

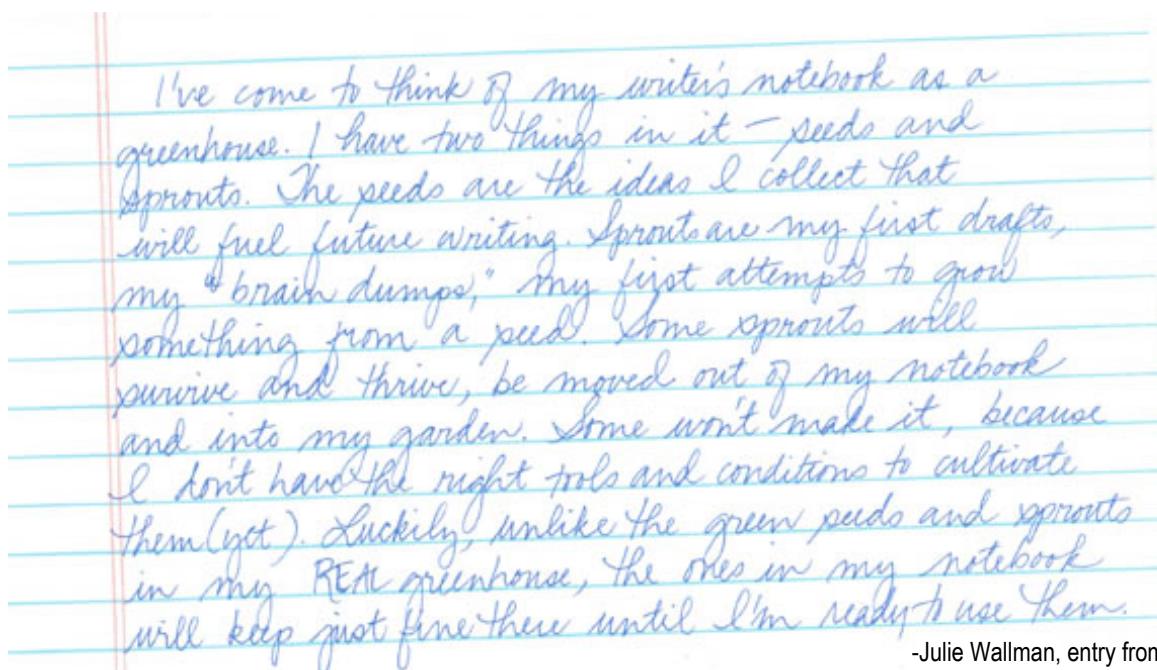
Introduction to Writing Notebooks

A writer's notebook is like that ditch—an empty space you dig in your busy life, a space that will fill up with all sorts of fascinating little creatures... You'll be amazed by what you catch there...

What is a writer's notebook anyway? Let's start by talking about what it is not. A writer's notebook is not a diary: "Today it is raining. We have a substitute teacher named Miss Pamapnella. She seems very nice. We are going to have gym right before lunch." It's not a reading journal in which your teacher tells you to summarize the main idea of a book, or write a letter to a character. A writer's notebook is different from any journal you've ever kept before...

A writer's notebook gives you a place to live like a writer, not just in school during writing time, but wherever you are, at any time of day.

- Ralph Fletcher, *A Writer's Notebook: Unlocking the Writer Within You*



-Julie Wallman, entry from her writer's notebook

Collecting Seeds

A seed is any small snippet or memento that inspires you, something you think you can write a lot about when you have more time. Seeds are quick snapshots of things you want to remember (or *can't* forget, no matter how hard you try).

Cultivating Sprouts (aka Nurturing a Seed Idea)

Sprouts are typically longer entries, more detailed. Sprouts are "thinking on paper," perhaps more deliberate and intense thinking about an earlier seed entry.

There's a fine line between seeds and sprouts, ideas and beginnings, and most professional writers would group them all together as "notebook entries."

What to put in your writer's notebook: Strategies for Collecting and Cultivating Ideas

- Record snippets of conversations you overhear between strangers.
- Gather family photographs and photographs of places important to you.
- Save take-out menus, napkins with logos, matchbooks from restaurants, hotels, etc.
- Make very close observations of everyday things.
- Gather family recipes (and list the occasions and other foods you eat/ate with them)
- Write down quotations that intrigue you from music, movies, books, etc.
- Look through a telephone book and mix and match first and last names to create potential character names. List them in your notebook.
- Gather paint swatches with names you like and/or colors that remind you of something specific you've seen. Tape them in your notebook.
- Jot down the rules and procedures of a game you played when you were a kid.
- Gather old letters, postcards, birthday cards, Christmas cards...ones actually sent to you or ones belonging to strangers that you scavenge at antique stores and flea markets.
- Make timelines (real or fictional).
- Record plot ideas inspired by news stories.
- Sketch people, places, things.
- Write down family stories (yours or anyone else's) that you never want to forget.
- Describe anything you wish you had taken a photograph of but didn't/couldn't.
- List interesting facts or statistics that you stumble upon (or know by heart).
- List potential titles, even (especially) if you have no idea what story goes with them.
- Jot down notes about a dream that scared or puzzled you.
- Gather maps (published) or draw your own.
- Go someplace that your character would go and behave like him/her. What would he notice? How would she react? What would he/she order off the menu?
- Do a "fast write," dumping all of your thoughts, reflections, reactions to your seed idea in your notebook as an egg timer ticks away.
- Go on an observation walk or sit quietly someplace. Write what you hear, see, smell, taste and feel. Write whatever happens.
- People watch. Draw conclusions about someone based on what they do, say, wear, carry with them, etc. Imagine the smallest details of their lives.
- Eavesdrop. What is each person thinking that he/she is not saying to the other?
- Make a big list of things you remember or things you don't remember. Things you're good at. Things you're not good at. Things you know. Things you don't know.
- Interview someone who plays a key role in your story or a relevant expert.
- Do "character research" like an actor would...learn a skill that your character already knows, shadow someone with same career as your character.
- Think like a detective as you live your everyday life. What happened just before you entered? Who was there before you?

Sources: Calkins, L. (1994). *The Art of Teaching Writing*. Heinemann; Fletcher, R. (1996) *A Writer's Notebook*. HarperTrophy; Grant, S. (2007) *Notebook Know-How*. Indiana Partnership for Young Writers Summer Institute; Ray & Laminack (2001) *The Writing Workshop*. NCTE

"Everybody walks past a thousand story ideas every day. The good writers are the ones who see five or six of them. Most people don't see any." – Orson Scott Card