

THE SHELF

For the Curious Writer: Writing tips for the New Year



ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

STAR BOOKS REPORT

As 2025 rolls around, spelling yet another year of reading about writing and writing about reading, we asked the Star Books and Literature family to share their top writing tips for our readers. From learning to pick up your pen anew to knowing when to part ways with an idea, here are some of our favourite pieces of advice for the Curious Writer in the upcoming year.

READ TO INHALE, WRITE TO EXHALE:

Read. A lot. It doesn't matter what it is, or if it's "good" or "bad". Read

constantly, endlessly, and greedily. Read good books and excellent books and bad books and terrible books. Read anything and everything, and do not stop. Reading is inhaling, and writing is exhaling. Read because you must, and then write because you now know how.

By Sarazeen Saif Ahana

YOU HAVE NOTHING TO BE AFRAID OF:

If you have not been writing for a while and there is that inkling of self-doubt creeping inside your head, do not be afraid of picking your pen up again. Of writing, of putting your words on paper—do not fight against your

previous self, fight against the fear of incompetence. Let your words flow. Give your words an outlet, a blank slate. Write about anything and everything that holds weight to you. It does not have to make sense, you only have to regain faith in yourself as a writer, author, or poet. As it has been said: "You have to let the dirty water run before the clean water flows", and yours will too!

By Nur-E-Jannat Alif

TREAT IT LIKE A JIGSAW PUZZLE: Unless you're sitting for a timed, paper-based exam, there is absolutely no reason to take a top-down approach

to writing. Give yourself permission to let go of the chronological order. Write the middle. Write the ending. Write the funny anecdote you just thought of for your character. You don't have to rack your brain for an introduction to let the rest of the words flow. Treat each paragraph like a modular chunk, so that you can rearrange and reorder to make the whole writing sound cohesive. Play around until you have perfectly fitted all the pieces together!

By Mashiyat Nayem

CONSISTENCY MATTERS:

This might come off as slightly

unconventionally worded advice, but if writing is something you really enjoy and/or are passionate about, then you need to keep showing up for yourself everyday no matter what other people, or even your own mind for that matter, tells you about your work. Be consistent. Try writing a word/sentence a day if nothing else helps. Keep pushing yourself. Keep showing up. Imposter syndrome is a writer's lifelong companion, and you'll have to keep at it regardless.

By Raisa Ashraf

KNOW WHEN TO LET GO:

Oftentimes, it becomes easy to lose yourself in crafting draft after draft of a piece, all to no avail. Your natural instinct of self-deprecation might make you think it's your writing that's causing the problem. While a healthy dose of self-deprecation is necessary to succeed as a writer, give yourself the benefit of the doubt. Maybe it's not you, maybe it's the idea or the method of execution that's causing the issue. Take a step back. Come back to it after a while. If it still doesn't work out, consider parting ways with the idea. There is, after all, no shortage of things to write about!

By Adrita Zaima

YOU'RE THE VOICE:

The "voice" in writing is that hard-to-define element that essentially captures the unique perspectives of a writer. A strong voice engages the reader and keeps them turning the pages. It's what distinguishes a writer from another. So how do you craft an authentic voice? Let go of the fear of perfection. Study the work of your favourite authors and draw inspiration from them, but don't try to emulate their style.

When writing fiction, it is important to note that the author's voice should not override the character's voice. How can we tell the difference? Think lengthy exposition (a.k.a "telling") and preachy monologues. Avoid that. When writing multiple points of view, ensure each character has an authentic voice and characteristics that distinguish one from the other. They can have similarities of course, but too many and they are essentially the same person. That can create monotony or confusion and turn off readers.

By Nabilah Khan

BOOK REVIEW: FICTION

Through folklore and fantasy: An ode to Bangla mythological characters

Review of 'Otiprakrito' (Otibeguni, 2024) by Anindita Chowdhury and Afra Nawmi

Not all myths, though, are equally telling. Some creatures remain shrouded in mystery, their chapters brief and fleeting. However, the black and white and sepia illustrations offer these chapters a chance to shine and their forms are instantly recognisable.

TAHSEEN NOWER PRACHI

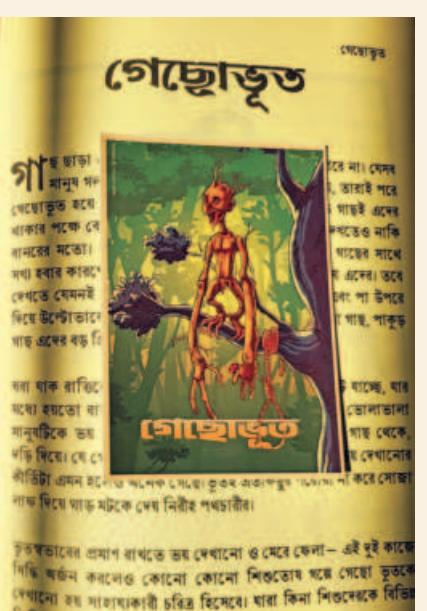
Let me tell you a tale of a big Banyan tree, by a river that flows through the heart of a village near the borders of Bangladesh, and merges into the Ganges. The tale features a little girl sitting under that tree, immersed in the books she brought from Dhaka to Chaudanga. Little did she know that Banyan tree held a reputation to be home to a creature known as the "Brommo Doitti". When she grew up, her grandmother and father narrated the tale of how the doitto had cursed the schoolmaster who cut the tree that was there before, and for generations, his successors died in the river, leaving no one to carry the family line. Finally, as an apology, the family planted another tree and prayed for peace to appease their ill fate.

Such was my introduction to the mythologies rooted in the soil of Bengal. As someone who is deeply in love with the relatively pale pages of Western mythologies—the saga of how Greek and Roman Gods ruled the earth and the Norse myths of Gods, giants, and cosmic balance, centered on Yggdrasil, the World Tree, connecting nine realms—the mythological treasures of Bengal attracted me just as much, probably more. So if you, too, are someone in love with mythology or is a lover of Bangla literature, there is much nostalgia awaiting you in the pages of *Otiprakrito*. The book features the mythological creatures that already exist in Bangla mythology and have been believed, loved, and feared throughout literature.



Otiprakrito is akin to a graphic novel that is written by Anindita Chowdhury and Afra Nawmi, with a team of illustrators and artists who reimagined and brought to life—through their artwork—traditional characters from Bangla mythology. A group of researchers also aided in creating the foundation for these stories and together, they crafted a book that can work as an encyclopedia of Bengal's mythological creatures.

Reading through *Otiprakrito* is like opening the pages of a book where myths and legends don't just whisper from the pages—they leap out of them. Each character is vividly painted. The moment you meet



Ghum Parani Mashi-Pishi, snoozing delicately in a fairy-tale saree, or stumble into the tragic hilarity of the Hattimatim, tucked away in their eccentric mansion, you know you're not in the realm of the ordinary. This is a universe where the fairy-tale demons and witches frighten and delight. Every image, a brainchild of different artists, carries their signature flair while staying bound to the book's overarching theme.

But at its heart, this book isn't a deep dive into just the supernatural—it is more of a visual feast, an attempt to acquaint readers with creatures of the myth, forgotten gods and goddesses, and fantastical beings. It's



as if the book wants to say, "Here, let me introduce you to the wonders of your dreams".

Not all myths, though, are equally telling. Some creatures remain shrouded in mystery, their chapters brief and fleeting. However, the black and white and sepia illustrations offer these chapters a chance to shine and their forms are instantly recognisable.

"Don't judge a book by its cover," they say—but here, the cover is visually appealing and shines on its own. A fairytale frame guards the 'au' (the first letter of the Bangla alphabet), while 10 mythical animals from folklore stand sentinel. It represents what lies within: the book's essence.

captured in a burst of noble colors. Additionally, the font in the book offers a nod to the nostalgic charm of old typewriters—the black lettering floats on yellowed pages.

For a curious reader, the real joy lies in character analysis. Find your favorite ghost or mythical creature you've never met, it's all here waiting to be discovered. The book invites you to revel in the world of legends, to dream as you once did as a child.

In its essence, *Otiprakrito* asks you to revisit your childhood and reminds you that our myths and legends are timeless and a part of our collective identity. It reminds us that like the myths from different cultures across the globe, the rivers of Bengal also whisper its ancient secrets to the world. In those whimsical depths, shadows dance—figures too delicate yet fierce to belong to the mortal realm. The air of *Otiprakrito* hums with stories older than time, of serpents with gems guarding treasures, of Ponkhiraj Ghora soaring above the clouds, and Rakshasas whose laughter can shatter the strongest of hearts.

If I am asked who this book is for: It is for the dreamers, believers, the ones who once feared the darkness under their beds, yet longed to uncover mysteries.

Tahseen Nower Prachi is a writer whose head is a koi pond of micro tales too scattered to come down to her keyboard. For more of her little pieces follow *The Minute Chronicles* on Facebook.

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