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*Louis de Bernières*

‘Reading *The Book You Need* is like getting useful advice from your own personal mentor, one who is wise, experienced, encouraging, and delighted to share their encyclopedic knowledge of literary craft. For anyone who wants to be a better writer - listen carefully. The authors know what they’re talking about.’

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‘Years of teaching expertise condensed into one of the most comprehensive journeys through the craft that I’ve seen. This book teaches in the most natural way, guiding you under the surface of a wide range of good writing, deep into the practical processes that bring it to life.’

*Philip Gross, poet, winner of the T. S. Eliot Prize; Emeritus Professor of Creative Writing, University of South Wales*

‘A terrific guide to becoming a better writer and embarking upon a publishing career. Burton and Poster have created a masterclass in print - comprehensive, authentic, clear, and insightful. A pleasure to read and to learn from, this handbook is a must-have for anyone who loves and practices the writing craft.’

*Jewell Parker Rhodes, New York Times bestselling author, Founding Artistic Director of the Virginia G. Piper Center for Creative Writing, Arizona State University*

‘This is a fresh, engaging and enjoyable guide to writing creative prose. If you want to become a novelist or short story writer, reading this book is a great first step.’

*Francesca Rhydderch, novelist; Associate Professor in Creative Writing, Swansea University*

## THE BOOK YOU NEED TO READ TO WRITE THE BOOK YOU WANT TO WRITE

Have you ever wanted to write a novel or short story but didn't know where to start? If so, this is the book for you. It's the book for anyone, in fact, who wants to write to their full potential. Practical and jargon-free, rejecting prescriptive templates and formulae, it's a storehouse of ideas and advice on a range of relevant subjects, from boosting self-motivation and confidence to approaching agents and publishers. Drawing on the authors' extensive experience as successful writers and inspiring teachers, it will guide you through such essentials as the interplay of memory and imagination; plotting your story; the creation of convincing characters; the uses of description; the pleasures and pitfalls of research; and the editing process. The book's primary aim is simple: to help its readers to become better writers.

Teachers of the *Guardian's* creative writing Masterclasses, and co-founders of the University of Cambridge's Master's programme in creative writing, Sarah Burton and Jem Poster draw on a wealth of teaching experience in a variety of contexts, from informal community education to PhD supervision. Sarah Burton is a novelist (*The Strange Adventures of H*, 2020), biographer (*A Double Life: A Biography of Charles and Mary Lamb*, 2003, shortlisted for the Mind Book of the Year Award) and social historian (*Impostors: Six Kinds of Liar*, 2000). Jem Poster is a novelist (*Courting Shadows*, 2002; *Rifling Paradise*, 2006), poet (*Brought to Light*, 2001), literary editor (*Edward Thomas: Prose Writings Vol. III*, 2018) and Emeritus Professor of creative writing, Aberystwyth University. Together Sarah and Jem run *Between the Lines*, an online mentoring programme for writers.

THE BOOK YOU  
NEED TO READ TO  
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YOU WANT TO  
WRITE

A HANDBOOK FOR FICTION  
WRITERS

SARAH BURTON  
AND JEM POSTER



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For our students,  
past, present and future

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## PREFACE

Welcome to this book. Perhaps you've already begun your journey as a writer, or perhaps you're about to take your first exploratory steps. In either case you'll find in these pages a comprehensive guide, supportive yet relaxed, illustrative rather than dogmatic, and allowing space for the development of your own particular talent.

This book doesn't claim to turn you into a best-selling author. It doesn't even promise to give you a fast-track to getting an agent or the inside knowledge on getting published. It doesn't because there's actually no secret to how these things happen. The surest way of becoming a published writer is to become a better writer.

That's the focus of this book. We don't have a formula (because there isn't one) and although we'll be offering plenty of advice, we won't be giving you rules, because unless we want all writers to be writing in the same way rules are not going to be helpful. And although this book is written by writers, we don't aim to make you write the way we write. We want to help you write the way *you* write, to develop your own unique voice.

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