

52 DATES FOR WRITERS

by Claire Wingfield



RIDE A TANDEM, ASSUME AN ALIAS,
AND 50 OTHER WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR NOVEL DRAFT

Introduction

This is an extract from the writing handbook *52 Dates for Writers*, by Claire Wingfield. The book is split into 52 writing dates to keep you motivated and inspired throughout the process of completing a novel.

Each of the 52 dates is designed to give you a creative space away from your everyday life and the daily grind of desk-bound writing. Each is accompanied by a number of exercises, prompts, or observations to help you to focus on one or more areas of your novel. You will be encouraged to look at your writing anew, to be rigorous in testing out your ideas, and above all to be playful.

Each writing date you go on has the potential to bring something new, unexpected and unique to your writing. You might also find the time, space and enthusiasm to explore something you already carry with you, but is not yet present in your draft.

Many of the dates and accompanying activities will help you in developing a particular facet of your novel, such as character, plot, or setting. They will bring richness and specificity to these areas, and allow you to think through them away from the restraints of what you already have on the page.

Many will also encourage you to bring an analytical eye to what you have already written, helping you to view your work as though you were a reader fresh to your writing.

Not all of the work you complete will find its way into your novel. Some will refuel your imagination, encourage you to reflect on your craft, or spark new ideas entirely. Sometimes you might write copious new material, and eventually edit it down to a single paragraph for your final draft. In the book, after the 52 dates, there is a short essay on editing to help you think about integrating fresh work into your novel draft, and to support you in achieving a satisfyingly coherent and focused final product.

I hope you enjoy the writing dates included in this sample. If you would like to download the full manuscript, complete with examples from well-known novels, it is available at Amazon and coming soon to Kobo stores.

Happy writing!

What readers have said:

‘An innovative writing aid that will be hugely valuable to writers’ –

Scottish Book Trust

‘Highly recommended for all writers – beginners or those with more experience who need a shot of energy. 5*’ – Karen Barclay

‘I’ll be using this book for years to come. 5*’ – Kristin Pedroja

1/52



Cook Something Luxurious

Whether it's a new recipe or an old favourite; whether you eat alone or with company; whether the attempt goes awry or perfectly to plan, savour the preparation and the results, and at some point afterwards:

Write about the role of food in your novel.

Your characters' relationships with food can evoke setting, bring an awareness of dominant and counter cultures to the fore, and betray their passions and anxieties. For example, does your office worker resist the daily cake round or readily indulge? What does your teenage protagonist spend their lunch money on? Which of your characters is a cautious, faddy or adventurous eater, and why? If you don't know the answers to these questions, try writing a food biography for each of your central characters. Consider such questions as:

What is this character's earliest food memory?

Who taught them to cook?

Who do they cook for?

Who cooks for them?

What role does food play in their culture?

Does this character cook from taste or recipe?

Convenience foods or home-cooking?

How extravagant is their weekday lunch?

Any weekend or holiday food rituals?

Now you have an enhanced knowledge of your characters' eating habits, take a closer look at a mealtime / refreshment scene you've already drafted. As the daily activity of eating is so familiar to us, these can sometimes suffer from underwriting, with a sketch given of a generic bar / meal scene. Can you bring more precision to your writing here?

To generate some new material, you might:

Set two of your characters into conflict on a food-related matter.

2/52



Go Geocaching

Register at www.geocaching.com to enjoy the thrill of tracking down a hidden cache following coordinates sent to a GPS device or smartphone. Whether you begin your adventure on your doorstep or further afield, your hi-tech treasure hunt can help to put you in the position of your reader – who must navigate your novel using the clues you provide.

Afterwards:

Conduct a survey of the major revelations of your novel. Make a list / chart of where the key information in your novel is revealed.

Is it all bunched up near the beginning, or in certain chapters?

Make note of the clues you leave before any revelations, as well as the questions the novel raises concerning your plot. Pay special attention to the end pay-off.

Having the facts about the challenge you are setting your readers laid out in front of you will make it easier to plan any adjustments. It's important to have a handle on this, because the excitement of 'solving' your novel is

what keeps your reader with you. Whilst most obvious for a crime novel or thriller, all writers must ration the information they provide to their readers, and think carefully about the order and pace of each new revelation.

You might also:

Record your adventure on the geocaching website and in your Writing Log.



View geocaching pictures and stories at www.geocaching.com

3/52



Attend a Celebrity Appearance

No matter if you celebrate or scorn modern celebrity culture, there's something worth learning from the cult itself. Looming large in modern life, attracting the fickle beacon of public attention, a little time observing one of these feted individuals can make you ask the question every writer must. *Do I have a character worth writing about?*

At its most basic, the question invites some reflection on what sets your character apart. For the celebrity you have encountered, the answer might be: their ambition, their talent, their failings, their failures – all magnified or manufactured for public consumption. And what of your character? What is the quirk or nub that sets him or her apart – and *will this get through to your reader?* To help make sure of this:

Plan one change to give greater definition to one of your central characters – a detail that really makes this character stand out.

Perhaps you observed others in attendance at your celebrity event, their interest ranging from the curious to the fanatical. What was it that claimed their attention? The charisma, talent or allure of the individual; or the pull of the narrative of triumph and tragedy that surrounds them? You might ask this same question of your own protagonist – for ultimately, your readers' interest must also span from curiosity to fanaticism.

Of course, most of us have mixed feelings towards our celebrities. Do we admire, despise, pity or envy them? The characters that most enthrall inspire something of all of these emotions. But what if we adjust the balance?

Thinking of your novel, how much of the time do you expect your reader to admire your central character? Come up with a percentage. And how much of the time do you expect your reader to despise your main character? Again, come up with a percentage.

Reverse these percentages. What changes to the novel would be required to achieve this?

Re-write one of your key scenes to satisfy this new balance.

You might repeat this exercise using 'envy' and 'pity'.