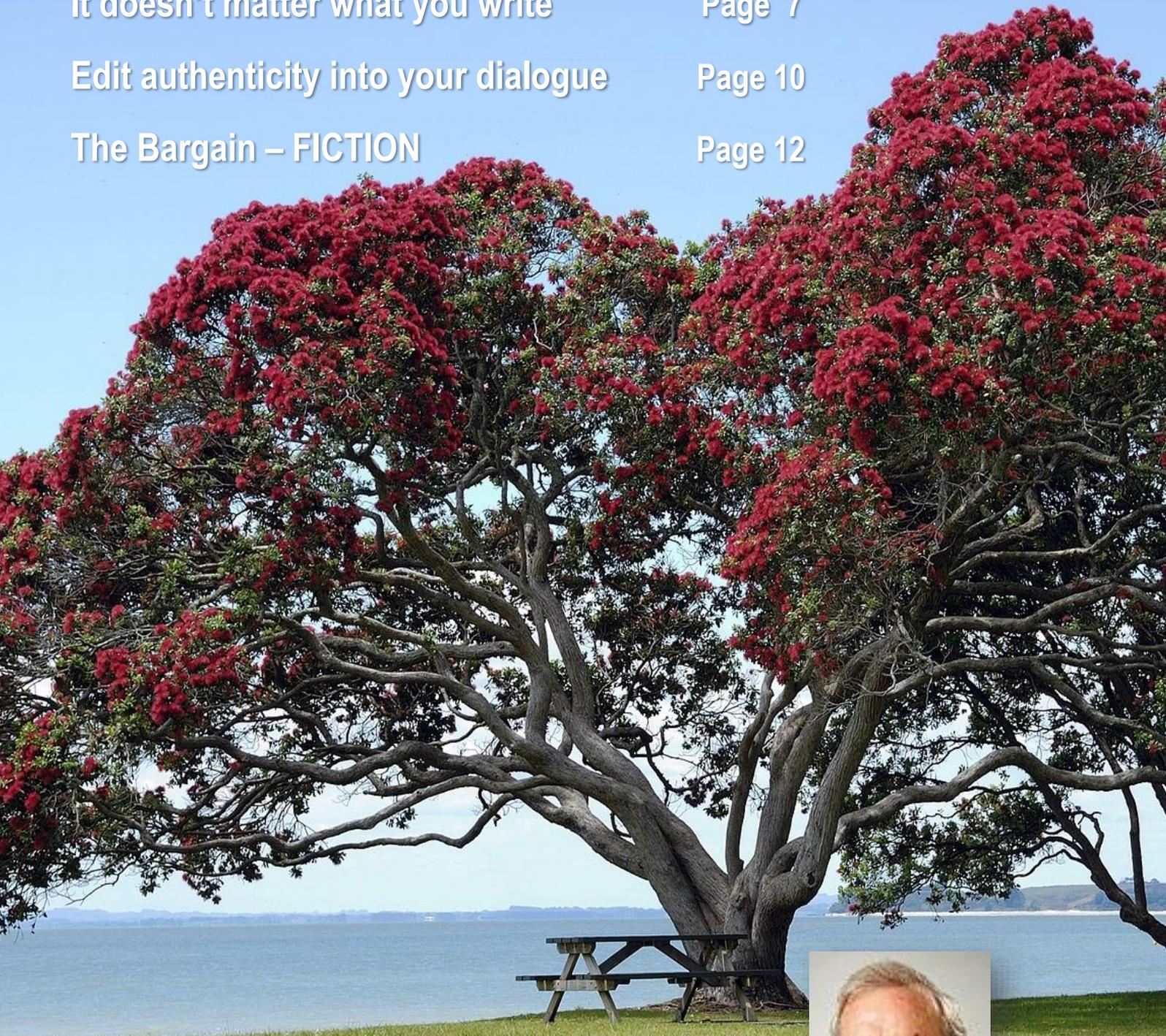


What could YOU do against the odds? Page 3

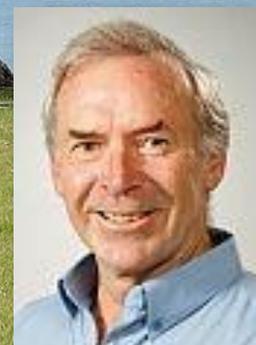
It doesn't matter what you write Page 7

Edit authenticity into your dialogue Page 10

The Bargain – FICTION Page 12

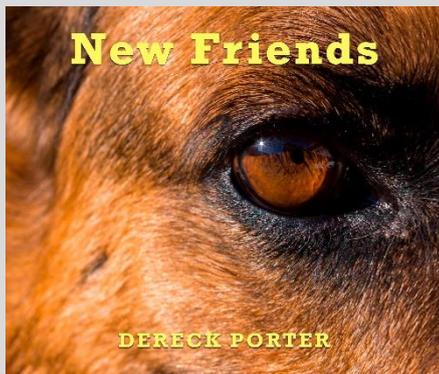


**Find Your Passion & Create Your Path**  
Page 2



## Find Your Passion and Create Your Path

NZIBS Graduate Dereck Porter has just published his first book on Amazon, *New Friends*.



Dereck is the proud owner of a Gold Card and working part-time at the University of Canterbury in Transition Programmes helping students who either do not have UE or are mature students and have been in the workforce for a while and want to come to university.

Dereck's job is to teach academic communication and study skills. This involves mainly academic writing in the form of essays.



This is Dereck's third career as he's been a communication technician and had his own handyman business before going into teaching. He's also travelled a lot, mainly with a pack on his back, and seen a lot of the world on a shoestring budget before mobile phones were invented. In fact, his 4-month OE to the UK ended up being two years!

Dereck's always loved reading, and he and his wife have passed that common trait on to their children. His eldest son worked in publishing for a while in Auckland and London and his daughter is also an aspiring writer.

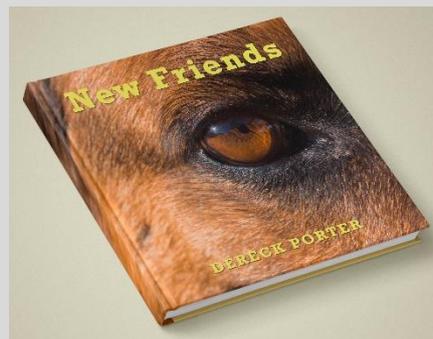
According to Dereck ...

I'm sure you cannot be a good writer if you are not a reader. The two skills go hand in hand. My reading genre of choice changes from time to time, but a good mystery is hard to beat, and I also love non-fiction including biographies and adventure.

I had been looking for something to do when my time at UC comes to an end and had considered a proofreading course as something that I could do from home and in my own time. A friend was doing the NZIBS Proofreading course and while looking at the different courses available on that website, the short fiction writing one seemed a more appropriate choice for me at this time.

Academic writing is full of dos and don'ts, and I wanted a complete change to develop my writing in a 'freer' environment in the form of fiction writing. I know there are still rules that apply but not to the same extent as in academia.

Like a lot of people, I thought I had a story in me, and short story writing seemed a good place to start. Surely that couldn't be too difficult. Then the learning curve started. When I sent off my draft of the first story, I had hoped to get a big tick for it, but that didn't eventuate. I've developed a thicker skin and appreciated the constructive criticism from Tina Shaw. All her comments were right and changing the text in line with her directions meant that the finished story was much better than my first effort.



I've enjoyed putting words on the page and I'm proud of my first effort, *New Friends*, that has just been published on Amazon.

## Would you walk in the rain?

There is a saying widely circulated on the internet which is a great thought provoker.

*Umbrella cannot stop the rain, but allows us to stand in the rain. Confidence may not bring success, but it gives the power to face the challenges.*

We often use umbrellas in the real sense and in the metaphoric sense too. Wouldn't it be great if we could imagine that every day it's raining, and we are using our umbrella to enable us to walk in the rain without getting wet?

Imagine how much more we could achieve if we did this, how many more places we could go, and how much farther too!

Doesn't this in turn give us confidence? Confidence to do these things and confidence in ourselves. If we have confidence in ourselves, then doesn't this in turn help us achieve and manage our failures or shortcomings, and with this of course we become tougher and stronger and more able to take on more, face more challenges and become successful.

So how can we incorporate this into our lives to help us to take on these challenges?

### Here are 6 steps for you to consider over the forthcoming weeks:

- B – Be positive – be aware of those negative thoughts and keep them at bay
- R – Be realistic – ensure what you do is achievable, don't overdo it
- O – Be optimistic – keeping focused on what you can do not what you can't do
- L – Be logical – ensure your steps follow a sensible path that is clear
- L – Be loving – particularly to yourself, you need to be good to you more often
- Y – Be yourself – don't lose 'you' in the process, only do what seems natural

Remember to have that plan to take your umbrella out in the rain at least once a week to help you broaden your comfort zone to increase your self-confidence and gain success. □

# What could YOU do against the odds?

by **Anthony Smits** Reproduced for educational purposes

*NZIBS has highlighted this story in the past. It's worth a revisit, as many are already thinking about 2018. Are you? If so, what will you do differently next year to advance the dreams you have?*

**The Brooklyn Bridge** in New York is one of the oldest suspension bridges in the United States. Completed in 1883, it has a main span of 486.3 m – which made it the longest suspension bridge in the world from its opening until 1903, and the first steel-wire suspension bridge. Better built than most, it survives in use today.

The Brooklyn Bridge design and construction methodology was new—in the 19<sup>th</sup> century—and the bridge was only completed due to the Roebling family's 'never-say-die' attitude and total belief in their vision.

In mid-century New York's ever-increasing busyness, an enterprising engineer named John Augustus Roebling put forward a plan to build an impossibly long bridge that would connect Manhattan Island with Long Island.

Roebling, born in Prussia, moved to Pennsylvania when he was 25, to form a Utopian agrarian community and to build suspension bridges.

The community failed – as most do – but his bridge designs were successful.

However, when he came to New York with a bold concept to bridge New York's East River, all other 'expert' bridge designers laughed.

They 'of course' knew bridge building best and concluded that his idea was an impossible project.

*"Can't be done."  
"It is not practical."*

Roebling decided that no critic knew better than he did – and that this bridge could and should be built.

After significant persuasion, so it was reported, his son Washington, also an engineer, agreed to help. It seemed that New Yorkers would soon be walking or riding over an engineering masterpiece.

Despite many obstacles, the father-and-son duo soon completed their design for a two-tower suspension bridge.

With a work crew hired, building began in 1869.

However, tragedy struck quickly.

The bridge's principal designer, John Roebling, died at only 63 after complications resulting from an injury he got while surveying the site of the Brooklyn-end tower.



Washington Roebling

His foot was crushed by a berthing ferry that pinned it against a piling. His toes were amputated.

Roebling developed tetanus, but didn't seek treatment, believing in the alternative therapies of the time. The disease incapacitated him and he died as a consequence.

Washington took over the reins, although the bridge was hardly begun, and there was a long and complex road ahead.

But he was young, and keen.

His first objective was to securely anchor the bridge's two towers on the solid bedrock found under the layers of mud below the East River.

To do this, builders had to work underwater.

A wooden caisson, resembling a giant box, was assembled on land, towed to the site of the Brooklyn-side tower and sunk. Compressed air was pumped into the chamber to prevent any water leaking in. The caisson's false floor was then ripped out allowing workers to dig up the river bottom.

Working conditions within the caisson were appalling.

Workers could only remain on the river bottom for two hours, due to pressure from the compressed air, as well as suffocating heat, a lack of oxygen – and the general din of construction.

Then, as they ascended through the compressed air to the top of the caisson, workers suffered the crippling and painful effects of the bends – an imbalance of nitrogen in the blood which is caused by moving between environments of different pressures too quickly. At that time, little was known about the 'bends' or decompression sickness. It was referred to as 'caisson disease' by the project's physician, Dr Andrew Smith. Many who worked within the caissons were afflicted by the bends, including the project's engineer, Washington Roebling.

In January 1870, construction of the towers had barely begun when Washington suffered a paralyzing injury.

*Continued on Page 4*

## What could YOU do against the odds?

*Continued from Page 3*

The decompression sickness almost killed Roebling and left him unable to continue work. He was not initially able to walk or talk or even move. He was bedridden.

Critics were vocal.

*"We told them."*

*"Stupid men and their stupid dreams."*

*"It's the height of foolishness to chase such a crazy vision."*

Everyone had an opinion.

Many felt that the project should now be scrapped.

Who would complete it, anyway? The Roeblings were the only ones who believed it was possible.



After Washington got the bends, he could not continue in charge of the construction. At times he could barely move.

However, in spite of his handicap, he was never discouraged and still had a burning desire to complete the bridge – and his mind was still as sharp as ever. He tried to inspire and pass on his enthusiasm to some of his friends, but they were daunted by the task.

However, Washington had to relinquish responsibility for the job of overseeing construction.

It was Emily, his wife, who rescued John Roebling's vision.



Emily Roebling

For the next 11 years, while her husband Washington could do little more than watch from a window and guide her, Emily was in charge. Initially, she had no engineering or mathematical training, so up-skilled to learn the complex disciplines required. She had to learn the nature of catenary curves, and gain a good working knowledge of the strengths of materials and all the aspects of cable construction.

Emily was also a good leader, able (in the 1880s), to supervise a crew of men – and she even spoke publicly to defend her husband.

For 13 years they worked as a team. In the end, John Roebling's vision proved more powerful than everything that needed to be overcome. The bridge was built. Emily was there at the end, to see it completed. At the opening ceremony on May 24, 1883, she was the first to walk across.

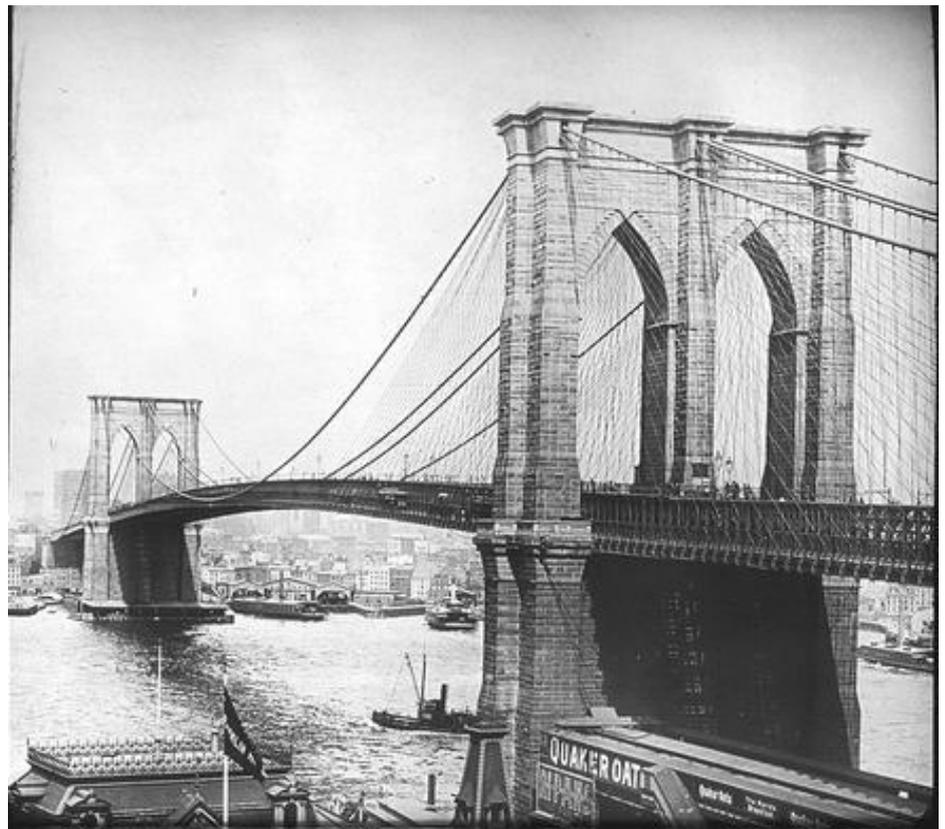
Today, this spectacular bridge stands as a tribute to Roebling's indomitable spirit and his determination not to be defeated by circumstances.

It is also a tribute to his other engineers and their team work, and to their faith in someone who was considered mad by half the world. It is also a tangible monument to Emily's love and devotion.

The Brooklyn Bridge story is one of the best examples of a never-say-die attitude.

Many others, like Roebling, have managed to overcome terrible physical handicaps and achieve 'impossible' goals.

*Continued on Page 5*



## What could YOU do against the odds?

*Continued from Page 4*

Often when we face obstacles in our day-to-day life, our hurdles seem very small in comparison to what many others have to face.

Even a distant dream can often be realised with persistence. You can build the bridges you need in life to achieve your dreams too.



### Brooklyn Bridge Trivia

The Brooklyn Bridge toll, on the day of opening, was one cent. Soon it was three cents, but not for long. Tolls were discontinued in 1911.

To ensure its survival and longevity, Roebling had over-designed his structure. His son estimated it was four times as strong as it needed to be, despite being supplied with inferior-quality steel cables during construction because a supplier wanted to make more profit.

While designing it, John Roebling claimed that the bridge wouldn't collapse without any cables, it would merely sag. But even after seeing it finished, many New Yorkers were not convinced the bridge was safe. To prove the doubters wrong, circus showman P.T. Barnum led a line of animals - including a herd of 21 elephants - across the bridge in 1884.

# Photography Competitions

Check out these photography contests:

There are dozens of photo contests worldwide, some free-to-enter and many which you can enter online.

**Here are some of the categories you could enter.**

- Abstract and Contemporary
- Architectural
- Fine Art
- Landscape and Nature
- Nudes
- People and Animals
- Photojournalism/Documentary

NOTE: some competitions are age-restricted, some are locality - restricted, others allow students to enter at no cost, and so on. If you're interested, you'll just have to read the terms and conditions to ensure you qualify.



## SHOOT THE FRAME

<http://shoottheframe.com/>

International monthly photography awards. Shoot the Frame gives exposure to your pictures.



Several competitions. If any are past closing, simply wait for the 2018 announcements.

<https://www.worldphoto.org/competitions>

<https://www.worldphoto.org/>

## viewbug

There are a LOT of contests here, with various criteria. Some are free to enter, others are not, or have conditions. You have to register and join the community before you can get the latest competition info.

Go here:

<https://www.viewbug.com>



Digital Camera Photographer of the Year is a competition which is intended to facilitate the discovery of new photographers.

<https://www.photocrowd.com/photo-competitions/photography-awards/dcpoty-2018/>

If you're under 25, you can also enter the Digital Camera Young Photographer of the Year contest.



This contest is for black and white photos. Low entry fee.

From the site

"...we hope the Zebra Awards will bring to light ... black and white photography from many amazing artists worldwide."

<http://www.tzipac.com/6th-zebra-awards-call-for-entries>

## Free Special Reports

**We have lots of articles on every topic imaginable. Ask for them by name and/or number. All of them are free.**

**Here are just a few examples:**

926 What to do in your creative retirement years.

109 Seven important tips from a great sports photographer.

169 How to relax your subjects, so you get a better photo portrait.

811 How to write like a real journalist.

486 How to prepare yourself for a brilliant career.

579 Jim Rohn's formula for turning failure into success.

850 What does a books editor do at work?

260 Why writing story books for children isn't all hard work.

263 How Harry Potter has got boys back into reading books.

754 How to stay positive during a long term job search.

920 Understanding why Internet sellers prosper while regular retailers stay anxious.

703 67 Ways to use your improved writing skills at work.

906 How Dick Francis got back into writing thrillers at age 87.

360 Why his childhood gave John Le Carre the right memories to be a master novelist.

232 How to write a more powerful press release.

242 How your handshake tells others a lot about you.

438 Speed reading. How to read fast so your eyes scan a whole page.

1000 Ken Follett talks about how he plans his thriller novels – meticulously.

1002 Tips for more effective PowerPoint presentations.

1004 How to write an editorial.

1005 How a novel written by an unknown author became a global bestseller. Amazing story.

**Ask for any of these by name and number. They're free.**

## CONTACTING NZIBS

Our toll free telephone number is  
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If you called the office recently and you didn't get through, please accept our apologies.

The office is usually ready for action from 9am until 5pm, Monday to Friday.

There is an ANSWERPHONE service to take messages before or after those hours.

The website is open 24/7. The Student Forum is always open and available, day and night, 24/7.

Or you can email ...  
[registrar@nzibs.co.nz](mailto:registrar@nzibs.co.nz)  
[principal@nzibs.co.nz](mailto:principal@nzibs.co.nz)  
[tutor@nzibs.co.nz](mailto:tutor@nzibs.co.nz)

### If you have good news:

Please share with everyone, use the online [Student Forum](#).

NB: Only students have access rights to the Forum.

### We ALL love reading about ...

- students' new books
- competition wins
- even small achievements.

Students can look in all sections and post comments or questions on subjects you're not studying.

That means proofreaders and story writers can see what the photographers are getting excited about. And so on.

There are also competitions anyone can enter. Participate in the full student life!

MEDIA caps for NZIBS graduates

- ❖ Journalist,
- ❖ Sports Journalist
- ❖ Photographer
- ❖ Travel Writer.

If you'd like one, please send \$10 and a letter detailing your name, postal address and former student number. One size fits all.



## Job Opportunities

[Conference Creator](#), Conferenz, Rodney & North Shore. Recent graduate with excellent communication who loves creating content and writing copy and always able to demonstrate impeccable written language. Full time. Apply now.

[Senior Media Advisor](#), New Zealand Police, Wellington. A talented Senior Media Advisor with a strong knowledge of the current media and social media environment and excellent writing skills to manage the more complex issues and be expected to mentor junior staff in the team. Full time. Apply now.

[Copywriter – MediaWorks Integration](#), MediaWorks NZ Limited, Auckland. An experienced copywriter with 2-3 years experience to provide creative and script writing skills to our Integration creative team. Full time. Apply now.

[Reporter](#), Kapiti News, Porirua & Kapiti Coast. Reporters with experience in multimedia essentially with ability to work across print and digital platforms. Full time. Apply now.

### All these vacancies were first listed in the Notices Forum when we discovered them.

Has the date expired? Check. Put yourself forward anyway! Show them you never give up.

[Media Assistant](#), New Zealand Police, Wellington. Duties include assisting with media and social media administration and responses, administrative support to enhance the team's trust and confidence objectives and co-ordination and management of the media team's roster. Full time. Apply now.

[Content Marketing Specialist](#), SKOPE Industries Ltd, Christchurch. A flawless communicator, both written and verbal with at least two years of experience to create and deliver high quality, targeted, multi-channel content. Full time. Apply now.

# It doesn't matter what you write

by **Elizabeth Engstrom**

from Graduates Club Report 1000

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When I was young, the only thing I ever wanted to be was a writer. I always knew that someday I'd see my name on the cover of a book, but it wasn't until I had a little life experience under my belt, a few credits from the school of hard knocks, and something to say about mankind, that I was ready to hit the keyboard and pour out my mystifications. The 'message' that burdens every writer had finally floated to the top of my psyche. It was time to write.

But everything I wrote sounded pompous or opinionated or biased. I couldn't make good fiction out of my message for mankind.

Then science fiction writer Theodore Sturgeon came to town and gave a workshop. I had grown up reading him; his influence on me as a young reader had been enormous. I paid my fee, mailed in the manuscript he agreed to read as a part of the workshop, and sat down to await his judgment.

While waiting for the workshop's date to roll around, it occurred to me that over the two-week course of this workshop, he and I might be at the coffee machine together.

The thought left me star-struck. What on earth could I say to the great Theodore Sturgeon?

I could ask him a question. I knew the prospect was not likely; there would be thousands of people at the workshop. Nevertheless, I prepared myself; I wracked my brain and spent sleepless nights, torturing myself about it.

## **What was my Definitive Question to ask Theodore Sturgeon?**

My musings came down to one question that seemed to synthesize all that had been troubling me.

The question was: "What do you do when you want to preach?"

I had the urge to write, I had a message to disseminate. But all my writing sounded preachy.

Every time I reread what I had written, it felt as if I ought to be writing essays or how-to books. At one point, I even talked with my minister about actually preaching.

His response? "My dog collar closes the door to 90 percent of the people in the world. You, as a writer, have no such boundaries." Wow. A fiction writer has such opportunity. Such responsibility.

Satisfied that I would not only find the answer to my question, but I would have something intelligent to talk over with Ted Sturgeon, I set about waiting with a calmer heart.

The first night of the seminar, I was astonished to see there were only ten students. This was going to be an intimate setting. I would probably get to know him over the course of two weeks. And I did.

He and I became friends in the limited time he had left on this planet, but I never asked my question because the first words out of his mouth, the first night of class, were these: "It doesn't matter what you write, what you believe will show through."

I was stunned.

I'm not sure I heard anything else Ted said that night, because this was so clearly the answer to all my questions. It was so simple and tasted so strongly of the truth that I was awash with the possibilities for my future career.

Did he mean I could write a fantasy book and my message would come through?

I could write a romance, a western, science fiction, horror, a comedy about dogs? And still, that which had been shown to me, that which had been given to me, the life-saving philosophy I had developed (which surely would save the world) could still be served?

Of course. I have only one story to tell, and that's my story. I can't tell yours.

But mine is large and encompasses much, and it can be sliced into a myriad tales of truth and fantasy.

I realised it was the message showing through in the writing of my favourite authors that attracted me to their work. Singly, a book may not contain impressive spiritual insights; but over the entire body of work of a certain author, a reader cannot help but get to know the writer's heart.

When I realised the truth of what Ted Sturgeon said that night, not only did my career spread before me like a vast playground, but I was filled with confidence.

Before he died, Ted Sturgeon and I spent a lot of time together. He wrote the introduction to my first book, *When Darkness Loves Us*. More importantly, I could relax. I'd learned that novel-writing needn't be unnecessarily complicated.

It is difficult enough to tell the truth within fiction; I didn't have to consciously worry about what message the reader was receiving. That isn't my job. I don't have to save the world. I only have to ensure the reader enjoys reading what I've written.

It has been my fortune to have a challenging career as a writer, teacher, editor and publisher. Through my relatively brief association with Theodore Sturgeon, I learned that the surest way to make my own dreams come true is to help others achieve their dreams.

The fate of empires does not hinge upon my work or upon any one piece of work. But those of us to whom this gift has been given have a responsibility to be persistent about writing and publishing our work. Our message is important. The world needs it.

Remember: It doesn't matter what you write.

What you believe will show through... □

# Viewed historically, this might be historic, hopefully

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## Historic or historical

"This is an historic day."

—Vice President-elect Mike Pence

Perhaps you know that historicals are a genre in novels. If so, you'll know they aren't called historic.

There's a difference between historical and historic; the words are not synonymous.

Something important in history, perhaps an event, is historic. It makes history. Waterloo was an historic battle; this battle changed the history of Europe.



Something, on the other hand, that relates to history or is about people or events from history is historical. Novels can obviously be about people and events that took place in history, and that is why they are historical novels.

We also use historical as an adjective to describe a person who lived or an event that occurred (as opposed to a person or event that is mythical or fictional).

We might ask:

**Was Shakespeare's Falstaff an historical person?**

Here, we are not asking whether Falstaff made history or not, we are simply asking whether he was a real person who existed at some point in history.

Just to confuse matters, we could ask a different question:

**Was Waterloo station named after the historical battle?**

In this question, we are asking whether the station was named in honour (or memory) of the battle.

However, changing the adjective to historic gives a different question: we are now asking whether the station was named after the battle *because* the battle made history.

More usually, historical is used to describe things relating to history.

A company may decide to destroy its historical files. These are files relating to business that took place sufficiently long ago that records are no longer needed. We do not describe them as historic files because, although they may have recorded events in the history of the company, they are hardly of such significance that they create history.



## Hopefully

"I've always maintained that I see myself as a student. There's always something to learn and be challenged by and hopefully grow from." —Nicolas Cage

In recent years there has been some considerable anguish about the use of hopefully.

It ... used to mean 'full of hope', and no one had any problem with that. But in recent years *hopefully* has also acquired the meaning of 'it is to be hoped'. This meaning that has attracted criticism. A good example of this would be:

*Hopefully, the train will soon arrive.*

There are some grammatical technicalities that can be advanced against this usage. It is not totally clear who is doing the hoping.

The sentence could mean that the train will arrive soon, full of hope. But the term is now taken to mean that the viewer is the one full of hope (about something); it has become widely accepted.

Even so, this usage can lead to ambiguity. For example:

*We will arrive hopefully on the early morning train.*

One possible meaning of this sentence is that we will arrive full of hope on the early morning train.

But if you accept the hope definition, then the meaning can become: *We hope to arrive on the early! morning train, or It is to be hoped that we will arrive on the early morning train.* In this particular context, the best route is probably to use the *we hope to arrive...* construction.

So the use of *hopefully* to *mean it is to be hoped* is probably with us to stay.

Just be sure that it is not used in such a way that it could have two alternative sensible meanings. □

## Graduates Club



**Students who graduate are invited to join the Graduates Club and enjoy these services:**

- # Access to your former tutor and staff for Q&A. Ask questions through email, phone, Skype etc.
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- # Access to Student Forum, 24/7/365.
- # Annual renewal of PRESS PASS where applicable.
- # Annual renewal of ID CARD.
- # Access to graduates and students who will proofread your manuscripts, without a \$ fee.
- # Access to a tutor for manuscript appraisal, for a fee.
- # Assistance with finding placements for articles, photos, book manuscripts.

All that for **\$100 membership**.

PS: As a consultant any of these people could charge \$75 per hour.



NZIBS has been providing skills through superior distance learning programmes for 26 years.



## Imagine if...

You have likely heard the quote by Brian Tracey *"Make your life a masterpiece; imagine no limitations on what you can be, have or do."*

Here is an example of something almost everyone can integrate into their lives, and now is as good a time as any. Particularly as we near the end of the year and begin the typical task of setting our New Year Resolutions and our plans for next year, now is the time to begin. An example of the best way to set goals and achieve them is to take the following steps and follow these consequentially:

### Imagine yourself as if you have achieved your goal

Remember not to put any restrictions on yourself at all. It is important in this first step to take 'time out' i.e. 10 minutes at least in a quiet room with your eyes shut just to be there in your mind, remembering you are already there, not on your way. Better still take yourself forward into time, perhaps 1 year or even up to 5 years, this would depend on what your goal is and how fast you want to achieve it.

### Write it down

If you have covered the first step in depth then this bit should really flow for you. As quickly as these thoughts come into your mind, write it all down, what you saw, felt, thought, wanted, needed etc, using every sense and emotion – being in the moment. It is important to bring emotion into goals as there must be an emotional benefit for you.

### Break it down

You have also likely heard the saying, the only way to eat an elephant is in small bites. A goal can seem like a massive mountain to climb, but taking easy and short steps is the way to go. These become your actions or tasks, things you need to do each day, week or month to achieve your goal.

We don't need to be an artist to create a masterpiece, we can do whatever we want, remembering always to remove those limitations we create on ourselves.

## On the NZIBS website

Learn new skills and create a new career for yourself.

### Freelance Travel Writing and Photography:

[http://nzibs.co.nz/?page\\_id=40](http://nzibs.co.nz/?page_id=40)

### Journalism and Non-Fiction Writing

[http://nzibs.co.nz/?page\\_id=38](http://nzibs.co.nz/?page_id=38)

### Sports Journalism

[http://nzibs.co.nz/?page\\_id=60](http://nzibs.co.nz/?page_id=60)

### Internet Entrepreneur

[http://nzibs.co.nz/?page\\_id=1726](http://nzibs.co.nz/?page_id=1726)

### Creative Writing

[http://nzibs.co.nz/?page\\_id=28](http://nzibs.co.nz/?page_id=28)

### Romance Writing

[http://nzibs.co.nz/?page\\_id=58](http://nzibs.co.nz/?page_id=58)

### Mystery and Thriller Writing

[http://nzibs.co.nz/?page\\_id=50](http://nzibs.co.nz/?page_id=50)

### How to Write Poetry

[http://nzibs.co.nz/?page\\_id=44](http://nzibs.co.nz/?page_id=44)

### Writing Stories for Children

[http://nzibs.co.nz/?page\\_id=83](http://nzibs.co.nz/?page_id=83)

### Writing Short Stories

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### Writing Your First Novel

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# Edit authenticity into your dialogue

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Can you alter dialogue (speech in short stories and novels) by adding artificial elements, so it sounds more authentic?

That sounds like an oxymoron.  
However ...

## Consider this recording:

Caller: "Jo? Got a minute? I got a letter from Carl today - where is it, I had it right here a minute ago. Blast. Who put that coffee there? Oh god, another disaster - yeah, here it is... he wants you to switch your presentation from Friday to Sunday."

Me: "Sorry. who is this?"

Caller: "Oh. I'm sorry. I'm always doing that, I'm so sorry. It's June Undrill calling about the conference in Rotorua. Carl Horn asked me to check with you about switching your speech..."

That's the way real people talk. All jumbled up sometimes. But if you put that into a story it wouldn't read well. In fact, it's dead boring.

Imagine something that really stirs the heart. Like the wind and roar from a A380 taking off over your head at full thrust. Or the thunderous noise and spray from the tailrace of a hydro dam when the sluice gates are opened.

Those events might have commonalities to real nature events, such as a tornado's dance or a serve of surf smashing a shoreline's rocks. But they aren't natural events. Both the jet taking off and the directed dam release are highly contrived and artificial.

"In art, the completely natural seldom works" says Nancy Kress who has written seven novels and dialogue for over 300 characters. "Instead, nature is refined, pruned, trained, heightened, considered and rehearsed. A 'perfect' football move, for example, has been planned, tested, refined, then practised and practised and practised, so on the day it looks spontaneously natural..."

## Good dialogue is artificially concise...

Kress says that nearly all normal people repeat themselves, interrupt themselves, start a conversation midway and wonder why no one understands them. They stutter, stammer, use an inexact word then spend four sentences explaining what they really meant.

But if you put this on a page, the speaker will sound boring, scatter-brained or under great stress.

(Check out the conversation of Miss Bates in Jane Austen's *Emma*.)

If you intend your characters to sound like normal, got-it-together people, you'll need to edit the raw stuff to make it read like coherent, reasonably concise and interesting conversation.

"In real life" says Kress "people develop their own shorthand way of speaking and both parties fully understand the grunts, sentence fragments and hand gestures. So a jumbled conversation can be completely satisfactory. It's only when it hits the page that it looks so unnatural.

Edited dialogue is not natural. It is more informative, concise and detailed than natural speech. Spoken speech is like a first draft. If we had the opportunity, we'd tidy it up before committing it to paper. Like this:

Caller: "Brian? I'm June Undrill, calling about the Toastmasters conference in Rotorua. D'you have a minute?"

Me: "Hello June. Sure."

Caller: "I got a letter from Carl Horn today and he wants you to switch your presentation from Friday to Sunday."

Me: "That's fine with me. I'll just check my diary. Yeah, that's OK."

Caller: "Oh good. I'll tell Carl. It's at the same time, by the way."

Notice how the conversation is more productive, but still sounds natural.

Don't go to the other extreme. You don't want dialogue so unnatural and contrived that a reader rejects it as implausible.

Beware the stilted voice who never uses contractions like I'm, you'll, that's, where's etc. This is the way we all speak in normal conversations.

Beware the voice of authority who says "I do not think, even when you take the financial advantages into account, that Jim's entrepreneurial venture is viable in this economic climate."

A real person would say "Well, I don't think Jim's new idea will work at the moment."

Beware the too informative walking encyclopaedia: "As you know, Ray, we were very poor back in the fifties when dad took on that Air Force contract from Wigram repairing boots for the K Force troops in Korea to keep us kids in school at Xavier College."

Sure, great authors like Somerset Maugham use dialogue to slip information to the reader, but with a lighter touch than this.

Beware the too concise conversation or your character will sound like Sylvester Stallone or Marlon Brando, where a few grunts or snatched phrases suffice. "Hey bud. Gimme a light, huh."

## Good dialogue is emotional

According to Allan Pease, 70% of all communication is body language or nonverbal. A sentence like 'I didn't know he stole the money' can have six different meanings, depending on the voice inflection and the stress on a single word. You need to convey the tone or the stressed word in some way.

"In fiction" says Kress "dialogue doesn't have the support of nonverbal clues. You can write them in, such as hand gestures, tone of voice or where the character is looking while speaking.

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You may need to increase the emotional level of the words to bring out their meaning. This is because there is a lot of subtext in human communication—gestures and tone that convey meaning in ways other than actual speech.

If you were writing a play, you could say "Tom was a good man." The actor's voice would provide the emotional overtone - anger, resignation, irony etc.

But in fictional writing, you might need to heighten the dialogue: "Tom was a good man. Damn it. He was such a good man!" The repeated words, mild swearing and the exclamation all make it clear that a good man is now dead.

You might also heighten the dialogue with a combination of nonverbal clues to convey the emotion.

"Tom was a good man" Stan said softly. He fumbled with a cigarette. Lit it. "Damn it. He was such a good man!" The cigarette tumbled from his slack fingers as his arm dropped to his side. His gaze slowly drifted out the window and the rug smouldered at his feet.

Here the dialogue adds layers of emotion to the words spoken.

### Good dialogue is individual

"Good dialogue characterises" says Kress.

In real life, much routine communication is generic. We use the same words to order a steak or to complement our favourite footballer: "Oh, well done."

But in fiction even routine dialogue can be used to differentiate characters and make them come across as individuals.

"All you 'ave to do is go out to the shed ... where they pile up them empty crates." That's the voice of Rose, the cockney barmaid in *As The Crow Flies*.

Whereas the major says ...  
"It's not as if my portfolio is that impressive. My capital is bound up in land. Has been for generations."

There's no mistaking who these two characters are when they speak.

"Beware overdoing this character speak" warns Kress. "Even the most eccentric character occasionally says 'What time is it?' or 'Pass the salt'. But if whole sections of a character's dialogue could be switched to another speaker, you haven't done an effective job of using language to individualise your characters.

"Give each character a personality, a diction, a rhythm and a slant on the world."

That's the key to good dialogue.

*"Dialogue is not just quotation. It is grimaces, pauses, adjustment of blouse buttons, doodles on a napkin and crossings of legs."*  
—Jerome Stern

### In summary:

The most effective dialogue is...

- ❖ Concise without being artificial.
- ❖ Informative without being implausible.
- ❖ Consistently interesting but with brief breaks to be humanly ordinary.
- ❖ Emotional and individual without becoming a parody.

### How do you learn to do this?

- ❖ Step 1: Listen to the ways people speak around you.
- ❖ Step 2: Read the good authors and see how they write dialogue.
- ❖ Step 3: Write lots of dialogue yourself. Just for practice.

Writing effective dialogue is a balancing act. You don't get good without doing a lot of it. □

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## The Bargain

Author **Kieran Miles**

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He said, "Hello. My name's Laurence and I'm ... er ... that is, I'm calling about the car advertised in this morning's paper."

"How can I help you?"

The woman's gentle voice sounded as if it belonged to someone who smiled often. But Laurence thought there was just a hint of sadness.

"It says here the car is a 1990 Mercedes sports with only 20,000 kilometres on the clock. Yet the price ..."

"The price is right, dear."

Laurence liked the way she called him "dear". She sounded such a nice lady, so he did not want to take advantage of her. "It seems rather... well... low."

"I assure you it's correct."

Well, he wasn't one to look a gift horse in the mouth. "I'd like to look, if that's OK."

"Certainly," the woman replied, and gave Laurence her address. Soon he was on the way in his old car. He had really only been idly glancing through the used car ads for a replacement when he chanced upon this one. He had very nearly not phoned.

Everything about the ad seemed too good to be true. And even now he cautioned himself with the thought that it must surely have major mechanical problems or be in need of much bodywork. No one could seriously offer that type of car in good condition for the price in the paper.

Upon arrival at the address, Laurence permitted a small ray of optimism to light his soul. The large house was set well back from the street amid sprawling grounds adorned with thriving trees and carefully maintained gardens.

"They're rich!" Laurence thought. "They probably don't care about the money."

He spoke his name into the security intercom.

The same sweet voice he'd heard on the phone responded to his buzz, and the gates began to swing open.

He eased his car along the gravelled driveway and stopped where it circled an ornate-looking fountain.

A smiling woman with greying hair and fullish figure came to greet him.

"Hello, Laurence. I'm Jessica Williams."

Laurence was a little surprised at the firmness of her grip and he was dazzled by the brilliance of the smile. She led him to the garage where, inside, he saw a sparkling spotless red Mercedes. He stood quietly for a moment, still telling himself that something must be wrong.

"Have a good look, Laurence. Start it up."



Laurence slid in behind the wheel. The upholstery smelled fresh and the interior of the car was immaculately clean.

He inhaled the smell of it, smoothed his palm across the leather. He checked the kilometres on the odometer: the dial showed a little over 20,000km.

*What was wrong with it?*

Finding the keys in the ignition he turned the engine over and it purred into life immediately. He listened for anything out of the ordinary and, hearing nothing, turned the engine off and got out. He looked at Mrs Williams.

"It was my husband's."

She answered Laurence's unasked question. "He looked after it like the child we never had."

Once again Laurence heard the note of sadness in the voice and, this time, also saw it in her eyes.

"On Sunday mornings he used to test everything, buff the paintwork, and then he would take me by the hand and we'd drive away into the sunny day.

"He loved this car and we spent some happy times in it. But now I want to see it gone.

"We hadn't done that Sunday drive in a long time, anyway ..."

She spoke wistfully, as she looked towards the opened door.

"I'm sorry," said Laurence.

She had been staring into the distance, but now as Jessica Williams turned, Laurence saw a tear upon her cheek.

"If you want it," she said, "it's yours for that price."

"Are you sure you want to sell it for such a small amount? You could get at least three times the amount you've advertised it for."

She looked him in the eye.

"I'm certain, dear. I'm glad a nice young fellow like you is going to benefit."

Laurence felt his heart go out to the woman.

"Thank you. I'll look after it well," he said.

"And ...if you ever want to ride in it again, I'd be happy to drive you anywhere you want to go. I know what it's like to lose a loved one. My own mother died only a few years ago."

"Laurence, you misunderstand. My husband hasn't passed away. Far from it. You see, a month ago he left me to go cavorting around Europe with some woman half his age. 'Jessica, I'm in love with someone else' he said to me. And he walked out the door.

"Then, a few days ago he rang me and asked me to sell the car and send him the money. It seems she has expensive tastes."

She paused, as Laurence stared, open-mouthed. A smile began to form. "He's going to get a shock, I think. After all," she continued, "what do I know about cars?"

Now Laurence smiled, too. □