might like to consider.

Join a writers' organisation. The Fellowship of Australian Writers is the oldest and largest writers' organisation in Australia, but there are many others worth joining. Most states now offer government-run Writers' Centres, which are great places for meeting other writers and finding out about readings, workshops, and literary festivals. In addition, there are many regional and suburban writing groups which meet on a regular basis. Joining writers' organisations puts you in touch with the latest events in the writing world, and can also provide you with a network of writing associates - and confirmation that you are, indeed, a writer.

Attend courses and workshops on writing. Your local Writers' Centre is likely to offer a range of short courses designed to improve your writing skills. In addition, institutions such as the Council of Adult Education, TAFE colleges, and an increasing number of universities, offer single writing subjects and Certificates/Diplomas of Professional Writing. Writing requires craft and skill as much as imagination; the benefits of classroom study and intensive workshops, when conducted by skilled, professional writers, cannot be underestimated.

Get into the habit of writing. No amount of formal training is likely to teach you as much about writing as the actual practice of putting pen to paper. Many new writers are reluctant to write because of a fear that what they produce will not be perfect - or may be so terrible that they should not have bothered in the first place! But it should be borne in mind that good writing is a craft, not a stroke of luck. The only way to improve your writing is to practise, and to practise on a regular basis. Rather than trying to "get a piece right" the first time, you would be better to simply throw all your ideas down on paper. Then you can spend some time reading over what you've written, before you begin the painstaking - yet rewarding - task of editing and improving your piece.