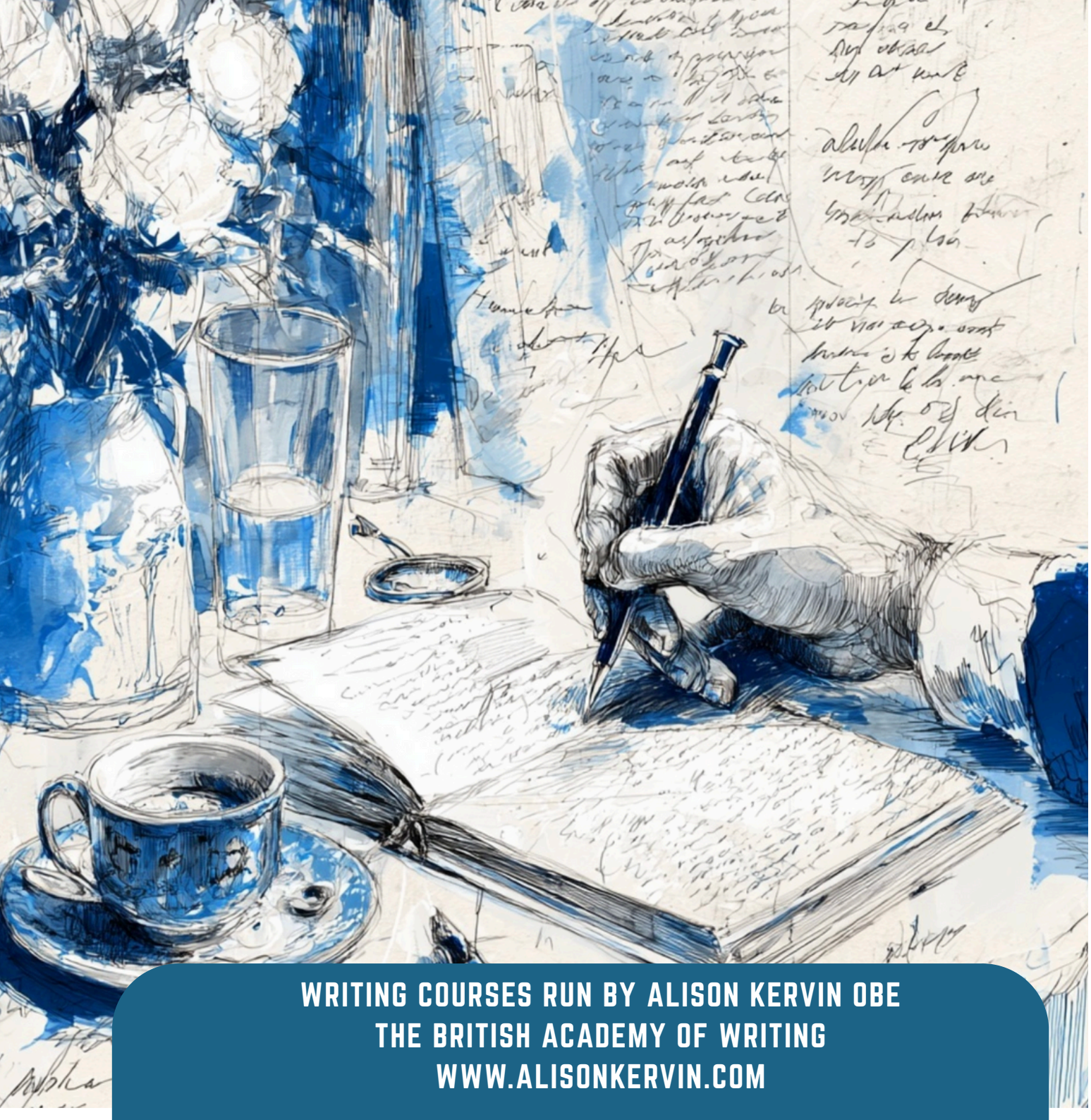


WRITE YOUR NOVEL

THINKING OF A GREAT IDEA

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HOW TO BEGIN

One of the biggest mistakes new writers make when they embark on a novel is to start writing.

Yes, you read that correctly.

Very few successful authors put pen to paper without first understanding the map they're following. Stephen King is a master of what's known as "pantsing" (writing by the seat of his pants until the story is done), but he's a rare breed. Most writers create a framework before they start & let their creativity flow into it. If you don't plan, you end up doing a great deal of editing, which can drive you to distraction. Before long, you'll wish you'd spent a little time in advance spotting the pitfalls and removing them.

So, I strongly advocate building the bones of the story before you dress it with beautiful prose. The result is cleaner, stronger writing and a far less painful editing process later on.



START YOUR STORY BIBLE

But if you don't start by writing, what do you do?

In my view, the best way to start a novel is with a Story Bible. This is the foundation of your book. It's a living document; messy, handwritten, full of scribbles and crossed-out thoughts. It's where everything is kept... maps of areas you're going to explore in your book, diagrams of houses, CVs of your characters... It's an incredibly useful document that keeps you right on track, and allows you to plot the novel beautifully.

💡 Tip: Every novel starts with a notebook full of half-formed theories, characters and ideas that blossom into wonderful characters & prose.

YOUR STORY BIBLE STARTS WITH A GREAT IDEA

So, grab a notebook and we'll start. Obviously, before you can do anything else, you need a BIG idea.
A big idea is one with energy. It's not just a funny anecdote or a nice setting; it's an idea fizzing with energy that has the power to keep creating complications for 20-40 chapters and tens of thousands of words.

Where do these ideas come from?

- **Your life**: emotions, frustrations, obsessions, questions.
- **History & culture**: myths, family stories, footnotes that won't let go.
- **Watching/observing/listening**: people who pass you on the street and sit next to you on the bus
- **Tropes**: Identified story types that audiences love.
- **What If…**

In this short guide, we are going to explore the idea of 'WHAT IF..?'

Many of the greatest stories in history begin with 'what if' and are shaped by it. For example: What would happen if…

A young boy and girl from rival families met and fell in love.

What if a man pretended to be mad? Would he eventually become mad?

Many of Shakespeare's finest works turn on the idea of creating a moment, then continually asking 'what if…'

AN EXAMPLE:

YOU'RE SITTING IN A BAR AND YOU SEE A MAN SMILE AT A WOMAN.

HOW DO WE USE THE "WHAT IF?" TECHNIQUE TO CREATE ENOUGH ENERGY FOR A NOVEL?

- **WHAT IF THEY SPEND THE NIGHT TOGETHER AND IN THE MORNING HE REALISES SHE'S UNDERAGE?**
- **WHAT IF HE'S A TEACHER STARTING A NEW JOB AND HE LATER DISCOVERS SHE'S HIS PUPIL?**
- **WHAT IF HE'S A POLICE OFFICER AND NOW HE'S BROKEN THE LAW?**
- **WHAT IF HE DOESN'T TELL ANYONE?**
- **WHAT IF SHE BLACKMAILS HIM?**

NOW THERE'S CONFLICT, SECRECY, CONSEQUENCE - AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, LOTS OF ENERGY.
DO YOU SEE?
YOU CAN FEEL THE ENERGY COMING OUT OF EVERY NEW DEVELOPMENT OF THE STORY, AND YOU CAN EASILY SENSE THE TWISTS AND TURNS THAT COULD ARISE, LIKE:

WHAT IF HER MUM FOUND OUT?
WHAT IF HE WAS MARRIED?
WHAT IF SHE TOLD ALL HER FRIENDS?
WHAT IF SHE FELL PREGNANT?

ADDING & DEVELOPING

You see how much fun this can be?

We can add in more and more **WHAT IFs**, adding complications, and the story will grow and grow because of its innate energy. If it's a bad idea, you'll not be able to keep challenging it with 'what if.'

Your Turn

Look up from where you are: what do you see?
I'm sitting in my office, and when I look out of the window, I see a man checking the pressures on his tyres with a portable gauge.

What do I ask myself?

- What if that's not his car?
- What if he's letting the tyres down?
- What if he fills them so much they explode?
- What if he's putting a tracking device or a listening device on the car?



NOW IT'S YOUR TURN

Look around and write a list of "what ifs" without judging them. Then circle the three that make your stomach flip - the ones that feel alive.

💡 Tip: A good "what if" makes you curious. A great one makes you gasp at the thought of the story that's unfolding under your pen.

Once you've highlighted your favourite three - ones that you can continue to ask 'what if' about - then pick one. That's the one we are going to work with today.

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE POWER

As well as being energetic, a strong idea needs power...it needs to fit into one line that gives it movement, conflict and stakes. Can you take your idea, and do this with it...?
When [character] faces [problem], they must [action] — or risk [stakes].

Examples:

1. When a newly hired teacher realises he's crossed a line with someone who turns out to be under-age and his pupil, he must choose between confession and cover-up — or lose everything.
2. When a retired policewoman's long-missing sister, wanted for murder, walks into her kitchen one morning, she must decide whether to call the station — or hide her.



KEEP DEVELOPING YOUR IDEA

Once you've done this, and have a power statement, it's time to really develop it.
To explain what I mean, let's take example one...

When a newly-hired teacher (what's his name? why newly hired? Where did he move from? How old is he? What does he teach? Is he married? Does he have children? etc) realises he's crossed a line (How? What happened? Where? When?)with someone who turns out to be under-age (how did he discover this? Did he know at the time, or find out afterwards?) and his pupil (what's her name? how old is she? when does he find out that she's a pupil? What sort of pupil is she? What school? Is she a popular student, is she likely to tell her friends? Is this something she's done before?), he must choose between confession and cover-up — or lose everything.

TIME TO THROW STONES

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All you've been doing in the last section is colouring in your idea and turning it into a premise. Keep all the notes through this development stage in your story bible.

Now you need to test whether this premise has real legs. Can it run for 300 pages?

George Abbott, a legendary American playwright, said:

**"In the first act, put your hero up a tree.
In the second act, throw stones at him.
In the third act, get him down."**

We've got our hero up a tree - we did this by revealing that the girl he'd just spent the night with was under age.

Now we need to work out whether we can throw stones at him. Can things get worse - is there enough energy and power in this idea for more?



LET'S COMPLICATE THINGS...

The short answer is - yes! - there's anough energy for loads of complications...

- What if she tells her mum?
- What if she tells her friends?
- What if she gets pregnant?

Those three definitely count as throwing stones at him.

Ask yourself - can things get more difficult for your protagonist? Who else will get dragged into the chaos?
Does each chapter raise the stakes? Can things get worse before they get better?

What's really at stake — love, freedom, safety, identity, justice, forgiveness?
Can you close your eyes and feel your story...the smells, the textures, the temperature of the air.
Stories live in the senses.
When you can feel your story, it's real.



CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE COURSE.
IN IT I TAKE YOU THROUGH THE WHOLE PROCESS OF WRITING A NOVEL, HOLDING YOUR HAND THROUGH EVERY STEP...

YOU CAN DO IT!

YOU CAN WRITE THE NOVEL YOU'VE ALWAYS DREAMED OF WRITING



I CAN HELP YOU. JUST CLICK HERE

TAKE A LOOK AT WHAT'S IN MY COURSE. JUST CLICK HERE

