

# 6 Day Writing Lockdown Challenge



Hello,

I'm Emma Tallon, author of the Tyler family series, a gritty, fast paced set of crime thrillers. I'm lucky that during this lockdown I have plenty to keep me busy, including the creation of the next book in this series. But I know there are a lot of you who are stuck inside and need something fun and creative to take your minds off the current state of the world. So, I have put together a six day challenge for those of you who would like to explore your inner author.

To be clear, this six day challenge is completely free of charge and all work carried out is your own to keep and share as you wish. I have created this purely as a gift to ease the boredom of Lockdown and I urge you to share it with anyone else you think might enjoy it too.

Ideally, you will take part along with someone else so that you are able to swap ideas and discuss as you go. However, if you don't have someone to take part with, you will see that I have suggested alternative tasks for you. So please don't worry if you haven't got a writing buddy coming along for the ride.

Remember that there is no right or wrong way of doing this, no perfect length for your stories – this challenge is for YOU. So, please write for as long or as little as you want to, or for as long as your ideas are flowing. Everyone works differently. And lastly, just enjoy yourself! Get lost in your own new worlds and have fun with them. We may all be stuck inside right now, but inside your mind you are as free as a bird. The only boundaries are the ones you create yourself.

Good luck and have fun,

Emma x

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# day 1

## The Flawed Character

One thing I found interesting about people's reactions to my books, was who their favourite characters were. There were a lot of different opinions, but a large proportion of the people I asked or who mentioned in their reviews or messages, claimed they favoured a character called Tanya.

Tanya is a very scarred, hard, flamboyant character. She has wild red hair, a very bad background and absolutely no filter. She works hard – very hard – to better herself in life, dragging herself from her life as a stripper in the seedier side of the East End, to running several successful businesses and reaching her goals. She's loud and brash but she has a heart of gold underneath and is loyal to a fault. She's also very funny.

There is nothing wrong with having a character who is perfect and serene – but whilst we may love them ourselves, these characters can often come across as a little unrealistic to readers. We as humans are flawed creatures. We tend to love people because of their quirks, not despite them. We are curious as to what has made people the way they are.

*Why is she so defensive around the subject of marriage?*

*Why does he get so angry over something so little?*

*What sparked the fear in her eye when she saw that random green car?*

*Why does he stare so wistfully over that mountain at the same time each day?*

As readers we love to be lured into curiosity. So as writers, we need to have a backstory, some secrets, some parts of the past for our characters that only we know before we even begin writing.

### **Task**

Create your own perfectly imperfect, beautifully flawed character and create a fleshed out biography. Really dig deep and get to know them. This can be male or female. I want you to think about the following things and put together a general overview that, if read, could tell someone all they need to know about what this person looks like, who they are and what made them this way.

- *Looks. Height, shape, hair, eyes, body language, style.*
- *Geographical location. Local or newcomer.*
- *Job/career. Why they chose this path.*
- *Social status. Background.*
- *Family. Relevant relationships.*
- *Personality traits both good and bad.*
- *Any specific back story that has led to who they are/why they act as they do, today.*

# day 2

## Get to Know How Your Character Interacts

This might sound a bit strange, but I often have little clue what is going to come out of some of my characters mouths before I write it. They have become so colourful and have such personalities of their own that sometimes as my fingers fly across the keyboard I find myself laughing or raising my eyebrows at what they say.

Sometimes you have to get into the flow and just let them take over to see how they interact with other people and how they react to situations. Or sometimes this isn't the case. With some characters you need to work it out with careful thought and strategically mould the way things pan out. There is no right or wrong here, every writer works with their characters differently. But before we get into writing a whole story, you need to know which way it works for you.

### **Task**

Your second task is to write a short story based around your character, about them overcoming a potential disaster in the workplace.

There is no set length or scenario, as each of your characters have different backgrounds, but here are some ideas to get your creative juices flowing:

- If your character is a young, bubbly woman in an office, she may have had to tell a small lie last week to appease a client which is now threatening to come back around as this client is coming in to see her boss. She could end up playing out a comical juggling act to avert disaster in this case.
- If your character is a CIA agent, there could be a terrorist threat to the building they work in and no one will listen to them so they have to act on their own to save the day.

Whatever it is, it can be big or small, funny or serious, social or technical – that's all up to you. But this is a great way to find out how your character works with other people and in pressurised situations.

### **If you have a writing buddy:**

Swap these short stories and read them. Give your feedback on their character. Did you like him/her? What did you like about them? What did you not like about them? Was there anything they said/did that piqued your curiosity? When you receive your feedback, ask yourself if your character came across as you wanted.

# day 2

## Get to Know How Your Character Interacts

If not, it could be that their personality has developed under your fingers without you realising – or it could mean you need to be a little clearer next time. That's for you to decide, and again, there is no right or wrong.

**If you are writing alone:**

Put it down, go away and do something else. Come back to it later and try to read it from a reader's point of view. Do you feel you clearly get your characters personality across? There is no right or wrong here, the best of us always still have extensive rewrites.

# day 3

## Drawing Up a Synopsis

Before I start a novel, I have to plot a synopsis, send it to my editor and have it agreed and signed off. The benefit to having a synopsis in place from an author's point of view, is that you have a basic structure to work from.

### Task

I am going to give you two titles below and they can be interpreted any way you wish. Pick one, sit back with a cup of tea/coffee/whisky/wine – whatever gets your creative juices flowing – decide what genre you will be writing in, and think up a short story involving your main character that could relate to this title.

Title 1 – *One Stolen Moment*

Title 2 – *Silent Mountain*

Once you have an idea, you now need to structure it. A good place to start is to make sure your story has a solid beginning, middle and end. Using a guideline of one to three paragraphs for each section, write down what is set to happen in each one.

- **The beginning** should be a good introduction of the characters and setting to the reader. It should introduce the main plot and start building it up.
- **The middle** should include something big to keep the readers interested. Something shocking or a big twist that they didn't see coming as you lead them towards the finale.
- **The end** should be where everything you've created comes to a head and where all the loose ends are tied up nicely before you round off your little adventure.

Now, pretty much every time I have sent a synopsis over to my editor, it has not been the final plot I've worked from. I have a great idea, I write it all down and send it off to her and then later on as it all turns over in my head I have another idea of how I can make it even better. I go back, I rewrite it with the new parts and send it over again. Sometimes this happens several times.

So, what I want you to do once you're happy with it, is go away for an hour or two, pour yourself another drink or make a snack and just think about the characters you've written into this story. Think about some of the scene's you have pictured in your head.

- Are they big enough?
- Could you add something to make them even more explosive or surprising or funny?

# day 3

## Drawing Up a Synopsis

- Is your middle twist a big enough twist or will it fall a little flat?
- How can you improve and evolve this first idea?

Keep a notebook close to hand to scribble down idea's as they come to you, then a little later go back to your synopsis and re-write it out completely again. If you want to, you can do this two or three times.

# day 4

## Write Your Short Story

I've written this challenge as a task a day, but please remember that this is YOUR challenge. It's your time, your creativity. If you want to take two days/a week/two weeks to write your story, do! There is no limit to the length of the story or the time you need to take doing it. Make this into whatever you want it to be. If you have a writing buddy you're doing this with, just agree a time frame or rough length with them so that you can still continue forward together.

Yesterday you moulded a fantastic synopsis that I am hoping by now you are happy with. Now it's time to flesh it out. Get yourself a drink and clear an area somewhere that is now your designated writing area – a desk or the end of your kitchen table, it doesn't matter where, so long as it's your writing space. Sit down with your laptop or pen and paper and start writing.

Some things to keep in mind:

- Whilst it is important to describe your surroundings to a point, be careful you **don't go into too much detail**. A whole paragraph on how pretty the wet gravel looked under the morning sun is too much. Readers have good imaginations, they only need a nudge or two on things like this.
- **Show, don't tell**. Let your readers work out what's unfolding by deduction rather than telling them what you want them to see. For example, if a character is angry, show the reader by describing his body language. For example: 'His eyes flashed dangerously and he balled his fists as he fought to contain himself.'
- **Keep up the tension**. Nobody likes to feel like they're plodding along in a book, so make sure to keep the readers on their toes. Don't let the drama drop off. And keep in mind that you are writing fiction. Whilst you may want to steer clear of the outright outrageous, just because it wouldn't be realistic in normal life for drama to unfold in such a way, doesn't mean you shouldn't write it that way in your story. Books are, after all, for entertainment.
- **Tie up loose ends**. There is nothing worse than getting to the end of a book and wondering what happened to one of the beta characters who was caught in a quandary a few chapters ago. So make sure you tie up all the smaller storylines that weave through your main one, even if it's only a one line resolution.

### If you have a writing buddy:

Swap stories and have a read. Provide feedback on what you thought of the story. And be honest about it. What was the pace like? Did everything make sense?

# day 4

## Write Your Short Story

Did you enjoy the main characters? What would you have added to improve it? What did you like about your WB's writing style? What didn't you like?

When you receive your feedback, don't take criticism as an insult. Take it as constructive and take it on board so that next time you can improve. There is not one writer out there who get's everything right first time. I have six successful books out with my publisher and I still go through five rounds of extensive edits each and every time. Having another set of eyes, another view point, a different opinion on your work is a good thing. It helps to shape it into something great.

**If you are writing alone:**

Step away from your project for a while and come back to it. Try to read it as though it is someone else's work and see if there are any area's you can improve.

If you'd like to share it, perhaps look up some writing communities online and upload to ask for some external feedback.



# day 5

## The Spanner in the Works

### **If you are writing alone:**

Go back to day one and create a whole new character, one that is the complete opposite of the one you have grown to know and love over these last few days. Someone who is a complete clash. The Moriarty to your Sherlock Holmes, if you like.

### **If you have a writing buddy:**

Give your original character bio to your buddy and read theirs in return. Get to know their character as best you can through this bio. Ask questions if you need to.

### **Task**

Today you are going to go back to the other title I gave you as an option and create a brand new synopsis including BOTH characters – the one you created on the first day and the one you have gained today. They will be joint main characters in this next story. You are welcome to stick with the same general genre if you so wish, but if you went with a serious crime story last time, I would like you to add a streak of romance into this one. If you wrote something funny and light-hearted or a romance last time, I'd like you to add a touch of serious danger into this one, etc, etc. Step out of your comfort zone and try adding something different. You might surprise yourself.

What I personally love about bringing two very different characters together is how the relationship forms.

*What direction is their relationship going to take?*

*How is this going to affect the outcome of the story?*

*Who is stronger willed?*

*Will they clash or get along – and either way, why?*

There is so much to explore here and so many different paths your story could take because of that. Enjoy the development of the relationship between the characters as you form your outline. When you've got it all down go back over your synopsis a few times to add and improve, the same way you did the first time, and start preparing yourself to get it down on paper tomorrow.

# day 6

## The New Short Story

Today is a brand new day and a fresh new challenge! You have your original character and your new one. You have your synopsis at the ready. Get that pen in your hand or the keyboard under your fingers and start creating another brave new adventure.

Explore the new dynamics, change course a little if you realise you need to. Just because you have the synopsis doesn't mean you have to stick to it religiously. It's just a guideline, a structure to help you on your way. If you have extra idea's or a lightbulb moment as you're writing, go with it!

Once more, the main things to keep in mind as you write:

- Don't go into too much detail.
- Show, don't tell.
- Keep up the tension.
- Tie up loose ends.

### **If you have a writing buddy:**

When you have finished this second masterpiece, share it with your buddy and read theirs in return. Look at how the introduction of your character changed their writing style and added to their story, and vice versa. See how they view your character, as it won't quite be the same way you do. Note the differences and discuss them. Some you might really like, others you might not. It is always healthy and interesting to see your characters through other people's eyes.

### **If you're writing alone:**

Take a break, then come back at read your latest story. Compare it to your first one. What has the new character brought to the table? How has it changed or added to your writing? Have you enjoyed writing the relationship dynamic between them?

# challenge

## The Ongoing Challenge

I hope you have enjoyed these last few days, or weeks, or however long your personal version of this has been. I hope it's taken your mind away from the darker issues in the world at the moment. If you have enjoyed these challenges and wish to carry on, either with a writing buddy or alone, I have created an ongoing challenge for you to continue at leisure. You will find a list of titles and a list of random objects below. Write each of these lists down, place them in a hat (separately) and do a random draw. Your next story has to be related to this title, and at the same time the main storyline must revolve around the random object.

Have fun and please do pass this challenge on to anyone else you think may enjoy it. This is my gift to anyone stuck in lockdown who wants a fun and creative distraction.

Good luck, happy writing and most of all stay safe and well.

Emma x

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### **Titles**

<i>The Bottle</i>	<i>The Message</i>	<i>Fields of Murder</i>	<i>Seashell Shore</i>
<i>Killer Looks</i>	<i>Still Alive</i>	<i>Love and Lace</i>	<i>A Good Night</i>
<i>The House</i>	<i>Doorway Five</i>	<i>The Box</i>	<i>Checkmate</i>

### **Items**

<i>Gold Bracelet</i>	<i>Smashed iPhone</i>	<i>A Red Ribbon</i>	<i>An Old Book</i>
<i>A Key</i>	<i>A Burnt Photo Album</i>	<i>One Glove</i>	<i>A Hunting Dagger</i>
<i>A Doll</i>	<i>A Silver Spoon</i>	<i>An Old Sixpence</i>	<i>A Tennis Ball</i>

If you would like to find out more about the author who bought you this challenge or her books, here are the links to Emma's website and social media channels:

[www.emmatallon.com](http://www.emmatallon.com)



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