

Sponsored by TD Children's Book Week ([www.bookweek.ca](http://www.bookweek.ca)), Canada Council, and ATEQ, Kristyn Dunnion gave a public reading. Ms Dunnion read excerpts from her books and entertained questions about the writing process.

Dunnion also offered a writing workshop to students at Centennial Regional High School and Heritage Regional High School.

## Ten Tips On Being A Better Writer

1. Say, "I am a writer" out loud. Admitting you have a problem is half the battle.
2. Read a heck of a lot.
3. Think critically about what you're reading. For instance:  
What makes a good story?
  - character
  - plot
  - setting
  - social/political/historical context
  - style
4. Who are your favourite authors? What are your favourite books?
  - notice what you like about these books
  - notice what you DON'T like about other books
  - try to figure out WHY things work or don't work
  - apprentice from writers you admire, especially if they're already dead. (no lawsuits)
5. Listen and Observe. Take public transportation for the recommended daily dose of improvised human interaction.
6. Take notes! Write down all your ideas, all those juicy sound bites you heard on the subway. Develop your own analysis by asking questions. You are a social scientist (like Harriet the Spy). Everything you take notes on now can be used for later writing projects. You may want to create your own system of shorthand or use pseudonyms to avoid losing all your friends, and destroying other valuable relationships. ☺
7. Practice writing. A lot. Writing is 1 part inspired creation and 2 parts hard work. That means sitting home sometimes when your friends are all out partying. Or sacrificing your favourite TV shows/video games for the sake of your art. Seriously, you need to be disciplined to make time for your craft and to really develop your skills.
8. Taking the harsh. This refers to receiving constructive criticism, which can be quite painful, but is absolutely necessary in order to get through the dirty business of revisions, multiple drafts of your work etc. This is not to say that everyone else's opinion is equally vital; you cannot please every reader. Give your work to someone you respect when you are ready for feedback. (get the Kleenex ready!)
9. Keep trying! Sometimes a project has to be shelved for a while in order for the themes / characters to mature. Always have something else ready to work on and if you feel stuck, try a writing exercise for new ideas.
10. Just Do It.

## Writing Exercises

1. **Stop, drop and write!** Keep a bunch of “starter” sentences in a jar and shake it up. Pick one. Write for five solid minutes and see what you get.
2. **Make an entrance!** Write a vivid description of a new character entering a room / scene. Try to incorporate ten different pieces of information. Avoid clichés. Include all kinds of things: age, height, build, eye/hair/skin colour, speech, posture, clothing, movement, scent, etc. When you are finished, put it in a sealed envelope, date it, and open it two or more weeks later.
3. **Revise your entrance!** Re-read your marvelous entrance piece. Do you have a clear picture of this new character? What physical details do you learn about the character in this passage? What subtle things do you learn? Remember, you choose which elements the reader gets to learn on the first meeting – save some information to reveal at more potent moments in your story.
4. **Give your character an ailment!** Write an anecdote or scene but pay special attention to the physical sensations the character/narrator experiences. The incident should not detract from your plotline. For instance, suppose your main character robbed a bank. If she's kind of clumsy or wearing the wrong shoes, by all means let her trip on the way out. Describe the related physical and emotional sensations in a direct and novel way. (pain, subsequent limps, possible blood, embarrassment, worry about leaving forensic evidence, etc)
5. **Kill the “I”!** Take a first person narrative passage (your own or from another source), circle all instances where the word “I” is used, then find a way to rewrite the passage removing most occurrences of “I”. You still need to have some “I’s” to make it a first person narrative, and keeping a couple near the end of the passage can work as an anchor. By reducing the use of “I” you allow the reader to more fully identify with the character and his/her actions. Present the narrative in a direct, immediate manner and make it a shared adventure.
6. **Stop thinking!** Try eliminating “thought” verbs from a passage you have already written. (thinks, wants, wonders, desires, feels, believes, knows, loves, hates) Rewrite the passage to express those sentiments using action verbs. This is “showing, not telling.” A tip: avoid leaving your character alone brooding and internalizing too much. Get your characters together and get the action started!
7. **Dear LiveJournal: I hate Facebook!** Write a letter to one of your characters from another character. Write a letter to yourself from one of your characters. Pay special attention to speech, diction, expressions, etc. Keep a diary or blog for one of your characters. You don't need to include it in your story, but it's a good way to explore character motivations, develop dialogue and social dynamics.
8. **Put a fellow writer on the Hot Seat!** Ask a series of specific questions to the writer who must answer as his/her main character. Like: When is your birthday? What is your favourite colour? What languages do you speak? Who is your best friend? What is your biggest fear? Your deepest secret? Your ambition in life? If you can't answer these random questions then you may need to spend more time developing your character. Note: not all of the info will be relevant to your story, but it's important for the writer to have extensive knowledge of each character.