

# PODCAST NOTES

We are excited to launch our new 6-part series, [Better Reading On Writing](#), the companion podcast to Better Reading's successful, *Stories Behind the Story*.

This new podcast is a little different to the [Stories Behind the Story](#) podcast. It retains the same friendly chat format, but here we focus on the craft of writing, what it takes to write that book, and what it means to be a published author. We've had so many listeners contact us, asking to hear more about *how to write*. So... you asked and we delivered.

However, this is not a writer's class, although we certainly hope you'll learn something along the way. The purpose of the series is to inspire you to either write your own book, or simply read more books because you've loved listening to the authors we interview.

In each episode, Cheryl Akle and a guest author or industry professional discusses one aspect of writing or the business of writing. Fascinating soundgrabs from other authors are included, along with a segment called *The Writer's Habits*, where each guest shares his or her Top 3 habits that have helped them carve out the career they have today.

Our new [Better Reading On Writing](#) podcast is for everyone: writers, teachers and students, would-be authors and readers who love hearing how their favourite authors work. It's an excellent way for listeners to understand what it takes to write a book.

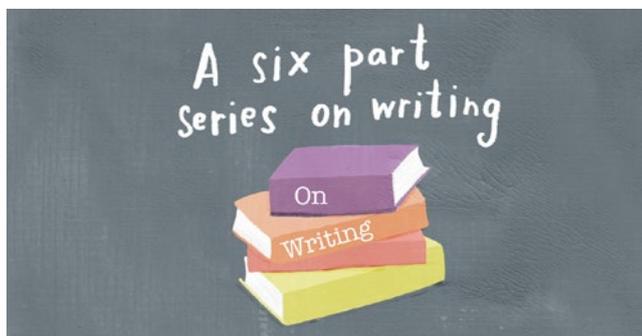
All six episodes have been released simultaneously, and we've included some podcast notes as well.

If you enjoy the series, please leave us a [review on iTunes](#).

Happy listening.



**Better Reading**



# Episode 1

## The Writer

### with Trent Dalton

“It’s something in my soul, it’s something that makes my legs move. It’s something that makes my brain tick over... It’s completely all consuming.”  
– Trent Dalton

What does it mean to be a writer? Is writing a calling, something you’re born to do? Or can anyone write a book? Is producing a bestseller the goal, or do writers persist for other reasons? Ben Okri calls it the impulse to create. What exactly is that?

Trent Dalton, the author of the phenomenally successful novel *Boy Swallows Universe* discusses the heart and soul of the writer and what being a writer means to him. He talks through the process of writing *Boy Swallows Universe*, as well as his work as a Walkley Award winning journalist.

#### Trent Dalton

Trent Dalton is a staff writer for the Weekend Australian Magazine and a former assistant editor of The Courier Mail. He’s a two-time winner of a Walkley Award for Excellence in Journalism, a four-time winner of a Kennedy Award for Excellence in NSW Journalism and a four-time winner of the national News Awards Features Journalist of the Year. His debut novel, *Boy Swallows Universe*, published by HarperCollins in 2018, is a much-loved national bestseller and critically acclaimed, winning the 2019 Indie Book of the Year Award, the MUD Literary Prize, the UTS Glenda Adams Award for New Writing and the People’s Choice Award at the 2019 NSW Premier’s Literary Awards, and in addition, at the 2019 Australian Book Industry Awards, the book won a record four ABIA Awards including the prestigious Book of the Year Award. *Boy Swallows Universe* will be published across 34 English language and translation territories.

#### Episode Resources

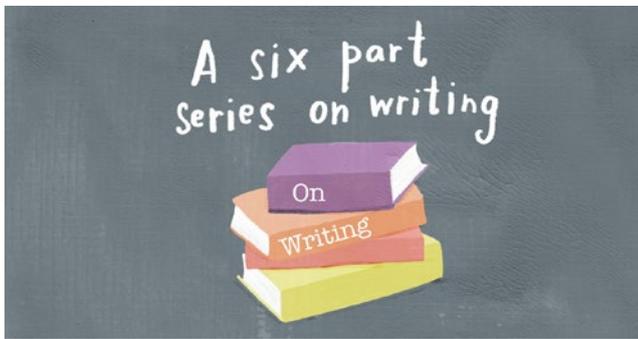
Read more about Trent Dalton [here](#)

Trent Dalton is a journalist for [The Weekend Australian Magazine](#)

“There’s nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and open a vein.” – Ernest Hemingway



**Better Reading**



# Episode 2

## Story and plot development with Dervla McTiernan

“I have my own little thing that I write, and I stick up on the wall every time ... the heart of every story comes down to three things: pity, fear and catharsis... I’m thinking about the reader all of the time. I want them firstly, to feel empathy for the character. Then you put in the stakes, you raise the stakes, so they feel fear for the character.”

–Dervla McTiernan

In his 2004 book, *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories*, Christopher Booker says there are only seven basic story plots, while John le Carre said there are only two stories: the cat sat on the mat... or the cat sat on the dog’s mat.

In this episode bestselling author, Dervla McTiernan discusses plot, how important structure is in your novel, and how she approaches writing a novel. She talks about being cruel to her characters to drive the story forward, and how she has a sign on her wall that reminds her what is important, every time she writes.

### Dervla McTiernan

Dervla McTiernan was born in County Cork, Ireland to a family of seven. She studied corporate law at the National University of Ireland, Galway and the Law Society of Ireland, and practiced as a lawyer for twelve years. Following the global financial crisis she moved with her family to Western Australia. In 2015 she submitted a story for the Sisters in Crime Scarlet Stiletto competition and was shortlisted. This inspired her to complete the novel that would become *The Rúin*. She lives in Perth with her husband and two children.

### Episode Resources

Read more about Dervla McTiernan [here](#).

#### Scrivener

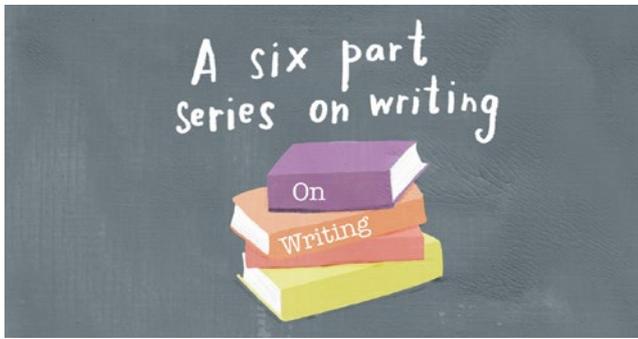
Scrivener is the go-to app for writers of all kinds, used every day by best-selling novelists, screen-writers, non-fiction writers, students, academics, lawyers, journalists, translators and more. Scrivener won’t tell you how to write—it simply provides everything you need to start writing and keep writing.

Read our review of Scrivener later in the podcast notes.

Visit [our website](#) to win your own Scrivener software.



Better Reading



# Episode 3

## Character building with Belinda Alexandra

“I think the most important thing about a good character is that they stand out in some way, there’s something unique or something particularly engaging about them. It can be a charismatic personality but it can also be a fatal flaw that we just can’t turn away from. And I think the best characters have a fatal flaw that we relate to in some way.”

–Belinda Alexandra

What makes a memorable character in fiction? Are literature’s great characters always likeable, even when they’re not? Are the best writers cruel to their characters? And for those of you who know a writer... could you end up in a book? Belinda Alexandra sheds light on all those questions and more. She shares how she immerses herself in the world she’s writing about, so her characters come to life. She talks about how some characters have a mind of their own... and how she even develops a full-blown crush on the occasional hero.

### Belinda Alexandra

Belinda Alexandra has been published to wide acclaim in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Holland, Poland, Norway and Russia. She is the daughter of a Russian mother and an Australian father and has been an intrepid traveller since her youth. Her love of other cultures is matched by her passion for her home country, Australia, where she is a volunteer rescuer and carer for the NSW Wildlife Information Rescue and Education Service (WIRES).

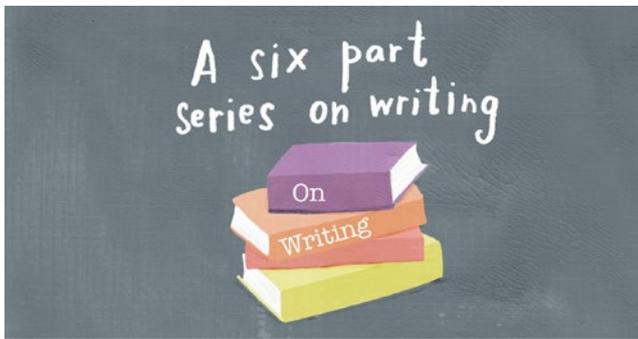
### Episode Resources

Read more about Belinda Alexandra [here](#).

Visit Belinda’s website [here](#).



**Better Reading**



# Episode 4

## Research and Setting with Candice Fox

“Setting is critically important, because everyone you surround the main characters with is going to be from that place and should really, you know, represent that place.”

— Candice Fox

Research is an important part of the writing process. Often, an author will extensively research the place where their novel is set. Candice Fox has immersed herself in both setting and research. She’s lived in LA, she’s visited a serial killer on death row and had dinner with an American President, all in the name of research. Hear all this and much more in this highly entertaining episode.

### Candice Fox

Hades, Candice Fox’s first novel, won the Ned Kelly Award for best debut in 2014 from the Australian Crime Writers Association. The sequel, Eden, won the Ned Kelly Award for best crime novel in 2015, making Candice only the second author to win these accolades back to back. All her subsequent novels - Fall, Crimson Lake and Redemption Point - have been shortlisted for the Ned Kelly Award. Her new novel, Gone by Midnight, will publish in January 2019.

In 2015 Candice began collaborating with James Patterson. Their first novel together, Never Never, set in the vast Australian outback, was a huge bestseller in Australia and went straight to number 1 on the New York Times bestseller list in the US and also to the top of the charts in the UK. Its sequel, Fifty Fifty, was released in 2017 and their third collaboration, Liar Liar, in August 2018. They have also co-written a prequel novella, Black & Blue, as part of the James Patterson Book-Shots series. Bankstown born and bred, Candice lives in Sydney.

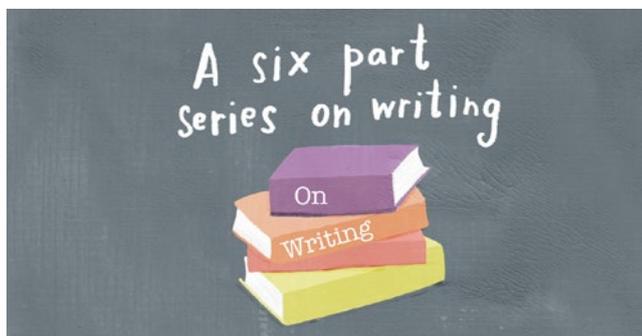
### Episode Resources

Read more about Candice Fox [here](#).

Visit Candice’s website [here](#).



Better Reading



# Episode 5

## Dialogue

### with Melina Marchetta

“It always starts with a character. And I’m a bit cruel, because I won’t put pen to paper unless they prove themselves in my head. So I listen to them for quite a while... I feel as if I write a novel in my head first and then I write a novel on paper, and I can’t write it on paper until I’ve got that voice right.”

– Melina Marchetta

How important is good dialogue to a story? Do some authors have a natural ear for it? Can it be developed. Dialogue expert extraordinaire, Melina Marchetta discusses the importance of dialogue, and how that voice defines her characters, the setting and the story she tells. She shares a great example of how even the briefest dialogue exchange between characters can really tell the reader so much, and in the process drive the story forward.

### Melina Marchetta

Melina Marchetta is a bestselling author in more than twenty countries and eighteen languages. She has published award-winning young adult, fantasy and crime fiction, including her acclaimed crime novel, *Tell the Truth, Shame the Devil*. Her much-loved Australian classic, *Looking for Alibrandi*, swept the pool of literary awards when it was published, and was also released as a film, adapted by Marchetta, winning an AFI Award and an Independent Film Award for best screenplay, as well as the New South Wales Premier’s Literary Award and the Film Critics Circle of Australia Award. The companion novel to Marchetta’s award-winning book *Saving Francesca*, *The Piper’s Son*, also received much acclaim in Australia and internationally, and in 2009 Marchetta won the prestigious Michael L. Printz Award from the American Library Association for *Jellicoe Road*. She lives in Sydney.

### Episode Resources

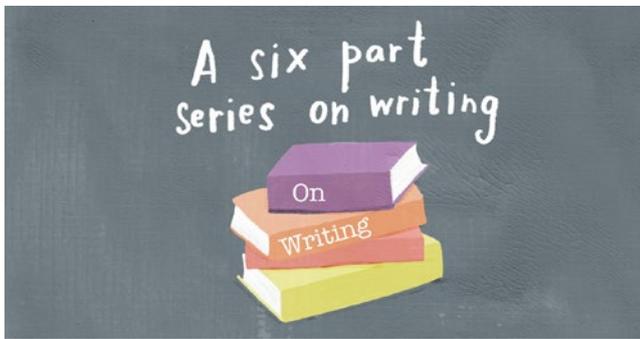
Read more about Melina Marchetta [here](#).

Visit Melina’s website [here](#).

“Dialogue is not just quotation. It is grimaces, pauses, adjustments of blouse buttons, doodles on a napkin, and crossings of legs.” - Jerome Stern



**Better Reading**



# Episode 6

What next? Road to Publication  
with Nikki Christer

“I think everyone potentially has a story in them. But I don’t necessarily think that they are the person to write that book. I think being a writer is not the same as someone who’s got a good story. A writer has usually honed their craft. It sort of diminishes writers to assume that everyone who thinks they’ve got a good story can write that story.”

– Nikki Christer

You’ve finally finished your novel - what next? How do you approach an agent or a publisher? What are they looking for in a submission? What are they looking for in an author? And for those who find themselves signing that elusive publishing contract... what comes next? Nikki Christer, the Group Publishing Director at Penguin Random House Australia talks about the publishing process, the difference between agents and publishers, why editing is so important... and what she needs in a story to encourage her to offer an author a publishing deal.

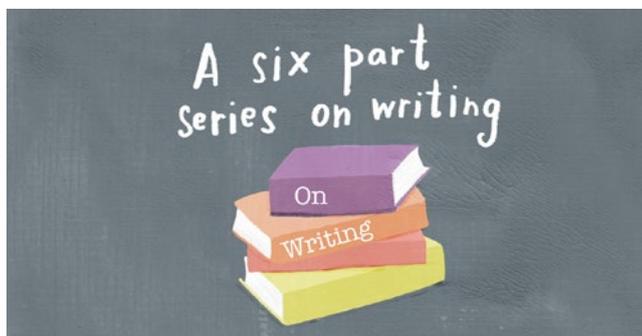
## Nikki Christer

Nikki Christer is the Publishing Director at Penguin Random House Australia. She oversees a list of books that includes sports titles, literary fiction, commercial fiction, non-fiction, self-help and illustrated books. She moved to Australia from London in 1987, and worked for HarperCollins and Pan Macmillan (including thirteen years as the Picador publisher), before joining Random House Australia in 2007. Authors she has published include: Tim Winton, Richard Flanagan, Elliot Perlman, Kate Grenville, Robert Dessaix, Helen Garner, Drusilla Modjeska, Joan London, Evie Wyld and Annabel Crabb, among many others. In 2014, Richard Flanagan’s *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* won the Man Booker prize.

“By the time I was fourteen the nail in my wall would no longer support the weight of the rejection slips impaled upon it. I replaced the nail with a spike and went on writing.” – Stephen King



Better Reading



# Review of Scrivener

“Yeah, I really recommend Scrivener. I mean, it’s very simple. First of all it’s not outrageously overpriced, as a lot of these systems are you don’t have to pay a monthly subscription. It’s a one-off fee, and you’ve got this solid piece of software that works.”

– Dervla McTiernan

Listen to Dervla McTiernan’s episode and you’d think she was talking about the Holy Grail as she talks about Scrivener. We’ve had a number of writers mention it to us at the Better Reading office, so we decided it was time to try it out for ourselves.

## What is Scrivener

**Scrivener is a tool for writers.** While many writers punch out their novels in Word, more and more authors are using Scrivener.

## Our Verdict

This is not my first time off the blocks. I have over 70 books published. The book I started writing in my new Scrivener software is the third novel in a YA series. I am quite happy and productive writing in Word. So how was it launching into a new novel in Scrivener? One word:

Fabulous.

The transition was smooth and the software simple to use. General writing didn’t change much however what I quickly discovered is that the real benefit of using Scrivener is how easy it is to organise everything, and I mean *everything*, in one place.

Along the side of the program you can organise everything you need that relates to what you’re working on. You can collate ideas and research, maintain timelines, character details and even photos for inspiration. It’s easy to keep information that you refer back to regularly, all in one easily accessible place. This is great while writing any novel, but it was an incredible time saver for this book being the third in the series.

Another benefit is you can see all your chapters, and then break them down into scenes, and get a visual for the flow – and if something needs to be moved, it’s easy to simply change that scene and place it elsewhere.

I’m only getting started, but I can honestly say there’s no going back for me. I’m discovering new features and benefits to Scrivener each time I write. I’m a convert. I totally understand why writers love Scrivener. I won’t be using anything else from now on.

## And finally...

Our advice to anyone thinking of writing a book is to look into courses for writers in your local area.

**Writing NSW** presents an annual program of courses including writers workshops, masterclasses and professional development seminars. Our training is delivered by published authors who are experienced teachers, and covers the full range of genres and styles of writing.

If you enjoyed the Better Reading On Writing podcast, and felt these notes were beneficial, please leave us a [review on iTunes](#).



**Better Reading**