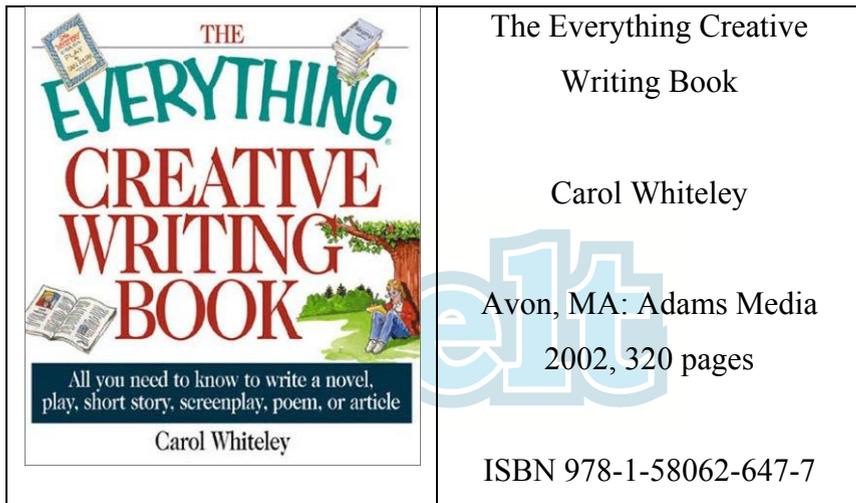


**A BOOK REVIEW:
A GOOD START, THOUGH INCOMPLETE,
FOR CREATIVE WRITERS**



Reviewed by Iwan Sulistiawan ¹

Carol Whiteley tries to guide the readers through the entire process of creative writing, from writing preparation and getting the ideas to drafting and editing what has been written. Whiteley also expects readers to learn all about the different formats of

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creative writing and find hundreds of writing tips, resources, examples, inspirational excerpts, advice and encouragement.

It is a good start, indeed, for a beginning writer in creative writing and the book is easy to understand as it is written in a casual, expository, conversational manner. Nevertheless, the tagline accompanying the title of the book (All you need to know to write a novel, play, short story, screenplay, or article) is not fully fulfilled in this book as, in my opinion; it provides more resources for prose writers especially novel and short story writers.

The first chapter provides the very basic needs of a creative writer, the preparations. They cover not only the tangible things like computer, pen or paper but also the time, inspiration, positive attitude and the expectation of success a writer should have. Whiteley works in details in this initial chapter. He says that a writer needs to find a comfortable place to write.

What would work for you if you had the luxury of setting up a custom workplace? Think about how you like to read or study, how sound affects you, how easily you're distracted, how disciplined you are, if you need people around you, your general nature. I, for example, am incredibly sensitive to sound. If a clock is tick-tick-tocking nearby, it's suddenly the only thing I hear (2002:2).

The next thing Whiteley mentions is the importance of a creative writer's having a kind of complete set of reference materials. This is, I think, what Indonesian creative writing students (and lecturers, unfortunately) need to pay serious attention to. I often find my students and fellow creative writers write without adequate reference and research (research is

discussed in details in chapter 12 of this book). They sometimes only rely on the writing passion, which is good, but not enough because even if your work is fiction, the characters of your story should be, using William Kenney's term, plausible, while the plausibility of characters can be obtained through reference and research. This first chapter is ended with a bunch of tips to keep and develop the writers' spirit of writing and creativity that will make them keep writing despite the obstacles and criticisms they will encounter.

The following two chapters discuss the short story and the novel as well as the comparison between the two. The explanations in general cover the whole things. However, for novice writers, I think Whiteley needs to add the explanation on how to write the narration, the dialogues, the thoughts and feelings of the characters, considering that every genre of creative writing has its own convention. The narration of short stories and novels, for instance, has to be written in past tenses, while in screenplay writing, story is narrated in present tenses.

This knowledge is important for Indonesian creative writers, especially, those who are interested in writing in the English language.

As the term creative writing belongs not only to fictional work but also to non fictional work the book goes on with books for pre readers like babies and toddlers, the screenplay, functional nonfiction, literary nonfiction, poetry. As for the chapter discussing the screenplay (Chapter 6) I think there should be more explanation on the use of the screenplay writing terms as they are related to cinematography. Though some other books say that it is not necessary for a creative screen writer to master all those terms, a glossary of some basic screenplay writing terms is still needed as screenplay writing terms differ considerably from even the terms used in the screenplay's

closest genre, play script stage directions. A simple basic knowledge (as the complicated one belongs to film directors) should be gained by screen writers as they should always put in mind that their work is written not to be read or staged but to be visualized and watched on TV or in cinema.

The sense of incompleteness is also felt in Chapter 9 (Poetry). Whiteley does discuss the definition of poetry, the line and meter, the rhyme, genres, forms, images, figures of speech and figurative language (the latter two are discussed further in Chapter 17: Rhetorical Devices), but she does not put the discussion on the “speaker” in a poem. This is important because I find my students, whom I told to write poems, often misunderstand the term “speaker” with the author of the poem. However, Whiteley’s decision to go deeper with the rhetorical devices in a separate chapter is a very good decision considering that rhetorical devices are not only important for poem writers but also for prose, screenplay and even the nonfiction writers.

The following chapters discuss the general stages before a final work is completed (Getting Ideas, Planning, Researching, Organizing, Drafting, Editing and Evaluating and some other closing chapters are more motivational than technical. In Chapter 10 (Getting Ideas), for instance, Whiteley discusses, among other, that ideas can be found in memories, observations, experiences, encounters, conversations, activities, sensory details, moods and emotions, books and other media, objects, scenery, relationships, weather, fantasy, history – just about everything (2002: 134), adding that the best ideas are often the simplest. The last statement is very true according to my experience teaching creative writing. My students often think too hard about “grand” ideas that hinder them from starting to write though actually they can make great stories out of simple ideas.

I would certainly recommend this book especially for the students or anyone in Indonesia who are interested in beginning a career in creative writing. Carol Whiteley's *The Everything Creative Writing Book* is a self-study book. The way this book suggests us to be a well-informed, well equipped, and organized is valuable.

This book is also important for Indonesian creative writers as creative writing in Indonesia is not given in formal school and universities. The so called "literature" in Indonesian curriculum in high schools and universities more focus on the students' memorizing novels, short stories, and poems along with their authors, while even in the faculty of letters literature is given as something to be discussed and analyzed as they aim to yield graduates who are able to be literary critics rather than literary writers.

As for the above mentioned incomplete parts, I think students can learn them from other books or through attending creative writing trainings and discussions. As Whiteley put in the introduction of the book, we should set ourselves a goal of becoming an accomplished creative writer. By doing so, we might one day find ourselves in a Manhattan bookstore, signing your name on hundreds of copies of your work.