



Running a creative writing workshop on 'Nourish'

A 10-step guide for workshop
leaders

About this resource and the 'Nourish' campaign

Are you part of a writing group, writing workshop or book club? Is there a food that brings you comfort as well as calories? Do you have a tale to tell about food, glorious food?

Cook up your story for us!

Food gives us so much more than nutrients. We eat with friends, family and colleagues. Everyone has food experiences that they'll never forget. Maybe it was that perfect sunset pasta carbonara that inspired you to propose on holiday? Or granny's cloutie dumplings that sat like a lead weight in your belly for hours? Or that Christmas where the turkey was still raw inside so the family cut straight to pudding and port? This is your chance to nourish Scotland's readers with those meals on paper, if not actually on the plate.

Use this handy guide to run an interactive creative writing session and help to get your group's stories down on paper and then encourage those who attend your session to share them on our website. These guidance notes are to help you help them to submit their work in any form they prefer, it could be a short story, a poem, comic strip, play, diary entry or letter – and we welcome entries in Gaelic and Scots too.

Our favourite stories will be published in an e-book for Book Week Scotland 2017 – our national celebration of books and reading.

We are hoping to receive a variety of pieces, both in terms of form and tone. These might be childhood stories or humorous stories, or they might be letters or poems that deal with more personally meaningful subject matter. The resulting e-book will showcase the different ways that the people of Scotland have chosen to respond to the theme.

Of course the theme of Nourish may suggest difficult issues for some people and we don't wish to discourage people from responding to the theme in whichever way they choose. However we are foregrounding a light-hearted and positive approach to the theme in order that we can try to maintain a balance of tone across the submissions we receive.

All stories submitted will appear online at Scottish Book Trust and a selection will be published, alongside commissioned authors' work, in an e-anthology entitled *Nourish*. Please refer to our terms and conditions / background to submission section online, in advance of submitting your entries.

Submission details

As mentioned, your group can be creative about how they write, as creative as they like, and submissions can take a variety of formats, such as:

- a story,
- a poem or a riddle,
- a diary entry,
- a letter,
- a sketch or a scene (like a short play),
- an article (newspaper or magazine),
- a personal piece of writing.

Entries can be submitted on Scottish Book Trust's website or by post, all entries must be received by the closing date 7th June 2017. The entries can be short in length or a longer piece but no more than 1,000 words in total.

Entries should be pasted into the body of the webpage entry form found at the following location:

<http://scottishbooktrust.com/writing/nourish/submit-story>

If your group usually meets for two hours, you can complete all the activities below in one two-hour session. If you usually meet for only one hour, you can run a one-hour session by omitting the activities that are marked 'optional'.

Activities

1. Icebreaker (optional)

If your group is meeting for the first time, or if you have some new members who don't know everyone, an icebreaker is a good way to start the session. Icebreakers are short activities that make sure everyone feels welcome and ready to contribute. You can find three sample icebreaker activities on the Scottish Book Trust website, or you can come up with your own. <http://scottishbooktrust.com/skint/detailed-guidance-notes/introductory-exercises-and-icebreakers>

2. Examples of Nourish stories already submitted

We will be uploading stories by budding writers from the general public as we receive them. These pieces of writing may help to provide inspiration for your workshop. You will be able to download examples from the following link: <http://scottishbooktrust.com/writing/nourish/read-stories>

3. What makes a story interesting and nourishing? (Optional)

Discuss examples of scenes in books or films where food plays a central role, e.g. the famous scene from *Oliver Twist* where our hero asks for more porridge; Miss Havisham's mouldering wedding cake in *Great Expectations*; or just about any scene from *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Why are these scenes so memorable? Which details stick with us?

You could also discuss a selection of the example/s on the SBT website (as above) and pick out what your group likes about them: What caught their attention? Are there any lines or images that they particularly liked? The following guidance from the author Liz Lochhead contains a few questions to get your discussion started.

If your group is quite large, you could discuss in pairs or small groups, and then feed back to the whole group with everyone's ideas being written on paper, a flipchart, whiteboard or smart board. In the examples you have read for inspiration which ones adhered to Liz Lochhead's suggested writing rules as outlined below?

4. Inspiration



Liz Lochhead's writing tips...

- **Write what *really* interests you**, not what you think you ought to be interested in.
- The old **five senses**. See it, touch it, taste it, smell it, hear it. *Turn yourself into it*, said Ted Hughes, *and then the words will look after themselves*. Well, certainly I have to turn all my censors, inhibitors and ego, and false sense of myself *as a writer*, and certainly any attempts at cleverness, off – *in the first draft at least*.
- See, it's only when you read back what you have written down, tasting and testing the words *as words and sounds* you can see where you have captured a bit of life in the language, an image, a wee detail – and that won't be necessarily in the bit that felt like it flowed or had the fancy words, but often in the bit that you struggled over and in the end, och, just put down what would have to do for now...
- Throw away all the bits that don't have that bit of life in them, keep these surprisingly **real or surprisingly honest and vivid bits**, the bits that, to tell the truth, surprised you – mibbe by their simplicity – and start again with them.
- **Don't explain**. You don't have to give the reasons for going there or the co-ordinates on a map. Consider cutting off the beginning and the end paragraph or stanza of what you have written – and do this once you think it's finished and cut down to the bone already. No 'vamping till ready', no summing up. Just trust your reader to be right there with you in the middle of the place you are writing about. *Get in, get out don't linger* said Raymond Carver.

- **Don't try and describe your feelings.** An emotion named is an emotion obliterated from any text. Stick to those five senses, stick to objects and actions, what's done, what's said. Get this right and all the feeling in the world will be in this.
- It's all in the details, in *the particular*. Small things. **Plain words**, probably. But which ones? Ah, I said the advice was simple, I didn't say it was easy...
- Enjoy yourself. Struggle with not enjoying yourself until you begin to, very much. (If I can't, or won't, then it's usually because I'm not obeying Rule Number One.)

5. Your Nourish stories

Now your group can start talking about their story ideas that would fit the theme Nourish. Ask them to start thinking about different environments or occasions that could lead to memorable and nourishing food experiences? Here are some examples:

- a favourite childhood meal or snack
- food to celebrate a special occasion such as a birthday or wedding
- a memorable meal when on holiday
- a meal to mark a religious occasion – Christmas, breaking fast at Ramadan etc.
- convalescent foods that make us feel better in times of illness
- learning to cook

Encourage your group to add more ideas to these headings to help stimulate nourishing memories.

6. Mapping your nourishing stories/ scribble down ideas (optional)

Once you have chosen the food event or memory you would like to share, you can start thinking very roughly about how you might write about it. Begin to think creatively about this story by drawing a mind map or spider diagram. Note down bullet points or single words or write a quick first draft.

Start thinking about the best angle from which to talk about your food story. Do you want to tell it from your point of view? Or could you take a more abstract angle? For example, a restaurant anecdote could be told from the perspective of the diner, the waiter or the chef, or maybe even by the food itself!

7. Where to begin

There's only a limited space for you to tell your story, so consider how you can make the story really exciting and interesting to readers. You can jump in anywhere. We're all used to starting the story of Cinderella with Cinderella working in her wicked stepmother's kitchen. But imagine if the story started in the middle: with a beautiful girl running out of a castle, one shoe missing, her clothes turning to rags around her... what an opening scene!

8. How to end

A good story ends with a memorable image. Think about the best thing that happened or the reason you have always remembered this meal or event. You should consider putting that right at the end, so the reader leaves the story remembering the great part! If it helps, you could even write down your ending first and then work towards that ending.

9. Drafting and redrafting (optional)

If you have time, write out a first draft, so you can read over your story, change and tweak it before you decide it's ready to send off. The word limit for submissions is 1,000 words.

10. Sharing (optional)

Once you have written your food story, you could read it aloud to the rest of your group if you feel brave enough! We hope you'll also send it off to SBT and share it with us! Please refer to our submission guidelines below to find out how to do this.

How to submit stories:

Go to the following section of Scottish Book Trust's web site

<http://www.scottishbooktrust.com/writing/nourish/submit-story>

Scroll down to find the online form. Complete this form and submit it to us electronically or complete the online form, print it out and post it to us at the following address:

Frances Campbell, Scottish Book Trust, Sandeman House, Trunk's Close,
55 High St, Edinburgh, EH1 1SR

If you need help submitting your story or have any questions about the project contact Fran frances.campbell@scottishbooktrust.com or 0131 524 0170

Other things to consider

Mental health and well-being

As always with our annual campaign, people will interpret the theme in a wide range of ways. You should be aware that this theme may lead people to share very personal and emotionally affecting stories and it is important to be prepared for this. Being prepared to listen to what someone wants to tell you is a very powerful supportive act in itself, however you may also need to be prepared to point people towards organisations that provide specific, professional support.

We will be providing links to a range of support organisations on the Nourish website – this will be a useful resource for anyone who might need more support than you are able to provide. Please ensure that you deal sensitively with any information that is shared with you, and remember that there is a possibility that this is the first time your learner has told anyone else their story. Always be honest, open and clear about your role as a literacy support worker.

Ground rules

Because we specifically ask participants to share true, personal stories it is important that your learners feel their experience is valued and heard. With the theme of Nourish, you may find a wide range of experiences and perspectives are discussed. In order to ensure that everyone's contributions are heard and respected you may wish to establish some agreed ground rules with the group to begin with. These might include:

- **Respect** – Give undivided attention to the person who has the floor (permission to speak).
- **Confidentiality** – What we share in this group will remain in this group. If someone wishes to share their story further, for example by submitting it to Nourish, that is their decision.
- **Non-judgmental approach** – we can disagree with another person's point of view without putting that person down.
- **Sensitivity to diversity** – We will remember that people in the group may differ in, age, race, religion, cultural background, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, ability, and/or parental or relationship status and will be careful about making insensitive or careless remarks.

Have a good time – when sharing stories and making stories it's fine to have a good time!