



EXPRESS YOURSELF

Your creative writing toolkit

PARKINSON'S^{UK}
CHANGE ATTITUDES.
FIND A CURE.
JOIN US.

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FOREWORD

Parkinson's UK and the people affected by Parkinson's who worked on this wonderful initiative must be congratulated. *Express yourself: Your creative writing toolkit* is full of great ideas on how to go about writing, whether you are a beginner or an experienced novelist.

The toolkit offers total guidance for your writing and all sorts of suggestions about developing and publishing it. All it is asking of you is that you are passionate about wanting to write.

It is designed to form an armature and a support for people with Parkinson's to develop their creative sides. It is evident that everybody's imagination has hidden depths.

There is nobody who is incapable of writing something, whether it is about their own experiences of the world or completely invented.

The writing that you do could be seen as a direct link with the storytellers of the ancient world.

The first Mervyn Peake Awards took place in 2002 and were available to anyone with Parkinson's.

Along with our brother, Sebastian, we realised straight away what a reservoir of creative talent existed in all those who live with Parkinson's.

It was wonderful to see the joyous energy with which all the entrants approached the awards.

Mervyn Peake himself had Parkinson's and continued to write, to draw and to paint until he was too ill to do so any more.

The Peake family knows that Mervyn would have shouted a loud 'Bravo!' for the idea of this toolkit. As his children, we wish everybody who partakes in this amazing scheme the greatest of success.

Fabian Peake and Clare Peñate
Mervyn Peake's son and daughter



1. INTRODUCTION

Creativity is a key tool for taking control of Parkinson's. You asked us to help you develop and promote your creative writing skills, and this toolkit is designed to do just that.

The original idea for the toolkit came out of a workshop with people affected by Parkinson's.

It has been written and produced by a group of creative writers affected by Parkinson's, alongside Parkinson's UK staff members.

Each section will give you hints, tips and links to useful resources that will help you develop your skills, explore new styles of writing, understand the publishing industry and market your work.

It's a tool for everyone, whether you're just starting to think about writing or you're ready to publish your first piece of prose or poetry.

Dip in and out of the sections, download the worksheets, take your time and get creative!



Jon Best

My name is Jon and I am a creative writer. I feel better having got that off my chest. I write poetry, short stories, biographical stories and blogs. I was diagnosed with Parkinson's in 2006, in my late thirties. When I heard Parkinson's UK wanted to support creative writing among those with Parkinson's I asked to be involved. I think it is an incredible idea and I have never heard of a charity doing something quite like this. Creativity is linked to health and wellbeing so it makes absolute sense.



Philip Gibbs

I am Philip B Gibbs and I was diagnosed with Parkinson's in 2005, in my sixties. On thinking back, I probably started to show signs when I was 40 – loss of taste and smell. So my diagnosis took rather a long time! I am learning to live with it, because it is not going to go away. Every day is different, so there is no time to lose.



Hywel Griffiths

I have been a police officer for more than 30 years and was diagnosed with Parkinson's in 1998 at the age of 32. I write poetry and positive feedback encouraged me to write more. I started to share my poems on the police force's internal web page but as the number of poems increased, I was looking to share my work more widely. Now I've had three poetry books published.



Maureen Hinton

I am a retired primary school teacher. I was diagnosed with Parkinson's in 2010 after taking early retirement a few years earlier – when I knew I couldn't cope with class teaching any more, but had no idea why. Much of what I write is memory or life writing. I am a mother, grandmother and sister and I enjoy stitching, gardening and sometimes cooking.



Kim Lewis

My name is Kim Lewis and I have a love for and fascination with words. I was diagnosed with Parkinson's aged 53 in 2011. Two years later I was made redundant, so with some of my redundancy money I bought a laptop. I joined a creative writing group, a poetry group and a Parkinson's support group which had just started up locally. I have found new confidence through this group activity.



Barbara Lewis

I am retired from my job as a medical secretary in an X-ray department and have always enjoyed writing letters. Now I'm more prolific in writing poems that cover many aspects of my life – family, holidays, feelings and of course Parkinson's, which was diagnosed in 2010. I have recently carried out some research for Parkinson's UK – looking for social groups in my local area that would welcome people with Parkinson's without the need for assessment. I also enjoy painting, listening to traditional jazz, gardening, travelling and volunteering.



Terry Rummins

Before a worsening Parkinson's forced me to retire, I had worked as a psychology lecturer, an educational psychologist and a counselling psychologist. I was diagnosed in 2002. One of the first Parkinson's books I read after diagnosis was *Lucky Man* by Michael J Fox. He expressed an upbeat attitude to the condition. This suggested to me that given good health and a positive outlook, one's personality could affect the progress of one's Parkinson's. I was determined that this should be the case for me.

Jane Scargill

I have written poetry, prose and, less frequently, drama on and off since my teens. I have a close relative with Parkinson's. I have a history of anxiety and some depression, and have worked in mental health user involvement and disability equality in recent years.



Nicola Wood

I'm Nicola Wood and I was diagnosed in 2012. I've been writing since the age of eight, and try to do something every day even when things are difficult. I've written a book of poetry inspired by astrology because both subjects make me feel like I'm so much more than just a body or a series of symptoms. I feel that being creative is a soul based spiritual experience – something Parkinson's can't touch. Showing I've still got a sense of humour and a point of view is important to me too.

Why we write

There are so many reasons to write. It can help us express our creativity, deal with difficult emotions, remember important experiences or communicate messages to other people.

Here, some of our contributors share their personal reasons for writing:

Jon: To explore my imagination

So, why do I write? Simple answer to a simple question? Primarily I write for me.

I use my writing to help me deal with difficult issues but also to make friends and family smile.

It has helped me to feel more in control by opening up channels for communication previously unknown to me and given me a tool to explore my imagination.

I believe there are no rules for what you can write. It's a personal decision. But if you need help, support or ideas, the toolkit is a resource that is here to help.

If anyone is interested in my writing I have a blog at www.shakesandsilverlinings.wordpress.com

Philip: To eliminate the fear

Most people hope for a cure, and so do I, but I would rather there were improvements in early diagnosis and more general understanding by the whole community, so that there is an end to the terrible fear which most newly diagnosed people seem to be left with.

I believe the fear would be eliminated by better understanding – and this is where you come in.

Write your poetry or your blockbuster and proudly tell the world that you have Parkinson's. Write and tell the world.

Use this toolkit to help you gain the strength to make the first move – which is to get a clean sheet of paper and a pencil or pen, and write those first four lines. You are now underway!

The subject doesn't matter – the writer and their feelings, put on paper, do.

Hwyel: To get things off my chest

I was transferred to an office job, and after nearly 15 years of working in an office environment, it suddenly dawned on me that I was tired of people complaining about trivialities.

I was too polite to tell them what I thought, so I wrote my first poem, 'Why Worry', to do the talking for me.

The main aim of my writing (or should I say typing – Parkinson's has made my writing illegible!) has been to give hope to anyone newly diagnosed with the terrible burden of Parkinson's.

I am proof that there is a future by the fact that I was still working full time 16 years after diagnosis.

Maureen: For myself

When we write it's usually to communicate thoughts and knowledge to others, but a lot of my writing is private. I need it in some way for me.

If I share it, the audience is very small – family members or friends in a writing group who I feel able to trust. So what does it achieve for me?

There is an uncomfortable thought in the back of my mind that I am creating a resource for my future. These memories may one day be read to me as fresh unknown stories.

I also write about incidents from my working life in inner London schools in the 70s, 80s and 90s.

When I share these stories with the writing group I attend, they are known as Maureen's group therapy sessions.

Such writing is not for publication, but putting it all down on paper removes a few ghosts from my life.

Barbara: To feel in control

I don't know why everyone else writes but I know why I do. Part of my reason may ring a few bells with some of you.

When you're fighting a losing battle it is a natural reaction to do something that you are good at – enjoy the euphoric feeling of accomplishing and being in control of that at least.

I write letters, articles and poems. The latter can be quite a challenge, so it is a good brain exercise which I need.

Writing gets rid of any unpleasant thoughts I may have and it is quite satisfying to compose a poem about Parkinson's which illustrates my feelings on the subject at the time.

Kim: To boost my confidence

Writing is how I fight the condition, by keeping busy and escaping into my writing.

I have found new confidence through successes with writing and other people's appreciation.

With my new confidence, I read my poetry at last year's Folkfest, though it was daunting at first.

If someone wants to write but never has, I strongly advise having a go! I also recommend joining a group or attending a workshop. Who knows what ideas are waiting to be unlocked!

Terry: To make something positive

The diagnosis had shocked me and I wanted to make something positive from such a negative situation – so I started writing my books.

I developed a new understanding of myself and found that this became crucial in helping me deal with the daily challenges of Parkinson's.

Nicola: To channel my frustration

I've always been a writer, but I do think Parkinson's can enhance or even kickstart this side of us.

I've found that being creative helps me deal with the emotional and mental aspects of Parkinson's – things like depression, anxiety, frustration and anger.

It's very therapeutic and healing when I'm having one of those 'why me?' days. It helps to calm things down a bit and prevents me taking it out on the people nearest who may not understand or be able to cope.

It takes the pressure away from you and those around you and channels it into something expressive and productive, something you and others can be rightly proud of.

2. DIFFERENT STYLES OF WRITING

Don't worry if you can't see yourself penning a novel or an anthology of poetry – there are many different types of creative writing, to suit every different type of writer.

Prose

Prose is a form of creative writing that reflects spoken language. Typically, it doesn't have a tempo, pattern or rhyme to it, and can include many different sub-categories:

Fiction (non-factual descriptions of events invented by the writer)

- **Novel:** A collection of ideas and characters that are bound together in a compelling story to become a book.
- **Short story:** A fully developed story but with a much shorter and less elaborate form than a novel.
- **Novella:** Can be thought of as a small book that's shorter than a novel but longer than a short story.
- **Dramatic pieces (eg monologue, duologue):** A monologue is a form of writing where a single character addresses a silent listener through revealing himself/herself in a dramatic situation. A duologue involves a dramatic conversation between two characters.
- **Playwriting:** A form of writing intended to be performed by actors rather than just read alone. Typically, a story is told through a series of dialogues between multiple characters.

Non-fiction (descriptions of events that are factual)

- **Biography and autobiography:** A record of someone else's life (biography) or your own (autobiography).
- **Essay:** Can be a flow of writing describing a particular topic, a persuasive argument or informative text.
- **Memoir:** An account of experiences relating to a specific area of life (eg food, travel). Usually longer than essays – and can sometimes be as long as a novel. Different

to an autobiography as the writer is not providing a broad overview of their life.

- **Journal/diary:** A written log of observations or events relating to a particular experience (eg dreams, travel), or a record of each day.
- **Reporting/journalism:** A form of writing where a writer reports on facts, people and events, but can also include their own opinions and creative thinking to make a story more captivating.
- **Reviews:** A form of writing where the writer critically assesses the quality and significance of a book, film, play etc.
- **Letters:** Informative writing on a particular topic, addressed to a specific audience.

Genres and topics

Once you've decided what type of prose you're going to write, you can think about a genre. The most common genres of fiction include:

- humour
- crime
- thriller
- fantasy and sci-fi
- romance
- historical

You can also try combining different genres to create your own, or decide to not write in any particular genre.

Tips from Phil

- Before you determine the genre for a story, sit quietly and write out the ending, so that you have in your mind's eye the exciting bit of the book. Don't let it all happen on the first page, unless that is your ploy for a shock to the reader.
- To help keep you on track it can be a good idea to sketch out your characters too.

Common topics in non-fiction include:

- health, family, lifestyle
- politics, economics, science
- travel, hobbies, art, photography, gardening, cooking

Poetry

Poetry is a very artistic and creative form of writing. It comes in many forms, from short, rigid ones, like haikus, to longer forms with a defined pattern, like sonnets, and narrative verses, like ballads. It can be romantic or fun, fast-paced or slow and gentle. The form and rhythm you choose can be as restrictive or as free-flowing as you want. This means that there are no real rules to writing poetry, so be creative. Using rhyme and rhythm can be a helpful tool for those who are new to poetry – it can help you move away from other, less structured forms of creative writing.

Tips from Hywel

- Read your newly written poem out loud – even if it's just to yourself. I find it easier if someone reads out my poems and this also helps to detect any grammatical errors (quite common in my case as my fingers struggle to keep up with my brain!).
- Include words that are difficult to rhyme with at the start of a sentence, so that you don't have to get them to rhyme.
- You can also use an online rhyming dictionary, like Rhymer (www.rhymer.com). I found this useful only yesterday when I was looking for a word to rhyme with 'work' and using this method gave me 'smirk'.

Tips from Phil

- It may be better to use an odd number of lines for effect, eg a three line poem with the third line repeating itself can be an effective way of writing couplets.
- Breaking a set rhythm can be effective in emphasising the object of the work.

Song lyrics

Writing lyrics can be a great way to get in touch with your inner creativity, as it allows you to merge the art of writing with music. It can also help you collaborate with musicians – and can be great fun for writers who are able to play a musical instrument.

Nicola on types of writing

At the top of the tree you have long, involved pieces of work like novels, which are labours of love and very satisfying, but which require several drafts, rewrites and editing. Then you might have the short story – an art form in itself with a good beginning, middle and end – a form of writing I could never conquer, but which magazines and competitions include on a regular basis if you want to get published.

Poetry is, I think, close to drama – a tightly structured script with its own rhythms, similar to the spoken word. I feel that poems were born to be spoken out loud because of this. There are smaller pieces of writing to get your teeth into, including reviews, letters and humorous caption competitions. These can be sent to publications and printed.

My advice is never give up, and if you send something in, keep checking the publication just in case. Large or small, there are a lot of opportunities to get your scrapbook of successes filled up.

If you're looking for help with other aspects of creative writing, such as characters and setting, try the Open University's free Start writing fiction course (www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/culture/literature-and-creative-writing/creative-writing/start-writing-fiction/content-section-0).

You'll also find tips and advice on plot, characters, dialogue and structure in Ian McMillan's Writing Lab (www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/culture/literature-and-creative-writing/creative-writing/get-writing-tips-and-advice), which is also from the Open University.

3. DEVELOPING YOUR WRITING SKILLS

Once you have made the leap to start writing, there are lots of things you can do to develop your skills further.

Read

The more you read, the more familiar you will become with how different authors write, as well as what you enjoy, what you don't and why. You will expand your vocabulary and gather ideas. Some people find watching films or TV programmes and listening to the radio or watching stage plays can also help them develop their own ideas.

Write

There's a common saying that it takes 10,000 hours of practice to become an expert at something. The first things you write may not be the best – but as with anything, the more you write, the better you will get at it.

'How to write' books and writing exercises from books, magazines and websites can help.

If you need some ideas to kickstart your writing here are some exercises from our contributors:

A picture paints a thousand words

Find any picture or photograph from a paper or magazine, preferably without text, and see if you can jot down a few words about it, or try to make a 100-word mini story or poem out of it. You might want to try coming up with a caption by putting a few words in a balloon.

Five alive

Think of five things, objects or people that mean a lot to you and describe what it is that makes them special. Make it as vivid as possible, add a colour or a feeling, and make the reader see what you see.

Ordinary, extraordinary

Take something like shopping, exercising, housework, even lying in bed or looking out of the window, and pretend that it's a television soap or it's being filmed. Make it a mini script,

add a bit of drama – it's an episode of your life so call it what you like. Lights, music, action!

Explain it to an alien

Choose one of the following words (or another of your choice) and pretend you are describing it to an alien: elephant, autumn, breakfast, rain, yellow, television.

Make your descriptions accurate and concise, with as much detail as possible. You may like to share your description with someone else to see if they can guess what you've described.

People watching

When you're out and about in public, watch the other people around you and pick someone you think looks interesting. Compose a detailed physical description and then fictionalise them.

Give them a name, a job, and a home. What is their daily routine, what has happened in their past to make them the person they are today? Go into real detail – what is their favourite meal, what does their bedroom look like, how would they cope if something were to go wrong in their life?

Find other ways to be creative

Any practical task that allows space for the creative side of the brain to work will stimulate creativity – such as walking and spending time outdoors, going to art galleries, knitting, cooking, woodwork, colouring books and crafts in general. Such activities are also calming, help you focus and can put you in the right frame of mind for writing.

Take a course

Classes from local colleges and writing promotion organisations, and university short courses that are available to the general public, can help you gain skills, feedback and confidence. Some universities run mass open online courses (MOOCs) which are free to join. See Future Learn (www.futurelearn.com) for lists of courses and their start dates. There are

also other online courses (eg from the Open University, Open College of Arts, The Poetry School).

Many universities run MAs in creative writing and some run undergraduate courses in it, or have creative writing as part of a BA course. You may even want to combine a holiday with a writing course, either in the UK or abroad.

Book and writing groups

Joining a book or writing group is a great way to meet new people and learn from others. You could also think about setting up your own group. You can meet up regularly in a local café or community centre, or take it in turns to meet at a member's house. Or you can make it a virtual, online-only group. You'll need to decide if you want to start (or join) a book group, where you read other published works, or a writing group, where people share their own work. Both can help you improve your own writing skills and can be great fun.

Book groups for published works

In groups of this sort, a book is chosen at each meeting – sometimes agreed through a democratic voting system – and all members go away and have a specific amount of time to read the book before the next meeting. At each meeting, the group comes together to discuss their thoughts about the book. The person who originally put forward the chosen book for a vote can introduce the book, saying something about it and why it was chosen. Then others can start to offer their thoughts.

What is interesting is that you inevitably get a real diversity of viewpoints! It can be a good way to understand how others engage with literature – they may see things in the book you didn't or vice versa. Your own opinion of the book may well change too after hearing others' views. You can find more information about joining or starting a book group on the BBC Skillswise website (www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/0/21757426). Reading Groups for Everyone (www.readinggroups.org) can help you to find existing groups in your area and offers many other resources too.

Tip for book groups

If you put forward a book of your own choosing, remember the comments back aren't personal! It's unlikely that everyone will feel about it the same way you do. Some people even suggest that you never put forward one of your all-time favourites because, without wishing to, others might have views that change your relationship with that book.

Writing groups to share members' writing

If you want to join or start a group where people can share their own work, there's a lot to be gained. A group of this sort can also be a workshop environment – an opportunity for everyone to write together and develop their skills. Sharing our own work can help improve our writing and also build confidence. It's a good idea to send copies of your work to members of the group in advance, so that everyone can read it and then give their feedback (either in a group discussion or online/by post).

You'll need to be aware of how much people can manage to read at a time and how much workshop time there is to discuss each writer's work. One way to work is to concentrate on a small number of pieces at each workshop, but allowing everyone a chance to read/have their work discussed either at each meeting or over a few meetings. Don't make people have to wait too long or they might get fed up and stop attending. People should be gently encouraged to share their work but not pushed to if they'd rather not. It is important that feedback is honest and a mixture of praise and constructive criticism.

The *Writing Magazine* website (www.writers-online.co.uk/writers-groups) has a list of groups but you can also try searching Google for 'Creative writing group in...' (with your location) to find a group local to you. You might also like to join an online group or forum such as the Creative corner section on our forum (parkinsons.org.uk/forum/creative-corner).

ACTIVITY 1: Jane's group poem exercise

- 1 Everyone in the group contributes a sentence. It can be on any theme. For example it could start with a phrase – eg 'Parkinson's is...' or 'spring is...' – or it could involve a description of one of these, or something like oranges, or anything else.
- 2 Group members either write these down individually or a scribe could write them on post-it notes, paper strips, a flip chart etc.
- 3 The group then decides between them in what order to put the sentences to form a poem. This can help with group cohesion and get round difficulties such as lack of confidence in writing, or people having difficulty with their handwriting because of Parkinson's.
- 4 Then read the poem out loud and see what you've come up with.

Adapted from an exercise by Cheryl Moskowitz in the book *Writing Works* (see part 9: Writing resources).

ACTIVITY 2: Point of view

Every piece of writing is told from a particular point of view, which can impact on the effect the writing has on the reader.

These exercises will make you consider which point of view you might want to write in, and get you to see how writing from a different point of view can change a piece of work.

Exercises

- 1 Write about your earliest memory. This is a writing exercise not a memory test, so feel free to invent details to fill in the gaps. Try to include things such as your size in relation to other people or objects, information from all five of your senses and any emotions you were feeling.

After including as many details as you can, set the piece of writing aside. In a few days, write about the same memory but from the point of view of somebody else who was there. Take note of the differences

that you've made in the tone, structure, vocabulary and details of the piece.

- 2 Think about a well-known short story or fairy tale that we normally read in the third person (he, she, it, they) and try writing it in the first person. Have you focused on different points in this first person perspective? Then have a go at rewriting it from the point of view of the villain (for example the wolf or evil step-mother). How does telling the story from another perspective alter the tone and change the sympathies of the reader?

- 3 Think about a cause you feel very strongly about. Write a 200 word piece persuading somebody to come around to your point of view. To challenge yourself further, try to write a similar piece arguing for the opposite viewpoint.

Adapted from *The Creative Writing Coursebook: Forty Authors Share Advice and Exercises for Fiction and Poetry* edited by Julia Bell and Paul Magrs (see part 9: Writing resources).

ACTIVITY 3:

Structuring your writing

No matter what genre you're writing in, the structure of it is key so that you don't confuse yourself or your reader.

Deciding in which order to present your ideas, and when to withhold them, will take your reader on a journey and encourage them to continue.

These exercises will help you consider how to structure your writing.

Three is the magic number

Plan a piece of writing breaking everything down into threes:

- Three parts – a beginning, a middle and an end.
- Three sentences – describe each of those parts in three sentences.
- Three words – sum up the aim or tone of your piece of writing in three words.

If you're writing a longer piece, you could use this technique for each chapter or long paragraph.

Write an attention-grabbing opening

People tend to have fairly short attention spans so it's important to get their attention straight away to encourage them to keep reading.

Think about a really mundane event in your daily life (for example hanging out the washing or going to the supermarket) and use this as the beginning of a story. How will you grab the reader's attention through your use of language and make them want to find out what happens next?

Extend and advance

Knowing when to extend on a point and when to advance to the next point is something that can be difficult. This exercise of writing in intervals will help you keep your writing moving and the narrative flowing. Choose a random word from the list below as a topic to write about.

- Certainty
- Brown
- Photograph
- Silence
- Power
- Pencil
- Camping
- Home

Set a timer and write about the topic for the following time intervals:

- 30 seconds: Free writing to get going.
- 1 minute: Extend on whatever point you're up to when the timer beeps.
- 1 minute: Advance onto a new point.
- 1 minute: Extend on whatever point you're up to when the timer beeps.
- 1 minute: Advance to a new point.
- 30 seconds: Finish your writing.

Adapted from Belle Beth Cooper's blog, *10 minute writing workouts to improve your creativity, clarity, and storytelling skills*, available at <https://blog.ghost.org/10-minute-writing-workouts>

4. BUILDING CONFIDENCE IN YOUR WRITING

Bestselling author Stephen King said in his book *On Writing*: “The scariest moment is always just before you start.” But don’t worry – here are our tips to help you conquer some of that fear.

Start small

Set yourself small, manageable aims – eg writing something once a week – so that you don’t feel overwhelmed.

Don't worry

Don’t worry about trying to make something perfect or making spelling or grammar mistakes. You can always come back to things and make edits at a later stage. Getting your ideas down on paper is the most important thing.

Try something new

If you always write poems, why not try prose? Or if you always write about romance, have a go at writing a thriller. Trying lots of different styles of writing can build your skills and increase your confidence in taking risks.

Do free writing

Free writing is a great way to get the creative juices flowing and explore different creative writing styles. It involves just writing whatever comes into your head for a limited time (eg 3-5 minutes), without worrying about meaning, spelling or grammar.

The aim is to keep the pen on the page and write without stopping. If you get stuck, just rewrite the last word or phrase you wrote until something new to write comes into your head.

Read books about writing

Thousands of books have been written about creative writing, containing tips and tricks to help boost your confidence in your writing. Here are some that have been recommended by our contributors:

- *The Artist’s Way* by Julia Cameron.
- *The Five Minute Writer* by Margret Geraghty.
- *The Creative Writing Coursebook* edited by Julia Bell and Paul Magrs.
- *The Writers’ and Artists’ Companions series*, edited by Carole Angier and Sally Cline.

For more books about writing, see part 9: Writing resources.

Learn from other writers

Often, writers and readers like to get together in annual festivals. These festivals are a great way to start networking with others, particularly if you’re new to creative writing. Typically, festivals last several days and feature presentations, workshops and readings by authors.

Here’s a few taking place in 2017:

- Stratford Literary Festival (www.stratfordliteraryfestival.co.uk)
- Oxford Literary Festival (www.oxfordliteraryfestival.org)
- Edinburgh International Book Festival (www.edbookfest.co.uk)
- Hay Festival (www.hayfestival.com/wales)
- Newcastle Poetry Festival (www.newcastlepoetryfestival.co.uk)
- Port Eliot Festival (www.porteliotfestival.com)
- Stoke Newington Literary Festival (www.stokenewingtonliteraryfestival.com)

Or follow @litfests on Twitter (www.twitter.com/litfests)

There may also be smaller, local festivals where you can meet other writers in your area.

Many libraries and bookshops also have visits from authors where they share their work and their writing process.

Be proud of yourself

Constantly comparing yourself to other writers might not be the best way to boost your confidence. Instead you should be proud that your own background, experiences and writing style will mean that your work is unique.

And remember – always celebrate your achievements, however big or small.

Share your work

Lots of people find that their confidence grows as they share their writing and get feedback from others.

Find out more about this in part 5: Sharing your writing.

ACTIVITY 4: Banish negative thoughts

One of the things that could have the most impact on your confidence in your writing is building your confidence overall.

Here are some steps to help you banish any negative thoughts that can stop you writing. Try to do these regularly to train your brain into thinking in a more positive way:

- 1 Do a simple breathing exercise to relax your whole body. Try breathing in for two counts, and breathing out for six. Focusing on your breathing will mean you don't have the space to think about any negativity.
- 2 Set aside five minutes and write down all of the negative thoughts in your mind.

When the time is up, screw up the piece of paper and throw it in the bin. This symbolises throwing away all of these negative thoughts and moving on.

- 3 Every time you have a negative thought, visualise yourself screwing it up and throwing it away. Immediately replace the thought with something positive that makes you feel good about yourself.
- 4 Think about what you would say to a loved one or a friend if they were having these negative thoughts. Be as kind to yourself as you would be to others!

5. SHARING YOUR WRITING

As you continue to develop your writing skills, you'll hopefully begin to feel more confident in your writing.

There's no pressure to share your writing and you may decide that you'd like to keep it to yourself, but as people's confidence grows, they often begin to want to share their work with others.

Jon on sharing your writing

My confidence in my writing grew as I shared it with others. Initially I shared anonymously on the internet with people I didn't know and their kind words made me wonder what my friends would think.

When I first shared some of my writing with a friend I hadn't expected much of a reaction, but her excitement spurred me on.

I used a poetry forum to submit poems and have other people comment and this has added a greater range and variety to my writing.

The continued enthusiasm from my friend encouraged me to share with other family members and friends, which led me to a revelation: whatever format I write – in poetry, prose, blog, short story etc – it contains a part of me.

I have found not only a voice, but *my* voice.

How to share your writing

You can share your writing in lots of different ways:

- Joining a writing group will allow you to share your writing with other budding writers.
- Submit your writing to a magazine or enter it into a local or national creative writing competition.
- To share your writing informally, you could show it to family and friends.

- To share your work on a wider scale, you can post on online forums (remaining anonymous if you prefer), set up a blog or share through social media.
- Take a look at the Creative corner section on our forum (parkinsons.org.uk/forum/creative-corner), where you can share your writing with other people in the Parkinson's UK community.

Blogging

A blog is like an online journal. You can publish entries on whatever you like, whenever you like.

Before you decide to set up a blog, try to answer these questions:

Why do you want to start a blog? To improve your writing? To make your voice heard? To get published? Ask yourself why you want a blog, so that you've got a clear idea of what you'll gain from one.

What will be the focus of your blog? Choosing a theme for your blog isn't essential, but it helps you to focus the content and gain a loyal following of people who are also interested in that specific topic.

Choose a blogging platform

There are loads of blogging platforms out there. To get you started, here are some of the most popular platforms:

- Wordpress (www.wordpress.com)
- Blogger (www.blogger.com/about)
- Wix (www.wix.com/start/blog)

You can create free blogs to get yourself started, but you can also set up a paid account if you get more serious.

A paid account will let you host your own domain name, so you can be www.myfirstblog.com (rather than www.myfirstblog.wordpress.com or www.myfirstblog.blogspot.com).

There are other benefits, like having no adverts on your site, but it's worth looking into the options yourself and seeing whether a paid account is worthwhile.

Set up your blog

Once you've chosen the best platform for your needs, sign up for an account. The site should guide you through this stage simply.

Start blogging

Log in to your new account, and start blogging as soon as you want.

Customise your site

To make your site look great and show off your writing in the best way possible, you can choose a 'theme'. Each blog host will allow you to do this in a different way, so look for online support from your specific provider.

Feedback

If you share your writing, you'll hopefully get some constructive feedback. Just be mindful of:

- who you share your writing with
- why you want feedback
- what you want feedback on (eg if you want feedback on content rather than grammar and spelling)

Dealing with criticism

"A friend submitted a poem to one festival and won with much praise, but submitted the same piece to another festival and had it dismissed as deplorable sentimental tosh. You do need a thick skin to expose yourself to some of the judges."

Maureen

"I have received some criticism that a lot of my poems are very similar. As I normally write my poems to give a positive outlook on life, and in particular living and dealing with Parkinson's, I actually take this criticism as a compliment in some ways."

Hwyel

ACTIVITY 5:

Thinking about sharing your work

If you're not sure about sharing your work, think about your answers to these simple questions:

Who do you want to read your work?

- Friends and family?
- Other people who have similar experiences to you?
- The general public?

Why do you want to share your work?

- To try and help loved ones understand you?
- To help others with similar difficulties?
- Just to get your work in the public domain?

6. PUBLISHING

There are two main routes to getting your work published: traditional publishing and self-publishing. In this section and the next we find out about the pros and cons of each type.

Traditional publishing

With traditional publishers, the vast majority of submissions come through literary agencies, not directly from authors. Your first step in securing a publishing deal is likely to be finding an agent to represent your work.

Biggest benefit

Traditional publishers take all responsibility and cover all costs. You receive money up front (an advance) and get more when you've earned your money out in royalties. Generally the author takes 5%-15% of royalty on the recommended retail price (RRP). Working with a publisher also gives you more time to write.

Biggest drawback

They take lots of the control so may not allow your input as much. It can also take a while to go through traditional publishers as they work with lots of authors at the same time.

Tips from Hywel

- Do your research so you approach agents and publishers who will have an interest in your submission.
- Have examples of previously published work – eg in competitions, magazines or on the internet – as well as any positive feedback or testimonials from readers.
- Make sure your manuscript looks professional.

Useful info

- On average publishers have 100 submissions a week and read in their spare time.
- Agents are looking for a compelling story.

- A useful resource is the *Writers' & Artists' Yearbook* (www.writersandartists.co.uk), which gives great advice about how to prepare your submission and lists of agents.
- When submitting to an agent, be sure you do exactly what they ask for – follow their guidelines.
- Capture their imagination in the first few lines of your submission letter.
- It is recommended to get a professional editor to read your book before submitting it to a publisher.

Dealing with setbacks in publishing

Why do you write? Do you feel it's personally fulfilling and you simply write for your own enjoyment? Or do you have stories you wish to share with the world? Any other reasons?

It's important to remind yourself of this on a regular basis – remembering why you love to write will help keep you grounded.

Also, if you're not able to write for a period of time, come across setbacks or receive negative feedback from other writers or publishers, just remind yourself why you write and why you enjoy it. Any roadblocks mean you'll come back stronger.

If you receive feedback that you don't feel is accurate or has upset you in any way, remember that it's simply an opinion and you don't need to take it to heart.

If it's constructive feedback, try to use it to improve your work.

Don't be afraid of bad reviews. If all reviews are positive then it could look suspicious (as though you may be paying people to write good reviews!). Not every story will suit everyone.

And if you're ever feeling down about your work, remember that *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* was rejected by 12 publishers before it was picked up!

ACTIVITY 6:

Working with agents and publishers

Your submission letter

Opening paragraph

Personalise each of your letters. Why do you want to work with the publisher or agent? The more you say about them, the better. For example: "I heard you speak at an event recently" (say which event) or "I hear a lot of great things from your authors" etc.

Second paragraph

Include a really good blurb for your book, in the style of your genre.

Third paragraph

- What is the hook for your book?
- How do you position it in the market?

Fourth paragraph

What is your personal story? Do you have a following? Could this add to good PR about you?

Remember that the author is marketable, not just the book. Think J K Rowling – you are the 'brand'.

Don't forget to sign off with a thank you, and make sure you include your contact details.

Presenting your letter

- Keep it to 1 page of A4, and make sure it is attractive looking and well-formatted.
- If you struggle with writing the blurb, ask someone to write it for you and edit it yourself.
- Mention any ideas for other books you're planning to write in the same genre.

Questions to ask your editor/publisher

- Are you going to get my book into supermarkets?
- How will you get my book ranking high up on Amazon?
- What about online listings and newspapers?
- What will drive people into a bookshop to be at my book signing?

The editor is a key person to develop a close relationship with. It's also good to consider your own efforts with promotion in addition to theirs.

Once a deal is made for your book, it is likely to take up to 18 months until it is released, depending on your agreement of the most appropriate time of year to release your book.

7. SELF-PUBLISHING

Self-publishing isn't about doing it all yourself – it just means the author goes about the publication process without working with a traditional publisher.

Biggest benefit

The power is in your hands and you have full control of every aspect. You can go at your own pace and self-publishing can take less time to produce as there is less of a process involved compared to traditional publishing.

Other benefits:

- You get to choose your team.
- You retain all your rights and keep all the royalties.
- It's all down to you – it's a business.
- You can sell your book on any market you choose.
- You can make connections with distributors who can push it out for you.

Having a good editor and designer is key – a cover designer will read a synopsis and a blurb before designing so they get to know the characters.

Biggest drawback

Self-publishing puts more responsibility in your hands, is more time consuming because you're doing everything yourself – like running a business – and you need to raise the costs.

Other drawbacks:

- There's no guarantee you will succeed with this.
- There's a financial risk – aim to not spend more than you can afford to lose.
- It can take up a lot of your time, which means you have less time to write.

Ebooks

- Ebooks are a very popular format. And remember – no one knows if you're self-published or not online, so there's no prejudice.

- The print market has risen, but ebooks are the quickest, cheapest and easiest way to sell.
- Try not to restrict yourself to any one retailer as you can reach other audiences through other platforms.
- Research and price your book around the reasonable price for your genre.
- You can create your own ebook in a number of ways, for example using Amazon's Kindle tool (<https://kdp.amazon.com>) or Adobe InDesign software (www.adobe.com/uk/products/indesign.html). You can also pay a professional to create an ebook for you.
- Ebooks have resurrected the short story market. Putting a short story on Amazon as an ebook can help build up your readership.
- Selling an ebook on Amazon means you keep a higher percentage of profits compared to traditional publishing.
- It's easier to test out your ideas as a self-published author and see what works when you sell online, then change things if you need to and re-upload your ebook.
- Meta data (to measure the success rate), pricing and marketing are important to maximise your success – you can find marketers who can help you if this isn't your area of expertise.

Facts and tips

- Goodreads (www.goodreads.com) is a website that tracks and rates books and offers networking with other readers.
- Printing on consignment means printing your book in bulk amounts and storing them.
- Make sure you research tax details about selling through online channels, to know what to expect.
- If you're going to self-publish, run a publishing company to add credibility to your name.

Terry and Jack on self-publishing

My wife Terry and I have published paperbacks, ebooks and a graphic book on Parkinson's, using a company that offers a wide range of self-publishing services. We use some of these services, but we design and supply the artwork for print. If you feel unable to do this, good companies will work with you and produce the artwork from your ideas. Here is a summary of what we do:

- Once the manuscript is finished we get a quotation.
- Our publisher understands that we provide page layouts and cover artworks. If they are to do this artwork it is reflected in the quotation and in the production time.
- Once we have accepted the quotation, contracts are signed and deposits paid.
- A number of pre-printing jobs are then carried out by the publisher, such as ISBN allocation.
- The job is checked and then printed.
- Our publisher then undertakes retail trade marketing for us, including sending an Advanced Information sheet to local and national book buyers, making the book available through online and high street bookstores, and arranging distribution.
- They also make it available as a 'print on demand' book so that it can be bought in countries such as Canada and the US.
- Our manuscript is then converted into a format suitable for ebook production and made available through all the major ebook outlets.

Nicola on illustrations

Illustrations can affect the overall price of the finished book, especially if they're colour. By using the work of an art student, Bradley Jay, I cut the costs significantly – and I got exactly what I wanted! So it definitely pays to shop around if you're looking for original artwork.

Self-publishing checklist

- 1 Where are you with your writing? Do you need a mentor to help start you off?
- 2 Think about getting your manuscript appraised by people with a publishing or editorial background. They will provide you with a report on your book.
- 3 Re-write your book based on the report, and then have someone else read your own work once edited, to pick up any missed typos etc.
- 4 Proof read the book yourself – does it all flow, make sense etc?
- 5 Have someone copy edit the book for grammar.
- 6 What would you like your book to look like? Send it to a typesetter and designer to review – remember that text design and cover design are two different tasks. You can proof the type setting and design, then once you're happy, convert it to an ebook or get it printed.
- 7 Set your pricing. This will depend on the prices of other, similar publications, as well as the amount of money you're hoping to make.
- 8 Start marketing your book and working on a PR strategy (find out more about marketing in the next section of the toolkit).
- 9 Seek out written reviews from readers and promote them through your marketing and PR channels.
- 10 Start getting your work out there and enjoying life as a published writer!

Jon on printing your own work

Unlike publishing, printing won't make the book available to the public – it will just provide you with a finite number, and then you can do what you like with them. I have used this to sell books of my poetry to raise money for charity and limited editions for family and friends.

It is relatively easy to find a printer on the internet and they usually have easy to use software to format the writing into. Another option that may be cheaper is to find a co-operative local printer.

8. MARKETING YOURSELF AND YOUR WORK

Marketing is all about raising awareness and understanding of your product or service. It's more than just advertising, selling and promotions – it's about knowing who your audiences are, working out the best way of communicating your message to them and sharing your work through different channels.

Market research

Look for similar authors to you. Find out where they are, what marketing channels they are using and what makes your writing different to theirs – how does it stand out?

Also think about writing bloggers. Could you approach them to blog about your book? Or are there any links to good writing forums you could join for networking and feedback?

TV shows like *This Morning* often interview authors on current topics, so make sure you keep an eye on what's going on. You could also approach TV stations to interview you about your background – remember to mention your own backstory and what makes you unique as a writer.

Social media

- All social networks have a different reader-base or audience, so start by identifying your readers – who reads the kind of books you write?
- Sign up to the social media channels that your target readers are likely to use. It doesn't have to be every social media channel – manage it according to what works best for getting your work out there.
- Create your own website and have an area to build a mailing list and collect your readers' data – then you can send out newsletters once in a while to keep them updated on your work. You can also include tips on writing, speaking opportunities etc.
- Create content that people will want to share and plan your content with a call-to-action –

you could include an excerpt of your writing, linking to where to buy it.

- Twitter is very popular with publishers and agents and is a good platform to engage with them – agents tweet what they're looking for, what they don't like, and to announce when submissions are open.
- If you don't feel it's your area of expertise or interest to do social media marketing, you can find a marketer who can do it all for you (both the planning and the posting).

Thinking outside the box – other promotional tools

Other ways to promote your book include booksellers, schools, arts organisations and book readings, as well as speaking at events, bookshops and libraries.

Harper Collins has run virtual romance festivals on Twitter, organised by Sam Missingham (Head of Audience Development). So festivals don't have to be physical. Would you be interested in developing and running an online festival to get your name out there?

You can get your voice out there by writing articles, blogs and guest blogs, and carrying out interviews and Q&As. You can also review other people's books online through channels such as Amazon or Goodreads. This all helps to raise your profile as a credible writer.

Look for authors who get a lot of likes, retweets and attention and ask them if they can support the release of your book, for example by tweeting about it. This will help get your book out to the masses.

Understanding your audience

Think about who is going to buy your book and flip it on its head – how do you choose a book? Where do you buy books from? How you decide what books to buy? What attracts you to buying a book? What puts you off about a cover and are you influenced by it?

Do you write reviews? What makes you write a review? Do you like to research more about the author? Think of what entices you to buy books and what will entice your target audience to buy your book.

Tips

- Think how your readers will feel when they finish reading your book – make them find more on your website, promote offers to keep the discussion going, etc.
- In your email signature, have an image of your book and hyperlink to your website or a specific webpage for people to buy the book.
- Leave copies of your book in public places where people read – ie coffee shops, local cinemas, the tube, public events, talks, etc.

Networking opportunities

- The London Writers' Club (www.londonwritersclub.com) runs monthly events.
- The London Book Fair (www.londonbookfair.co.uk) is a good networking opportunity as new agents will be taking submissions there. Agents do specialise, so do some research and find the ones who represent people like you.
- Byte the Book (www.bytethebook.com) is a networking group which meets up on a monthly basis – a mixture of authors, publishers etc.
- There is a network of Arts Council England-funded development agencies which cover different regions and have different programmes including networking events.
- The Book People (www.thebookpeople.co.uk) sell a range of books, including children's books.

Nicola on doing it yourself

It's a minefield, finding out what's available when you go DIY. One thing I found useful was to ask any company you're interested in to send a copy of a book they've self-published so you can see what the finished product looks like. This might avert any nasty shocks or disappointment further down the line.

The most valuable thing that I found when self-publishing was the expertise, advice and support of someone who worked in the industry and had the relevant knowledge.

Terry on useful things to do

You might want to produce press releases or information sheets to help in this endeavour (email activities@parkinsons.org.uk if you'd like support with these activities).

Posters for bookshops and free review copies for the media can also be helpful. A good review in a magazine, journal or newspaper is invaluable.

ACTIVITY 7:

PR benefits and considerations

PR (public relations)

- PR is about communicating the right message to your audience. It's an opportunity to influence opinion and build relationships.
- Word of mouth is one of the most powerful forms of advertising.
- Public speaking, book signings, festivals, interviews and blogging all provide a platform for you to talk about why you write. What does it mean to you? What do you want to express and achieve? What is the writing process like for you?
- Do you teach classes? Are you an expert in something? Do you write articles on other topics? Is there a catalyst or inspiration behind your writing? These are all great hooks for promoting you as a writer.
- Consider organising collective book launches and panel discussions with other writers – this is also a good way to maximise publicity.
- What media contacts do you have, or do you know anyone who can help with this?

Advanced Information sheets

Advanced Information (AI) sheets provide information about you and your book for press and book buyers, such as Waterstones, Foyles etc. An AI sheet should include:

- a picture of the book cover
- publishing data/ISBN number
- a picture of the author
- the retail price
- the number of pages
- the format – hardback, paperback, ebook?
- an author bio, contact details and information on where you can buy the book
- a synopsis of the book
- your marketing and PR plans

Press releases

- Think about the angle – why would a journalist read past the first line? What is newsworthy about your story? Do you have a universal theme?
- Cut out adjectives and any kind of jargon – stick to the facts and be short and sweet.
- Always follow up with journalists – take the lead.
- Try to get editorial coverage rather than reviews.

Press release template

The square brackets show where to personalise the press release template for your own work.

[Company/individual]
[Contact info]

[Publisher and/or Author] announces the release of [Genre] book, [*Book title*]

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[Town/city, county] – [Publisher and/or Author] are proud to offer the [latest, debut, etc] work from [Author], [*Book title*], hitting bookstores everywhere on [Date].

[*Book title*] is a [gripping story, informative guide, etc], focused on [basic premise of the book, or the subject matter covered].

[Further synopsis of book and/or details about the author. Try to persuade the reader that they want to buy this book because it's exactly what they/their customers are looking for].

[Quotes from author, and/or any positive reviews from critics].

[Sign-off].

9. WRITING RESOURCES

The different sections of this toolkit all aim to help you develop your creative writing skills, but there are plenty more resources out there too. Here's a round-up of some of them.

Short story competitions

If you're looking to get your work published, or just want to share your writing with others, entering a short story competition is a fun way to get started. Please note, most competitions do charge a small entry fee.

Writer Christopher Fielden lists several small and large-scale short story competitions that take place in the UK on his website (www.christopherfielden.com/short-story-tips-and-writing-advice/short-story-competitions.php).

Nicola on Creative Future:

One of the interesting competitions (and there are thousands!) is the Creative Future Literary Awards (www.cfliteraryawards.org.uk), which are run every year for people who are marginalised. While I don't particularly like the word, I applaud the thinking behind it.

In their own words, the awards "showcase talented writers who lack opportunities due to mental health issues, disability, identity or other social circumstance".

Magazines, books and websites

- Writers Online (www.writers-online.co.uk) provides writing advice details of writing groups, competitions etc and publishes *Writing Magazine*, which is available from shops such as WH Smith.
- *Mslexia* (www.mslexia.co.uk) is a magazine for women who write. It lists publications to submit to, competitions, writing events and groups, has articles on various writing genres, and publishes short fiction and poems.

- *The Five Minute Writer* by Margret Geraghty is a book of useful, fairly short writing ideas and exercises.
- *The Creative Writing Coursebook: Forty Authors Share Advice and Exercises for Fiction and Poetry*, edited by Julia Bell and Paul Magrs, is full of very detailed ideas and advice.
- *Getting into Poetry* by Paul Hyland is a useful overview of poetry writing, submitting etc.
- Bloomsbury publishes the Writers' and Artists' Companion series. Titles include: *Writing Short Stories*, *Crime and Thriller Writing*, *Writing Children's Fiction*, *Novel Writing*, *Writing Historical Fiction* and *The Arvon Book of Literary Non-Fiction*.

Books with an emphasis on writing for wellbeing

- *Write Yourself a New Life* by Stephen Wade provides advice and exercises to help with self-awareness, decisions and developing creativity. It also includes information about journaling.
- *Writing Works. A Resource Handbook for Therapeutic Writing Workshops and Activities*, edited by Gillie Bolton, Victoria Field and Kate Thompson, includes plenty of writing exercises. These are particularly useful for groups, but many could be done alone too. It is published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers (www.jkp.com), who also publish several other books on the theme of writing and health/wellbeing.
- Kate Thompson is an expert on journal therapy/writing and writes a blog on this.
- *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron, and several of her other books, give advice on creativity and writing for wellbeing. You can find advice and sign up to her blog on her website (juliacameronlive.com).

Drama

- BBC Writersroom (www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom) gives writing tips, has opening windows for people to send scripts twice a year, and advertises writing opportunities.

- The Graeae Theatre Company (www.graeae.org) prioritises accessibility. Founded in 1980, they use theatre, workshops and training to dispel images of defencelessness, together with prejudices and popular myths, around disabled people. They also run a yearly 'Write to Play' playwriting programme for aspiring deaf and disabled writers.
- Orton (www.orton.io) is an online resource where writers can share their writing (for TV, radio, film and theatre) and get feedback.

Writing organisations

- The Poetry School (www.poetryschool.com) runs online poetry courses and has a poetry social network called CAMPUS.
- The Poetry Society (www.poetrysociety.org.uk) runs poetry competitions and is generally engaged in raising the profile of poetry.
- The Arvon Foundation (www.arvon.org) runs residential creative writing courses and retreats in a number of Arvon centres and has some grants available.
- Ty Newydd Writing Centre (www.tynewydd.wales), run by Literature Wales, runs a variety of creative writing courses, mostly residential over several days. There is a bursary pot, but it's only available for Gwynedd residents.
- The National Association of Writers in Education (www.nawe.co.uk) is a member organisation that supports the development of creative writing in all genres in all educational and community settings throughout the UK. It is open to anyone with an interest in its aims.
- Lapidus (www.lapidus.org.uk) is a member organisation that promotes the practice of writing for wellbeing and the benefits it brings. It is open to anyone with a personal or professional interest in writing for wellbeing.
- The Workers' Educational Association (www.wea.org.uk) runs face to face courses across the country with experienced tutors.

Every hour, someone in the UK is told they have Parkinson's – a brain condition that turns lives upside down, leaving a future full of uncertainty.

Parkinson's UK is here to make sure people have whatever they need to take back control – from information to inspiration.

We want everyone to get the best health and social care. So we bring professionals together to drive improvements that enable people to live life to the full.

Ultimately, we want to end Parkinson's. That's why we inspire and support the international research community to develop life-changing treatments, faster. And we won't stop until we find a cure.

**Together we can bring forward the day
when no one fears Parkinson's.**

Parkinson's UK
215 Vauxhall Bridge Road
London SW1V 1EJ

Free confidential helpline **0808 800 0303**
(Monday to Friday 9am–7pm,
Saturday 10am–2pm). Interpreting available.
Text Relay **18001 0808 800 0303**
(for textphone users only)

hello@parkinsons.org.uk
parkinsons.org.uk