



## The Perfect Place to Write

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**W**HEN I'M WRITING A FIRST draft, I usually try to get out of the house. I need to get away from the Things to Do which suddenly seem so attractive when faced with that initial blank page. (Put out the washing? Yes please! Tidy those receipts? Bring it on!) I head to a café or a library for some *Just-write-it-down-no-matter-how-dreadful-the-first-few-phrases-may-seem* time.

Hours fly by. I come home with pages of concentrated writing which act as a crucial start. I do this once a week, and then use these beginnings as markers within which to write the rest at home — a bit like sketching an outline and then colouring it in.

However, I'm writing this in January 2021, at the start of another lockdown, after nine months of the pandemic. It currently isn't possible to linger in cafés or libraries. Our home – which is my office – is filled with my family, working hard, doing their own things. At the start of the first lockdown, last year, stuck at home, I found it incredibly hard to take myself away from the real world and write about another.

Luckily, help was at hand. I joined an online support group of local freelancers, supported by the brilliant Annie Davy of Flo's — the Place in the Park. I poured out my heart about how difficult I was finding it to write. Annie offered me the use of an old bowling pavilion at the back of Flo's, which is in the centre of my local park. I gratefully accepted, and I started writing there two afternoons a week.



The pavilion was a large, rather unloved room with changing rooms off it. I had to roll up a big metal blind to get in. But it was empty. And it was like magic.

I fell into that pavilion with the intense relief of diving into sleep after a broken night with a newborn baby. I didn't hesitate — I just sat down and wrote. Stuff *poured* out. Having written nothing for three months, I wrote a novel for young readers, a picture book and a premise for a series. It was like a dam had been broken. I wrote a poem about Flo's to say thank you to Annie. I wrote through the baking-hot summer and into the autumn, each time feeling that sense of sweet release as I rolled up the metal blind. Autumn became winter. I still loved writing in the pavilion, looking out onto the park — but it became seriously cold. With no heating, and holes in the walls, it got harder to write there. So I said goodbye to that perfect place, and I'm back to writing at home again.

But this time, I'm feeling hopeful. We're building a cabin in our garden where I can write. It will be a separate space from our house, away from all those Things to Do. It will look out on the plants I grow. And I'm hoping this really *will* be my perfect place to write.