



In this issue

Websites	2
Getting down to business	2
Clear thoughts, clear text	
Tight words	2
The writing life	3
No time to write?	
Studying on-line	4

Flexing our minds

Can't say we have pursued the tai chi since this photo was taken, but we're besotted with the tea we found on our explorations in Hong Kong. We still remember to 'wake up the tea' as we were taught ... and hope our current stocks last until the next trip.

It is said that elite sports performance is 20 per cent physical and 80 per cent psychological. We reckon this also applies to professional writing so in this issue, we

ponder the writer's state of mind. Let us know if it resonates with you ... or not!

We're now preparing ideas for sessions to offer in HK in November—what would you like us to tackle next, or even to repeat? We'd really love to hear your suggestions so please feel free to contact us via the email details on page 4.

Susanna Bryceson & Sherry! Clark

what are we up to now?



Photo top: Harbourside in Hong Kong, with much to learn.

Photo above: Susanna and Women in Publishing Society session participants in the lovely cellar conference room at the Helena May Centre in Hong Kong, November 2007. Such a beautiful building to teach in!

Susanna: I'm currently writing newsletters for residents who live within walking distance of a local shopping area, to encourage them to 'live local'.

Unlike most of the other work I do, it involves looking at micro issues and I'm enjoying it greatly. I'm also working on a project that's becoming more 'macro' by

the week—housing affordability. It began as three leaflets for different readers; now we're talking about regular email bulletins with reader input.

Work at Victoria University is absorbing, mainly because we have the latitude to invent and organise as suits our course—the most exciting project is to build the literary life of the region around the university.

And I've just begun teaching *Corporate Writing* online (not too late to join—see page 4).

Sherry! I've just been to the Children's Book Council conference in Melbourne and heard some terrific speakers.

I chaired a session on poetry for kids, and out of that has come a proposal for a Children's Laureate in Australia, as well as a 'Poem a Week' webpage for schools.

My new book *Tracey Binns is Trouble* was launched during the conference, and I've created a website for the character at www.traceybinns.com.

The best news of all is that my verse novel *Sixth Grade Style Queen (Not!)* has been shortlisted for the CBCA awards—the winner

is announced in August but I won't start biting my fingernails just yet!

And I am teaching three subjects online at VU (well, at last count—they seem to be growing like mushrooms). The *Writing Picture Books* unit is going well with 19 students, and *Fiction Elements* is producing some great writing.



Supporting writers

My site of the moment is a writers' blog at

www.writers-first-aid.blogspot.com

Kristi Holl is a children's writer and editor who I met at the Chautauqua workshop in New York in 2004. That was when I bought her book, *Writers' First Aid*, a great collection of articles.

Now she has a blog, designed to support writers of all forms and genres. Recent posts have been about time management, journalling, staying focused on goals, and energy zappers.

SC

Writer's voice, and more goals

Craig Harper started out as a fitness advisor and has become a sought-after motivational speaker.

I've heard him on the radio and Sherryl came across his website. We both subscribe to his online blog.

I looked at Craig's site out of curiosity and subscribed from a professional writing viewpoint—I am intrigued by his ability to write from the heart without repelling me, even though his messages about 'renovating your life' are full-on.

What impresses me most is the way Craig's voice comes across. As a writer, he's untrained and could sometimes use editing help to make his posts more succinct. His distinctly Australian word choices might drive you crazy, but I think his style is an extraordinary example of engaging expression using plain words.

If you *also* like his messages, so much the better.

NOTE: Craig's post on 4 May 2008, 'In search of the twenty-five hour day', relates directly to the topic Sherryl covers on page 3.

www.craigharper.com.au

SB

Clear thoughts, clear text

The educator Rudolph Steiner may well have said 'busy hands, busy brain', but Susanna says 'for anyone trying to write clearly in a complex world, multi-tasking might only make the job more difficult'.

Thinking time is under-valued in the workplace. In today's commercial world, the common belief is that one should always be busy, that this is what you are paid for. Checking and responding to emails. Speaking on the phone. Attending meetings.

However, from the kind of writing I'm called on to work with, it seems busy hands are creating addled brains, foggy thoughts.

I believe there isn't enough plain old thinking going on. If more people thought deeply and clearly before they wrote, half my freelance work would dry up.

Most of us aren't taught thinking techniques: not in school, at university or in the workplace. We are all expected to write about our ideas clearly, but this assumes you have them clear in your mind in the first place.

Just concentrate!

It's extraordinary what you can accomplish with just 5-10 minutes of concentration.

I don't mean staring out the window, waiting for something inspirational to bubble up—one might say that's for those fiction writers who have plenty of time, but Sherryl agrees that even they can benefit greatly from intense thinking.

What I mean is giving your full attention to resolving that tricky letter or planning your funding proposal.

There's really nothing fancy about it—just shut the door, silence the phone and disable your email. If you can't do that, then get out and away—go to the staff library, an unoccupied meeting room, or even to a nearby cafe. When I worked in London, I'd take my notes to a nearby pub and order a soda—it was always quiet there in the afternoons.

Picture in your mind what you are trying to say. Imagine it clearly—the action, the people, the location, the fine details.

Here are some tips to get you started.

- ∞ Explain your message or topic plainly to an imaginary customer, or even to your mum. If it helps, say it out loud—or whisper it—then write down what you've said. This can be a good starting point.
- ∞ Sketch your message or idea as a diagram.
- ∞ Write about it as a postcard to an old friend.

The aim is to bring your idea to life, to work out what it means to the daily lives of people who will buy it, see it, or be affected by it.

For example, look at this sentence:

'We will be increasing accessibility to all service centres in the central city.'

For the person using the service centres this sounds ... desirable, but it doesn't actually create a clear picture of anything.

Use the techniques above to pinpoint what you mean. Imagine the service centres, see the people who use them coming and going. Are you going to extend opening hours? Are you going to set up websites? Are you going to install wheelchair ramps or relocate bus stops? All of the above? If so, that's fantastic and I'd be detailing them, loud and clear.

This kind of hard thinking can make all the difference, and with practice, you'll be putting writers like me out of work!

SB ∞

TIGHT WORDS

'The Social Model of Disability understands disability as a problem created and imposed by society. It recognises that it is not the impairments of people with disabilities which cause "the problem", but rather the way in which society fails to make allowances for differences.'

*from Women with Disabilities
Australia website*

Tightened up for a newsletter

'Council believes disability is a problem created and imposed by society—it's not the people's impairments that cause "the problem", but society's failure to allow for the differences.'

∞

No time to write?

It's a familiar complaint. Everything seems to get in the way—family commitments, work, sport, the need to sleep—and nowhere is there time to sit down and write. Sherryl Clark admits she has a problem.

People often say to me, 'How do you find the time? You're so prolific.'

Well, I'm not. I often feel guilty because I don't spend as much time writing as I could. Notice that I said 'could', not 'should'.

'Should' is like the stuff we were told as kids—you should eat your vegies because there are starving children in Africa. If we think of writing as a should task, where's the incentive to do it? You're trying to work out of a sense of created guilt.

I say 'could' because I know that I waste time. I know that I procrastinate. Why? I think it's because of fear—fear I will have nothing to write and that I'll sit there for hours producing zilch. Or fear that anything I do produce will be terrible. Despite all I know about rewriting, and about how the first draft is always either bad or just not what you wanted, I still have to convince myself every time that all I have to do is sit and write.

Usually I get there by telling myself that I only have to do one page, even if it's an awful page, just write ONE. Eventually I do, and most of the time I write a lot more. But I still have to talk myself into that first one.

How do I waste time? The way everyone does. I read, talk on the phone, do housework, check emails (a time killer), catch up on paperwork, do class preparation ... add your own favourites.

How do we solve this problem? I doubt we can do it by beating ourselves over the head with a heavy dictionary—that's the road to more guilt and shoulds, and is best avoided.

I like this analogy from Kristi Holl's *Writer's First Aid*. A professor fills a large jar with rocks. He asks his class if the jar is full. He demonstrates that it's not by adding pebbles. Full? No, he adds sand. Full now? No, he adds water. You might assume this is about how much we can cram into our day. Holl says no, think of the rocks as your writing. They have to go in first, otherwise you will never fit them in all with the other stuff. (See Kristi's website address on page 2.)

How many of us put writing first, really and truly? We fill our days and then cram writing into the odd half hour once a week.

Some people's lives are just too chaotic and busy—you might have five kids, an ailing mother and a part-time job. I see these people put aside their writing, month after month, and yearn for the chance to write.

Then I read about writers who have all that and more to cope with, and who still find half an hour to write, even if it means getting up earlier or staying up half an hour later. In half an hour you can write one page. In a week, that's six pages. In a year, that's 300 pages. A novel.

Am I preaching? I guess so. I finally became serious about my commitment after I had been to the USA for a two-week writing



This relaxed picture of Sherryl at St Catherine's Girls High School, Hong Kong, doesn't betray the panic she felt when she disembarked at the wrong metro station on her way to the school earlier that day.

workshop. Every day I wrote in class, we workshoped our writing and talked writing non-stop. Every night in my little room, I wrote for an hour. In two weeks I wrote 7500 words.

When I arrived home, I realised I could do it anywhere. The 7500 words hadn't come from writing in my room for five or six hours. What changed was that I understood the importance of regular stints instead of long sessions every once in a while. It's especially important for novels: if you don't write regularly, it takes a lot of time thinking your way back into the story. It's 'showing up at your desk every day' that works.

This way I was always thinking about my writing project; even if it was in the back of my brain, subconsciously something was simmering because I knew sometime that day I'd be writing. When I sat down to write, I was ready. Out came the words.

I'd like to say I've continued this marvelous work routine ever since, but I'd be lying. However, I did continue it for four months until I finished (and rewrote) that novel. I still retain that feeling of 'living the writing' and am convinced that short, regular periods of writing will get me there a lot faster and more effectively than saving up for a rainy writing day.

This was confirmed for me when I listened to Linda Sue Park speak about her writing at the Chautauqua Children's Writers' Workshop in New York. She described her commitment to write two pages per day, no matter what. She stuck to this every day for three months before it became an ingrained habit *that she couldn't stop*. It will work for you too.

So where and when are you going to write each day? You only have to find half an hour. Not enough? Then in your diary, block out three one-hour sessions per week. Call it 'Writer's Meeting'. Call it anything you like, but make sure you're there, backside on the chair, ready to write.

You don't think you have three hours? Try this. Turn off the TV. Don't look at your emails. Take the phone off the hook. Get the family to help with the chores, and don't accept any excuses or arguments. Put a 'Keep Out!' sign on the door and mean it.

Mean it for yourself. Do you want to write? Really and truly?

Then do it.

SC ∞

This is the edited version of an article that first appeared on www.absolutewrite.com.

STUDYING ONLINE

After early complications with enrolments, our online units are up and running, generating lots of enthusiastic posts.

For those of you who don't know what we're doing, Sue and I mooted the idea a couple of years ago of running our own online classes through textConnection. However, the job required more than just translating our manuals into webpages and our face-to-face teaching took priority.

In the meantime, funding at Victoria University enabled us to create online units for some of our subjects. In 2007, Sue ran *Corporate Writing 1* for the first time online and has just begun it again for 2008.

I built *Writing Picture Books* over 18 months, and took it online in February this year. I now have 22 students! In the first two weeks we had over 300 posts on the Discussion Board (now nearly 1000) and everyone has been active and engaged. Our introduction to fiction writing—*Fiction Elements*—also went live in February, and I have 12 students in that subject.

I'm finding it to be an exciting way to communicate with students. Gone is the shyness about putting up your hand in class! Everyone can take part freely on the Discussion Board and read other posts.

I have students in Melbourne, country Victoria, outback Queensland and Hong Kong. International time differences are irrelevant! Some students log in at midnight, others join in first thing every morning. Instead of attending one set class per week, I'm logging in nearly every day to post my responses, answer questions and see what everyone is doing.

I'll certainly be doing this again in 2009!

SC ∞

More Information

Our online subjects entail about 60 hours study over about 15 weeks, but this varies from student to student.

Fiction Elements and *Writing Picture Books* are set up as weekly sessions students join when it suits them during that week.

Corporate Writing 1 is set up as 4 modules that students work through over 15 weeks, largely at their own pace, meeting a few interim deadlines and interacting via a Discussion Board.

If you're interested in *Corporate Writing 1* you can still join in. The subject will run until September and is flexible enough to admit newcomers.

Email us to receive information sheets on each of these on-line subjects.

To put your name on the lists for *Fiction Elements* (to begin mid-July 2008) or *Writing Picture Books* (February 2009), email Sherryl.Clark@vu.edu.au

applying

Participants need to enrol in the Certificate IV Professional Writing & Editing at Victoria University.

Application details are on the Victoria University website:

www.creativeindustries.vu.edu.au

Follow the links to Professional Writing & Editing. Your email query will go straight to Susanna as Course Coordinator.

This is not one of Sherryl's online classes—they're too difficult to photograph! It's from one of her classes at the Hong Kong YWCA in November 2007.



textConnection

writing ∞ editing ∞ training

www.textconnection.net

Sherryl Clark

phone +613 9314 1082
(in Australia 03 9314 1082)

email
sherrylclark@textconnection.net

Susanna Bryceson

phone +61413 261 447
(in Australia 0413 261 447)

email
suebryceson@textconnection.net

the textConnection newsletter is produced and emailed quarterly.

Please forward this newsletter to anyone you think might find it useful.

Just send us an email if you want to be added to our distribution list.

textConnection conducts training courses in writing tailored to beginners and advanced writers, people working in the publishing industry, teachers and businesspeople.

Our courses include:

- ∞ fiction writing for adults and children
- ∞ poetry writing
- ∞ non-fiction and life writing
- ∞ corporate writing
- ∞ editing
- ∞ publication production.

We have been teaching writing and editing for more than 20 years each, and both work in the writing industry.

We conduct our courses in Australia and Asia.