

## August Workshop Report by Annie Clouston: Creative Writing

This month we were very privileged to have the distinguished and much published author, Anne Fine, to lead a session on getting going with our writing ambitions. There were seventeen of us, and I was surprised at how many of my fellow participants had actually got on with the job of putting pen to paper (now a metaphor, for who does that old fashioned thing any more?).

The session (NOT a workshop) initially took the form of introductions that included where participants were in their writing and what was their preferred medium. We had poets, fiction writers, memoir writers, children's writers, and collators within our group. There were some common issues, notably getting started, keeping going and finishing!

Self-discipline is a must and this includes denying distraction opportunities, eg cleaning the deep-fat fryer and painting the understairs cupboard, in order to get BUM ON SEAT. Then deal with extraneous noise, and loss of confidence. Anne quoted Bertrand Russell – you're not as good as you think you are, or as bad as you fear, and as for temperamental interference, the words of Phillip Larkin were helpful – treat your moods as if they're technical difficulties and write the book you'd most like to read.

We had some discussion about whether as a writer one is plot or character led. Anne puts herself firmly in the character-led category, in that, by getting into the skin of your protagonists you can evolve the story in a credible way.

Anne introduced helpful accessories to the craft of writing: The Writers and Artists Yearbook, and Mslexia <https://mslexia.co.uk> a useful resource for women who write, with an extensive list of competitions and fora for creative writers. And she cautioned that self-editing and a willingness to "murder your darlings" ie those literary gems that you absolutely can't bear to delete, even when they deserve it, are required to avoid "red words", a Russian phrase for language that stops the eye, and turns off the reader.

Anne was very generous with her time and her experience. Maybe now we have the stimuli to get that BUM ON SEAT, or to keep on keeping on...

