

# Just Write It!

How to develop top-class  
university writing skills

*Greta Solomon*

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## **Praise for this book**

*“The biggest fear and indeed stumbling block for some students is their writing skills, yet the ability to articulate yourself in a written format is vital for success. Writing is a skill that develops over time with practice. Indeed, if I were learning to ride a motorbike, I would seek assistance along the way and may also occasionally fall over and scrape my knees, yet often students do not apply this same mentality when it comes to developing their writing skills. Just Write it! is a reader-friendly, step by step book, which demystifies academic writing and breaks the process down in bite-sized chunks. It offers great practical advice and assistance in simple stages, which guide the reader to developing their writing skills.”*

*Vanessa Heaslip, Senior Lecturer in Adult Nursing,  
Bournemouth University, UK*

*“This is a well-designed book to support undergraduates through their university journey. It is user-friendly with its clear, easy to follow structure. This book is a great support mechanism to help undergraduates to achieve. I highly recommend this text - it is an essential resource for undergraduates!”*

*Emma Jackson, University of Worcester, UK*

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## Preface: A letter to the reader

Have you ever instinctively known what to do at a given moment? Or experienced a chance meeting or chain of events that seemed to have its own life force? This is how it felt when I started to get inklings that what I should really do is teach. So, in 2006 I heeded my calling. Until then, I had been a writer, journalist and public relations (PR) practitioner. I had spent several years writing for women's magazines and PR clients. But something – fate, the universe or a plain old hunch – told me that what I really needed to do was inspire other people to find their own voices.

I signed up with a tutoring agency and students started to trickle in. Then the word started to go round my area. 'Did you know there's this tutor who helps people improve by two grades?' the parents of my students would say to each other. Before long, I was inundated for requests for tuition and had a long waiting list for my services.

I have worked with hundreds of students aged 6 to 60. I have coached them to pass their SATs, 11+ and 13+ entrance exams, GCSEs, A-levels and degrees. I helped them to write personal statements and CVs and shared interview tips and techniques. Simon, whose teacher had threatened to relegate him to the bottom set in GCSE English if his grades didn't improve, suddenly stunned the faculty by scoring straight As. Melanie won a full scholarship to a coveted grammar school. And special needs student Raj went from a grade F to a grade C in GCSE English, finding confidence in his self-expression abilities along the way.

With all these achievements under my belt, I started focusing almost exclusively on university students, of all disciplines, and the success stories kept rolling in. Philosophy and French graduate Paulina channelled her new-found interest in words into a journalism career. Meanwhile, mature Nursing student Terence was able to verbalize intellectually but every time he came to write, he

would freeze. Yet, he was able to build the confidence to pass all his assignments when many people at his university failed.

But perhaps the biggest success was the method I created, which is what I will share with you in this book. I found that as soon as my students increased their creativity and levels of self-expression, they were able to think more freely and confidently and were able to successfully implement writing skills techniques that transformed all their written work.

So, this book is inspired by my students. The exercises are the result of the many hours we spent working together, as I created and tested new writing skills methods on them. The result is that this book is an incredibly practical programme and you will learn simply by completing the exercises.

Now, teaching writing has taken me all over the world to places such as Norway, Ethiopia and Holland where I have delivered corporate writing skills workshops for various organizations. I have also taught senior executives at a world-leading charity how to write stories that touch people's hearts and encourage donors to give money that can save children's lives. I have seen the power of words and the joy on my students' faces when something suddenly clicks and they realize that they can write freely and expressively. The confidence that it promotes in their studies, lives, work and well-being is priceless.

And so, dear reader, my aim in this book is for you to feel the same levels of confidence and self-expression. I hope that somewhere between deadlines, responsibilities and the pressures of taking a degree you can carve out a little space to practise your writing. I hope that you experience the delight of being able to communicate freely, clearly and concisely. But most of all, I hope that when you hear the siren call of serendipity you'll be right there, ready and waiting to take action.

# Acknowledgements

This book is dedicated to my late mother, Joy Solomon. She inspired in me a love of words and a love of writing and for that I will always be grateful.

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# Introduction

You've made it! After months of revision, tackling panic-inducing exam questions and a nail-biting wait for your results – you're finally at university. Now, what? Well, with the celebrations firmly over you're left with a far more sobering reality.

For a start, you're expected to read and digest copious amounts of complex information. You're then expected to use that information independently to come up with your own intellectual stance. And the stakes are high. Depending on where you're studying, Sir Isaac Newton, Oscar Wilde or Edward de Bono could have walked the halls before you.

But that's not all. The university landscape is almost unrecognizable from school classrooms. Words such as 'discourse' and 'deontology' are casually bandied about. You're expected to step up and become a confident, *academic* writer. In fact, a study by researcher Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams (2004) found that 98 per cent of university tutors expect your writing to improve significantly throughout your course. But having written all your life, it can seem like all the rules have changed and that you have no idea how to write a degree standard essay, let alone emulate the great academics. It's enough to make even the most confident student break out in a cold sweat.

## What is academic writing?

Contrary to popular belief, academic writing doesn't have to be pompous and hard to decipher with long, winding sentences that only lead to fear and trepidation. Granted, you may feel that some of your textbooks are written in the academic equivalent of hieroglyphics. But that doesn't mean that you have to emulate that style.

Put simply, academic writing uses other people's work to evaluate, compare and contrast viewpoints, and then it discusses them at length. The subject

matter may be different, but we all do the same with our friends when discussing music, films or sport. However, most students get tripped up by the conventional way in which this is done. Academic style is cautious and neutral. For instance, instead of writing: 'I think', the convention is to write: 'It seems that' (or some other cautious variation).

However, the trouble is that most students haven't been taught to write in the first place. So faced with what seems like a whole new way of writing, they rely too much on quotes, definitions and regurgitating what other academics have said.

If you've picked up this book, it's likely that you wish you could write in an easier, quicker and more effective way. Well, the good news is that no matter your current level of ability you can learn simple techniques that will transform your writing. You don't have to rely on writing crutches and props. Whether you're a first, second or final year student you can benefit from this book.

Working through this book is like having your very own writing coach guiding you and coaxing out of you clear, crisp, creative and effective pieces of writing. The interactive exercises, activities, quizzes and tasks each build on a fundamental principle of writing.

*Just Write It!* is a set system to unlock your creativity and bring it back to life. Think of it as a word workout where you are flexing your writing muscles in a skilled, controlled way. The more creative you are as a writer, the more you will be up to the academic demands of your course.

It must be noted here that this book uses a very informal style, which includes contractions such as 'isn't' and 'didn't'. This is to make the book easy to read and accessible. But in all your academic work you should write out the words in full. This means that 'isn't' becomes 'is not' and 'didn't' becomes 'did not'. Once you've mastered excellent writing skills, you're free to use creative licence outside and beyond university to write in this more informal way.

## **The nuts and bolts of the programme**

To get the most out of this book, it's best to follow it in order, which may take three months or up to a year. The only exception is Part IV. Some of the exercises there can be completed in order, but others are most useful if you actually have an essay or dissertation to write, or an exam to prepare for. Overall, the most important thing is that you use the 'little and often' approach when it comes to this programme.

The book is divided into five sections. The first lays the foundation for good writing. You'll figure out exactly what's holding you back from your writing best and then set a series of goals. Then you'll go back to basics with reading and vocabulary exercises.

In the second part of the book, you'll learn how to access your seven senses and use objects to kick-start your creativity. You'll also learn techniques for creating metaphors, plus practical ways of putting your new-found creative skills to good use.

Part III is the thinking phase, where you'll learn to recognize the differences between right and left brain thinking and how to integrate the two. You'll identify your thinking type and learn techniques for planning, generating ideas and persuading.

Part IV is the practical application of everything you have learnt. You'll learn, step by step, how to apply your new knowledge to essays (both coursework and exam), dissertations, articles and reports. And you'll learn fresh ways to approach these types of written work. We'll also look at writing effective personal statements, CVs and cover letters. And you'll learn how to transform academic writing into writing that thrives in the business world.

Finally, in the finishing touches section, there is an extensive checklist where you can mark off the techniques you have learnt and ensure that you are using them in your essays and other work. This checklist is a document you can visit again and again.

If you don't have the luxury of several months and need a quick fix, you can dip in and out of any of the chapters and exercises. But you'll see the biggest and most long-lasting change if you follow the programme as it's laid out. This is because each stage builds upon the last.

## **Graduation and beyond**

*Just Write It!* isn't a magic wand, but if you diligently apply the exercises, you will gain essential writing skills that will last a lifetime. This book is about writing with a practical purpose. It aims to give you the skills to write effectively and creatively on all subjects and to become a fluent, passionate communicator. This is essential in order to respond to the demands of our fast-moving society, which is constantly changing and evolving. Empower yourself by assuming personal responsibility for the quality of your writing skills. Adopting an empowered attitude will take you far – not to mention helping you get the best university grades possible!

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# Part I

## Laying the foundations

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# Chapter 1

## Have you got the write stuff?

Welcome to *Just Write It!* You might be a little surprised that you're not actually going to do any writing composition in this chapter. Instead you're going to examine your thoughts, feelings and beliefs about writing, which will help pave the way to becoming a whole-brain writer.

This chapter is crucial because it's part of the foundation for the work ahead. So, whatever you do, don't skip it. The more time you spend on these quizzes and exercises, the better results you'll see later.

### So, let's begin.

Read the statements below and tick all that apply to you. Don't worry – there are no right or wrong answers.

#### Writing is . . .

Worse than a nightmare

Really hard work

A struggle to get my thoughts on paper

A chore that I hate doing

A fun way to express my thoughts and feelings

A natural thing I do all the time

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| Sometimes challenging, but really satisfying             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| A complete mystery to me                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| OK, except for all that spelling and grammar             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Something with right and wrong answers                   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| A talent you are born with                               | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Just another part of university that I can take or leave | <input type="checkbox"/> |

How did you do? Were you really honest? Did some of your answers surprise you?

Whether you love writing, hate writing or feel nothing towards it, you need to be actively aware of what you're thinking.

**Tick which writing category you belong in**

- |              |                          |
|--------------|--------------------------|
| Like         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Love         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Hate         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Indifference | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Next, let's delve a little deeper.

What (if anything) do you like about writing and why?

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What (if anything) do you hate about writing and why?

---

---

---

If you ticked the 'indifference' category, explain why. For example, what does writing mean to you?

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What writing tasks do you find the easiest?

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What writing tasks are the hardest for you?

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The chances are good that you like the tasks you find easy. The aim of this book is to make the process of writing a lot easier and, in turn, more enjoyable.

## Cultivating a writing mind

You've faced up to how you really think and feel about writing. Now it's time to change some of your thinking. This is crucial as your thoughts and feelings, in large part, create your reality. Much of what you may believe about writing are actually myths – ideas which simply aren't true.

Let's take the example of Brussels sprouts. If you think that sprouts are tasty, then you will enjoy eating them. If you think they're the worst vegetable ever, again, that's your reality. The truth is, Brussels sprouts are not inherently yummy or yucky – it's all a matter of perspective. But, if you hate them, you can train your mind to like them and actually even enjoy them. It's the same with your writing.

Psychologist Seymour Epstein has spent his career looking at people's mindsets. He devised the Constructive Thinking Inventory (Epstein 1998), and stated that constructive thinking is the key to managing your emotions, developing emotional intelligence (which we'll look at in Chapter 2) and dealing with stress.

Here are some examples of constructive thinking versus destructive thinking:

**Table 1.1** Examples of constructive versus destructive thinking

<i>Destructive thinking</i>	<i>Constructive thinking</i>
<b>To be good at writing I have to know everything about spelling and grammar.</b>	<b>I can learn practical techniques as I go along. This book is a journey, where step by step I'll learn what I need to learn.</b>
<b>People who are good at writing are just smarter than everyone else.</b>	<b>Writing is something that I can learn. The more I do targeted, focused practice, using the exercises in the book, the better I'll get. Of course, some writers are very smart but it doesn't mean that good writers are a breed apart from everyone else.</b>
<b>People who are good at writing find that words just flow to them.</b>	<b>Writing takes concentration and effort – good writers may make it look easy but they are thinking hard and finding the best words to put on the page. Besides, anything worth doing takes time to master.</b>

People who are good at writing are inspired – everything comes naturally to them.	My inspiration will come and go, but as long as I start somewhere I can grow my ideas from there. I need to do independent work most days so I can't wait to be inspired. I've got to be able to sit down and do it no matter how I feel.
Writing is agony and torture.	Everything is what I make it. I choose to see writing as a challenge rather than a source of pain. Although writing can sometimes feel like a chore, once I get into it, I can enjoy it.
Writing should be fun and easy all the time. If it's not, I must be doing it incorrectly.	Sometimes writing will be fun and easy, and other times it will be difficult and demanding. I need to celebrate the successes I have and remember that being able to write well will put me ahead of other people in both university and life.
I should be smart enough to instantly write like a university lecturer and cope with difficult essays.	Everything worth having takes time to learn. I can learn the differences between A-level and university essays and apply new techniques step by step.
To succeed at university I have to have the intelligence of a Nobel Prize winner.	I can learn thinking techniques that give my IQ a workout – I don't have to be perfect to be a success.

## Recognizing your writing behaviours

So, we've looked at which thoughts about writing are helpful, and which are not so helpful. Now, see if you recognize yourself in any of the characters below. Then think about whether your behaviour helps you to achieve your goals. We'll look in more detail at goal setting in Chapter 2. But for now, just think about whether your behaviour around writing and university work helps you to get what you want: whether it's good grades, plenty of time to play football or a congratulatory gift to yourself for being so smart!

## Quiz: What type of writer are you?

Over the next week monitor all your actions around your writing. Or, if you don't think that's going to work, ask a friend or study partner to keep an eye on what you actually do when you've got a pen, pencil or keyboard in your hands.

## Writing types

### Perfectionist Petra

Your attitude is that your writing is either perfect or worthless. You spend ages on one assignment or piece of work and feel that everything you do is never quite good enough. Ironically, your work has plenty of crossings out because you always want your writing to be exact and precise. Highly conscientious, you are a hard worker who gets good marks.

### Fretful Fred

You hate seeing your lecturer's red pen across your work. So you play it safe and don't take too many writing risks. This means you tend to follow set patterns in your work and don't like to try out new techniques or ideas.

### Could Do Better Betty

You simply never put 100 per cent into anything. You know that you have huge potential, but instead prefer to do just enough to get by. Your friends and lecturers don't think you're particularly smart, but you occasionally pull out the stops and get excellent marks, before going back to your easy life. The downside is that gaps are forming in your knowledge and you are finding it more difficult to maintain your grades.

### Fun-seeking Fehmina

You prefer not to think too much and would much rather be active and outdoors than cooped up over a textbook and a pad of paper. Having fun is the most important thing and writing just doesn't compete with other activities.

### Slapdash Simon

You whittle off work at an amazing speed but your work is littered with silly errors that would have been spotted with a little more care and attention. You also leap in and start working before even formulating a plan.

### Last-minute Lorraine

You often hand work in late because you simply haven't given yourself enough time to complete it. With every piece of work it's as though you're competing in a 100m race because you avoid doing most written work until the very last minute.

## One-Trick Oliver

You quite like writing certain things – your music blog, for instance. But when it comes to something you find challenging, you freeze up. Sometimes, you can get going but find it hard to finish. Other times, you feel you just don't have the skills to get a university essay done.

### **Using affirmations to change your mind and behaviours**

Whether you identify with some of the types, all of them, or none at all – questioning your writing behaviour is the first step to success. Once you've identified your negative thoughts and attitudes about writing you can use affirmations to help change them.

Often used by psychologists and life coaches, affirmations are short statements of positive intent that state in the present what you would like to 'do', 'have' or 'be' in life. Although it may seem a little simple, creating affirmations and repeating them is incredibly powerful. This is because much of our behaviour is ruled by our subconscious minds – the part of our brains that is automatic. The subconscious rules our breathing, the nervous system and other functions that don't need conscious thought.

When we're actively thinking about something, it is our conscious mind at play. For instance, if you're learning to play tennis, you have to make a real effort to think about your technique and the strokes you're making. But once you've mastered that backhand or volley, it becomes automatic and you no longer think about it.

Our behaviours and thoughts operate in much the same way. If, way back at first school, you started thinking that writing was really hard, and quite frankly a bit of a nightmare, the chances are good that every time you wrote you activated that thought. Soon after, just like learning the backhand, that thought became automatic and you didn't even really notice it. Then it turned into behaviours, so that every time you wrote, it actually was a hard slog.

Writing may still be hard and a nightmare but you don't have to think that it is. You can train your mind to think more positively and in turn that will make the experience a lot more enjoyable, which will in turn make it much easier to create change.

### **Creating affirmations**

Now's the time to create some affirmations for your writing – make sure you create at least three and up to 10, if necessary. Affirmations work best when you say them in the present tense as though they are already happening. Start each

one with ‘I am’, ‘I think’, ‘I can’ or ‘Writing is.’ For example, you might say, ‘I am writing in an easy, fluent way’ or, ‘I can find great ideas for essays everywhere.’

But don’t just pull these affirmations out of the sky. Go back to your original statements (including what you found hard about writing and everything we’ve done in this chapter so far) and see where your danger spots were. Then, turn your thoughts on their head. So, if at the start of this chapter you thought that writing was a chore that you hated doing, your affirmation might be, ‘Writing is something that I approach with all my energy’ or, ‘Writing is something I enjoy.’

If you identified with Slapdash Simon in the writing types, you might say, ‘I am taking time to write more slowly, with more care.’

On the flip side, if you have a pretty positive attitude to writing, just create a couple of statements that back up your current attitude.

### Affirmation sheet

1 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

4 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

5 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

6 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

7

8

9

10

### Why are affirmations so important?

These affirmations will help to trick your brain into solving your writing problems, while you focus on other things. We've got a lot of work to do in the coming chapters. We have to make sure that the terrain is as smooth as possible, so that the going doesn't get too tough.

For this reason, it's important to remedy your thoughts before you put pen to paper for a single writing exercise. Preparation can be the single biggest factor in whether you succeed or fail. If you're well prepared you're better at navigating obstacles as they come your way.

### What next?

Now that you've written your affirmations, your task is to pick the most important ones and read these every morning and evening out loud for the next 30 days. If reading them aloud is a little dull, you can sing them, chant them or spell them out with your alphabet spaghetti at dinner time. Just say them somehow until you actually start to believe them.

Research by Dr Maxwell Maltz (1960) found that it takes 21 days to form a habit. But it can actually take up to 245 days to really ingrain this new habit (Lally *et al.* 2010). Of course, you're free to repeat your affirmations for much longer than 30 days. But a 30-day time frame is a realistic way to get started. After this period you can work with different affirmations or simply reap the rewards of the affirmations you've already worked with.

Now, you may find that every time you say an affirmation, such as 'I can write easily and well', another part of you answers back with, 'No, you can't!'

Don't worry about this, just keep going with your positive thoughts and soon the negative ones will be drowned out.

## **Dealing with corrections and criticisms**

It can also be hard to keep thinking positively about your writing when your lecturers give back your work, smeared with red marks, highlighting all the things you did wrong. It also doesn't help if you put all your energy into something and still get the same old marks as when you didn't try.

Learning to apply the right tools helps get past this last problem. The first problem is all about mind control. So, try not to think constantly about what mark you're going to get; just make the writing the best you can. Think of your grades as being fluid and know that with hard work, learning and application of new skills you can change your grades. Grades are not set in stone. A bad grade today does not mean a bad grade tomorrow and a good grade today does not guarantee a good grade tomorrow.

## **Understanding whole-brain writing**

The good news is that you have begun to understand your thoughts and behaviour as a writer. Now, you need to take the first steps into understanding yourself as a whole-brain writer. And to do this, first we have to look at neuroscience. If the mere mention of science brings you out in a cold sweat, relax. This is brain science with a purpose. It's going to make you into a happier, more confident writer. It helps to understand the principles behind the methods in this book, so you can not only master them but perhaps also share them with others.

Although humans only have one brain, studies have shown that the brain is split into right and left hemispheres. These opposite areas, or spheres, communicate to each other through a thick band that contains millions of nerve fibres called the corpus callosum.

Now, here's the interesting part. Neuroscientists Roger Sperry and Michael Gazzaniga studied patients whose corpus callosum had been cut (Gazzaniga 2005). Although these patients with 'split brains' seemed perfectly normal at first, it soon emerged that the right and left hemispheres of the brain were responsible for different functions. They found that the right side of the brain could not process language (or writing). That was the domain of the left side. The left hand side of the brain was responsible for language, calculations, maths, detail, analysis and logical abilities. In contrast, the right was found to be non-verbal and primarily responsible for spatial abilities, face recognition, pattern recognition, visual imagery and music appreciation. Put simply, the right side of the brain is involved in the creative, intuitive aspects whereas the left side is more logical.

## A nation of left-brain writers

Despite writing being a primarily left-brain activity, it's important to remember that you actually use your whole brain when you do any task. The trouble is that right-brain activities get sidelined in schools, so people become over-reliant on the left brain. School develops our logical abilities, teaching us to analyse, add up and deduce one thing from another. This is great, except that the more left-brained we become, the less we're able to write freely and easily. The left logical brain wants to edit, cross things out and have everything in a neat linear fashion. And most of the time, writing just isn't like that. The left brain may control our ability to write. But the right brain needs to get involved, otherwise we can feel frustrated, blocked and simply unable to get the words onto the page.

### Quiz: are you more right-brained or left-brained?

This quiz is based on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, which is a questionnaire that measures how people perceive the world and make decisions (MBTI Basics 2012). The Indicator results in 16 discrete personality types. But we're just using some of the principles to find out whether you are more right-brained or left-brained. Finding out your preference can help you to know exactly what you need to work on with your writing.

Tick whether you agree or disagree with the following statements:

#### Category 1: facts versus ideas

##### Left-brain statements

- I like to work with facts and figures
- I don't like to accept things without proof
- I pay close attention to detail in my university work
- I like things to be routine and predictable

##### Right-brain statements

- I'm a dreamer and want life to be like my ideals
- I am very resourceful and creative when solving problems
- I think about the future a lot and am open to many possibilities
- I love it when the rules constantly change

Agree

Disagree

**Category 2: thoughts versus feelings**

Left-brain statements	Agree	Disagree
I'm good at planning and organizing		
I like to put things into categories		
I think a lot about concrete things rather than ideas		
In writing, I tend to put 'I think . . .'		
Right-brain statements		
In teamwork, I think of others before making decisions		
I'm good at imagining how people feel		
I consult how I feel before I make decisions		
In writing, I tend to put 'I feel . . .'		

**Category 3: structured versus flexible**

Left-brain statements	Agree	Disagree
I don't like leaving work half-finished		
I'm good at sticking to a schedule		
I choose the safe approach and don't take risks		
I can make decisions easily and stick to them		
Right-brain statements		
I often leave work half-finished		
I'm good at doing lots of things at once		
I'm curious about people, situations and ideas		
I find it hard to choose anything!		

**What does it mean?**

It's easy to see whether you agreed with mostly right-brain or left-brain statements. But if your answers seem to conflict, then you're in the enviable position of being pretty balanced.

Knowing these answers will help you to improve your written work. In Chapter 2 you'll set goals based on these answers. So, make sure you feel you've evaluated yourself in the most accurate way. Right-brain people tend to know what they mean but can't get it onto paper. Left-brain students can

write in a logical way but sometimes lack inspiration and stick to facts or rote learning.

### **So, how exactly do we get to whole-brain writing?**

The best writing uses an integrated approach. In writing it is the left brain that pays attention to mechanics such as spelling, agreement and punctuation. But the right side pays attention to coherence and meaning; that is, your right brain tells you it ‘feels’ right.

According to some experts, the trick is not to try and get out of your left brain and into your right but instead to increase activity in the right hemisphere (or reduce activity in the left) so it matches the activity on the other side. To be truly creative, you need to be balanced.

This book covers both left-brain and right-brain activities. With this knowledge, you’ll be better equipped to figure out how best to improve your writing. You don’t need to worry about this too much as the exercises in the book create a balanced programme. However, here are some simple tips to start thinking about straight away:

- To get the right brain working, try and create images in your head while you’re working and actively increase your use of metaphors, analogies and visuals.
- To activate the left brain, you need to plan and structure your work, actively think about what techniques you’re using and edit as you go along.

### **Your writing MOT**

By now, you should have learnt a lot about yourself as a writer. Here’s the chance to summarize it, in handy format. In the UK, cars older than three years have to go through a yearly MOT (a Ministry of Transport test) where a trained mechanic goes through a list of checks to see whether it is road worthy. This is very similar to what we’ve just done. So, here’s your MOT summary sheet. Think of this as a checklist that will help to keep your writing machine in good working order.

**Constructive thinking** (write out the thoughts and beliefs you have about writing that are helpful)

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**Destructive thinking** (write out the thoughts and beliefs you have about writing that are unhelpful and that you want to change)

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**Right brain versus left brain** (summarize your results from the quiz: write out any statements that really rang true for you)

- Do you prefer facts or ideas?

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- Are you a thinker or a feeler?

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- Are you more structured or flexible?

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**Your writing types** (state the writing types – such as Perfectionist Petra and Fun-seeking Fehmina – that you identified with)

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**Areas for improvement** (summarize the areas of writing you want to improve)

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**What next?** (list the actions you're going to take over the next 30 days)

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This information is invaluable as we progress to the later stages of the book. For instance, if you're a thinking type and you're writing a very emotional, tragic case study, you may want to include some feeling-type language to make it more effective.

Using a variety of techniques, tools and quizzes, this chapter has found out what kind of writer you are, and your likes and dislikes, so that you can best tailor the rest of the programme to you.

We all have preferences. Some of us like chocolate ice cream, others butterscotch mixed in with strawberry, while some can't stand all that gooey stuff and would much rather have a pastry. When it comes to writing, it really is no different. Except that if you don't know your preferences and don't understand what type of writer you are, writing can be really hard, like climbing up a steep mountain incline barefoot without a harness.

You now have real tools to start to think yourself into the fantastic writer you really are. You can also periodically revisit this chapter and amend your MOT and the answers to the other questions as you progress and develop as a writer. This section can grow with you and provide you with a strong foundation from which to write.

### **Further reading**

You can find out more about your personality type by using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. Visit [www.myersbriggs.org](http://www.myersbriggs.org).

**Student Comment****Paulina, French and Philosophy undergraduate****Writing types:** Perfectionist Petra and One-Trick Oliver

'I loved the fact that the first chapter was very engaging and really made you think about your attitude to writing. Many writing books just give you exercises and tell you what to write, which can make you wonder whether it is at all helpful or suitable to you. It was great to really feel like I would be working for my own needs, rather than following general instructions. It was fun and exciting to get involved straight away!'

**What do you hate most about writing and why?**

I hate not being able to find the right words or expressions (or metaphors and similes) to express what I want to say. I hate not knowing my own style and being scared of experimenting because of feeling like 'I'm not good enough'. It takes a lot of time to get to something that I really like or am proud of, but because of my initial fear, I am unwilling to put the time in for fear of just wasting my time!

**Paulina's affirmations to help combat these writing dislikes:****Greta says:**

'In Chapter 4 we'll learn the technique of object writing, which will help your metaphors and similes to flow more easily and help you to write in the moment and use your first instinct, rather than trying to second guess yourself, or be critical. This will also help you overcome your perfectionist tendencies and try out new ways of writing. You'll also learn a really easy technique for choosing the exact metaphor or simile that fits what you want to say. This will help your essays to run more smoothly.'