

Laing Art Gallery 2012



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A space cannot help but be affected by the presence of life, of noise and movement. The gallery and its exhibits alter throughout the day depending on the people passing through them, whether a shadow thrown across a portrait, or merely a shift in the energy of the room. Just as a sombre canvas may seem profound when scrutinised by an art critic, it will unexpectedly become trite when surrounded by a giggling group of schoolchildren. It is equally true that viewing a painting alone sparks different feelings to those experienced when part of a crowd.

- 1) Imagine you are the only person in the gallery, amongst the paintings and statues, in the echoing halls. How do you feel about the spaces and sounds around you? Are you afraid or exhilarated by the frozen figures looking down from their frames? What would happen if they came suddenly to life? How does the surrounding history impact upon you?
- 2) Write a series of diary entries from the perspective of someone left alone at night in a gallery. It could be a security guard or curator, a cleaner or artist, a stowaway or something more abstract – a ghost or a fly on the wall.

The diary form creates a straightforward structure, but it also affords the possibility of a combination of action and the innermost thoughts of the character. It also offers the potential for an unreliable narrator, allowing the writer the chance to explore surreal scenes and interesting quirks in the character.

Aim to slowly release elements of your story. Build the narrative. Remember it is a diary and therefore there will be certain things your character would not write. For example, a security guard would not note in his diary: *I have been working here ten years*. He would not have to remind himself of something he would obviously already know.

Spend time walking around the gallery, taking in the exhibits, but also the space and the atmosphere. For inspiration you might write brief responses to each room, focusing on a particular painting which might catch the eye of your character. It may just provide the spark needed for a way into your story.

City Library 2012



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What would Hermione say?

- 1) Choose a strong character from children's literature - this might be a childhood favourite or just one that you know something about.
- 2) Find a copy of one of the national, regional, or local newspapers available in the library. Read the lead story.
- 3) Take some time to reflect on what your character would think about this current situation or event.
- 4) Without worrying about how and/or why they would meet, write a piece of dialogue between your character and a significant protagonist in the real-life story.
- 5) Try to write at least ten exchanges between them.
- 6) Consider which speaker (fictional or real) has been most influenced or changed by the exchange.

Great North Museum: Hancock 2012



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A museum could be one of the most inspiring places for a writer and the Great North Museum is certainly one of the best places to get inspired. Spending some time among the objects, each with so much history, would no doubt trigger many fantastic ideas in anyone's mind.

- Get your writing tools (pen and paper that is!) and go to one of the many galleries in the museum (e.g. the prehistoric gallery). Choose an object on display by which you are most fascinated (e.g. the T-Rex).
- Without glancing at the written descriptions, look at it for 1 minute exactly (time yourself). During that minute, study the item carefully: its size, its colour, how it's been laid out, how old you think it is, which part of the world you think it comes from, etc.
- Now look away and write down everything that you can remember about the object.
- Once done, put your pen and paper away and choose another object from the same display, only this time make it an object you like the least. Do the same for this one as well. Only one minute.
- Compare your lists: Which one is more detailed? Which list was easier to write?
- Now read the descriptions provided by the museum and take a note of anything you find in it that could liven up your list to make it more interesting.
- Time for some creative writing now: write two letters to a friend and in each describe only one of the objects in as much details as you can. Have fun with this; make it sound as if you are the discoverer of the object. Which letter is easier to write?
- Now go and sit at a totally different part of the museum (e.g. the Ancient Greek gallery) and imagine your earlier two chosen objects coming alive in the environment of the gallery where you are sitting (e.g. the T-Rex having fun in some ancient Greek village) and write a short story about something that happens there. Have fun with your characters and see where they would take you.
- Repeat the entire exercise with other galleries and objects. Keep going back to the museum on different days until you have managed to write a collection of stories.
- Let your friends read your letters and stories. Then ask them which of the stories they find most engaging, which ones they like the most, or hate the most. Try to be positive and take their views constructively. See if you can make your written pieces better. Go back to the museum for more inspiration. You never know: you might end up with the next best seller...

Seven Stories 2012



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SEVEN SEVENS = A STORY

You'll need a pen, seven pieces of card, and a pair of scissors (ask a responsible adult to help you!)

Did you know that Seven Stories celebrates its seventh birthday in 2012? Some people say that there are only seven basic plot lines and all stories are variations of one of these.

Make yourself a set of story cards by writing down the following suggestions (One category per piece of card), cutting them into strips and mixing them up into seven piles. Pick one strip from each pile and use them to tell a story... then start again until you have seven stories!

PLOT	CHARACTER	TWIST	SETTING
Rags to Riches Overcoming the monster Voyage and Return Comedy Tragedy Rebirth The Quest	The hunter/seeker Mother or father The person who is lost Dog – or cat Fool or joker Soldier/ warrior Witch/wizard/enchanter	Get lost Fall down a hole Tell a lie Find a strange object Open a door Help someone out See someone get hurt	The ruin The ship The cave The forest The island The school The shop

ACTION	PROP	WRITING TIP
Make friends with an animal Find something out Find a weapon Be jealous Lose something Be starving Get chased	The mirror The diary The charm The key The boat The tree The door	Make your opening line something someone says Rearrange events – put the start at the end Describe how things smell, taste, feel and sound Tell the story from another character's viewpoint Cut out all your adjectives! Read your story aloud – does it sound right? Show how someone feels by how they act

The Shipley Art Gallery 2012



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“Welcome to the Shipley Art Gallery! It’s very lucky for you to have chosen today for your visit, because today we are experimenting with Anthropomorphic Hats. Please take one from the hat stands in the lobby and enjoy your enhanced visiting experience....”

You look at the hats. They’re all different. There are knitted hats with colourful stripes and woolly pom-poms, Sherlock Holmes style deerstalkers, trilbies made of brown or grey felt, wizard and witch hats, baseball caps and even a ‘bald cap’ in which you have to tuck all your hair for the full effect. Each hat has a mysterious twinkling quality, but you can’t tell by looking at them what makes them so special, why they’re having all this fuss made about them. You touch a number of hats in turn and feel a slight tingling in your fingers.

Which hat will you choose? Write three sentences to describe what it looks like, feels like and why you chose it.

You put your chosen hat on your head and feel dizzy for a second. You close your eyes and take a deep breath and the dizziness fades away. When you open your eyes... nothing seems different. You start to think your hat must be broken, or it’s all just a big joke, but the friendly Shipley staff are smiling and nodding and direct you in to the main gallery. The second you step inside you hear whispering. You whip your head around to see who’s talking, but there’s no-one there. You shrug and start to wander about and look at the portraits.

That’s when you realise you can hear what the paintings are thinking.

And not just the representations of people, or animals: you can hear the voices of fruit and furniture, rivers and roads. Whatever you look at, the hat can magically *tune in* to. You walk into the Designs for Life Gallery, just to see if you can ‘hear’ the items on display in here too. Nothing you look at moves, but everything has a voice which the hat lets you hear inside your head.

Describe what you are looking at. What does the voice in your head sound like? What is it saying? Is it happy sitting next to its neighbour? Does it have a story to tell you?

You wander some more through the gallery. You hear a high pitched voice calling to you. It knows your name. Its voice is urgent. “Hurry!” it calls. “Come quick!” You look around for it, rushing from room to room. Then you find it, shouting to you, asking for your help. It is a...

What is it? What does it need you to do? Your magical hat can help you communicate with anything inside the gallery. It’s over to you now. Tell us your story.

The Sage Gateshead 2012



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The Sage Gateshead is a building built for music. It hosts performances from musicians from all over the world, it hosts festivals of Americana, Jazz and Classical music, it is the home to the Northern Sinfonia, and it is a musical education centre. In short, The Sage Gateshead is a musical multiplex, and the building itself creates its own unique music, as people pass through and use the space for a variety of reasons during all hours of the day.

As soon as you enter the Sage Gateshead, take yourself to the third floor and sit around one of the tables on the concourse outside Hall One. Take out a pen and some paper and close your eyes. Listen. What do you hear? The clamber of chairs below in the cafeteria? Children playing with the accordions and xylophones in the gift shop below? An occasional full-bellied laugh? The velocity of air conditioning? The Sage Gateshead has its own atmosphere, sometimes relaxing, and other times chaotic. The day of the week and time you visit will yield different sonic experiences.

- Write about what the sounds you hear and try to imagine what they remind you of. For example, does a chair scraping along the floor remind you of a dog growling?
- Keep tuning yourself like a radio into all the different frequencies in the building: conversations, announcements, outside traffic.
- When you're ready, take a walk around the building and write about how the sound changes from place to place.
- Head down into the Musical Education Centre and walk around the rehearsal rooms. If you're lucky you'll hear even more different sounds as different types of musicians practice.

When you feel you've gotten enough material, return to the third floor or another suitable location and begin to draft a poem or prose piece from the material you have gathered. The brief: what does sound itself sound like? Try answering this in the form of a poem, or in a non-fiction prose piece, or even as a discussion between two protagonists in a play or as part of a story.

Tyneside Cinema 2012



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The Tyneside Cinema is full of memories. Everyday hundreds of new memories are created as people arrive for lunch, coffee, cake, to meet with friends and family, to knit, to read, to write or to watch a film. In some ways it is factory of memories; head to the Coffee Rooms during any weekday lunchtime and you'll hear a myriad of voices exchanging stories about the building. Better still, take one of the heritage tours and find out about the history of the building, which is steeped not only in the history of Newcastle, but within the history of cinema itself. For this exercise we're going to explore your memories of the Tyneside Cinema, be they ages old or as fresh as spring.

Find a place to sit in the Tyneside Cinema. Try the Coffee Rooms or the Tyneside Bar. Ask yourself the following questions:

- 1) What was the first film you saw at the Tyneside Cinema? Perhaps it was the news from when the cinema exclusively screened newsreels. Perhaps it was an art house classic, or a subtitled French new-wave thriller? Perhaps this is your first visit or you can't remember. If so, what are you going to watch today?
- 2) What do you remember about that day? What was the weather like? Was the building crowded, or empty? How many people watched the film? What sort of people attended the film? What you remember about the film? How did you make you feel? Was it uplifting, exciting or romantic? Was it sad, thrilling, or chilling? Did you identify with any of the characters in the film?

Now use the memories you've written as a springboard from which to start a poem or short story. The key here is to infuse your memories of the Tyneside Cinema and of the film you watched in order to create a personal narrative, exploring the way your memories mingle with those of the building.

Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art 2012



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With its thought provoking collections, striking architecture and dramatic views of the city, visiting the Baltic is such a visually stimulating experience that it is easy to overlook the ways in which your other senses engage with and respond to this space. Participating in this writing exercise will get you thinking deeply about all of your senses – try it and see what you discover.

Start by finding a place where you will be able to work comfortably for 30 minutes to 1 hour. Try the Level 5 viewing box or inside one of the exhibition spaces (just make sure there will be adequate light so that you can see what you're writing).

Step 1:

- Spend 3 minutes recording your visual observations in a list.
- Using this list spend 5-10 minutes crafting a piece of writing (poetry/prose) which focuses on a visual description of this space. If you are stuck, start the piece with 'I see...?'

Step 2:

- Close your eyes.
- Spend 3 minutes engaging your sense of hearing, smell, touch.
- Open your eyes and record your observations in a list.
- Using this list spend 5-10 minutes crafting a piece of writing (poetry/prose) which focuses on a non-visual sensory description of this space. If you are stuck, start the piece with 'I hear...' or 'I smell...' etc.

Step 3:

- Spend 3 minutes recording your feelings/emotions in a list.
- Using this list spend 5-10 minutes crafting a piece of writing (poetry/prose) which focuses on an emotional description of this space. If you are stuck, start the piece with 'I feel...?'

Take a moment to reflect: Did your lists vary greatly in size? How do the pieces of writing compare? Did you feel more comfortable engaging in one activity over the other? Did writing about one of the senses come more naturally than the other?

Step 4:

- Review the pieces you have written
- Spend 5-10 minutes crafting a single piece of writing (poetry/prose) which uses all of your sense to describe this space.

While this exercise is simple, it should get you thinking about how visiting the Baltic stimulates all of your senses. Use it in spaces you are familiar with to see if it helps you develop a new relationship with them. Try it when you are visiting somewhere new or when you are working on scenic description – see where it takes you.

Northern Stage 2012



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Backstage voice: a monologue for radio

(this exercise is best completed after you have seen a performance at Northern Stage)

- Recall the performance and what you most enjoyed about it.
- Pick out **one** detail of the staging (not the acting) that you like. Decide which member of the backstage team is most likely to have been responsible for it – wardrobe, sound, lighting, stage management, props, sets.

Your task is to create this character and to give them a voice as they talk about their work.

- Give your character a name, age, gender, physical appearance. What was their pathway to joining Northern Stage? Where's home and who else is there now? How will they travel home tonight? What do they long to do on their next day off? Name somebody important in their personal life. Name an ambition they haven't been able to fulfill, yet.
- Think about the detail of staging that you identified at 2 and imagine your character's involvement with it *before* and *during* the performance. For instance, did they design the sound balance for a birdcall at the back of the auditorium, or manage a change of lighting that made the audience gasp?
- Imagine your character in the backstage area where s/he works – in the wings, or the auditorium, or a workroom nearby, during the performance. In some rooms the performance is screened live. Picture him/her as clearly as you can. What did they eat for lunch? When will the next meal be eaten? What's near at hand – a bottle of water, a magazine, a mobile phone?
- Give your character a worry that has nothing to do with work: something that won't be forgotten.

Imagine the voice of your character, talking about the work that is loved, and the worry that won't go away.

- The creative writing task is to create a monologue about the situation, as if for the radio, from the point of view of the character you have imagined.
 - Start with what is happening onstage, and what you did to set it up.
 - You might like to include how they feel about the performance, other characters in the backstage team, theatre in the North-East, their professional aspirations, the audience today, arts funding, actors...
 - At the same time, talk about their worry.
 - Your monologue describes the conflict between their responsibility for what is going on in the theatre now and the worry that is also on their mind.
 - Your monologue should be no more than 300 words.
 - You might like to download and use this free software for writing for radio: <https://www.celtx.com/>

Hatton Gallery 2012



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Between February and May 2012 the Hatton Gallery exhibited the work of Julien Maire as part of the AV Festival ('As Slow as Possible'). This was the first UK solo exhibition by Maire, who creates cinematic machines using obsolete technology to reflect on memory and the passage of time. The exhibition included new commissions and old work, featuring low-resolution projections, high-voltage photographs with ten-hour exposures, disintegrating slow motion material, as well as the Grey Editor, which you can download from www.julienmaire.net. The experience of engaging with Maire's work has inspired these exercises, but they can be used with any exhibition in the Hatton.

Exercise One: Quick

Select one of the artworks on display and spend exactly one minute exploring it with your senses—it may be that you can both see and hear the artwork, as the mechanisms of Maire's cinematic machines could be. After one minute, go somewhere you cannot see or hear the piece.

1. Write down all the associations you can, from memory, of your thoughts and feelings about the artwork; do this for no more than one minute.
2. Now select one of the associations and put it together with a memory of a time when you had to do something quickly or to a deadline (catch a plane, sit an exam); and now write for ten minutes on how these two associations might connect.
3. You can also try using a memory of a time when you gave yourself a break from deadlines.

Exercise Two: Quick or Slow

Spend exactly one hour (or any set period of time, say 30 minutes) in the gallery. Move between the artworks, but don't write down anything yet. Focus on the work, and how the experience of taking a specific period of time might be changing/challenging your experience of the art.

1. Later, reflect on the artworks. Then, for one minute, write down all of your associations, thoughts and feelings—words, sentences, fragments, or drawings, whatever you wish.
2. Select two or three of these associations, and write about the connections between them. What are the threads? What is emerging for you from the experience?
3. Set yourself a particular amount of time to write a story using these two or three associations. Set yourself a minute, an hour, a day, or a month to write this piece. Note, straight away, the different expectations of the piece you are about to place upon it by the decision to set it within a timeframe. Can you then incorporate this sense of time and limit into the story? With whatever time you have set yourself, get to writing. Don't exceed the time you have set yourself—just try it, as an exercise.
4. Try again with a different timescale. Start with a one-minute story, then a one-hour story, using the same associations, or changing the associations from the original set. See how you can draw different stories depending on the relation of time you spent in the gallery, the time you give to the experience, and then again to the time to write the work. What do your stories say about the relationship between art, time and memory?

Dance City 2012



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Poetry and Dance have always shared a special relationship. From what we can gather, early poetry was often performed alongside dance. The two are intimately linked. Or as the Estonian poet Doris Kareva puts it:

Poetry is the dance of language.

Dance is the poetry of the body.

from *Shape of Time* (trans. Tiina Aleman, Arc Publications, 2010)

This connection can be found when we look at the origins of poetic forms. find somewhere comfortable to sit and write and we can try writing using one such form, a villanelle. Don't be afraid to explore as there are many places in the building where you can do this.

The original Italian villanella was a rustic dance, or at least the music for a rustic dance. A villanelle consists of five three-line stanzas (verses) and a final four-line stanza – 19 lines in total.

- The rhyme scheme for each three-line stanza is a / b / a.
- The rhyme scheme for the final four-line stanza is a / b / a / a
- The first and last line for each three-line stanza (tercet) and the final two lines of the final four-line stanza (quatrain) have the same end rhyme.

Two of the lines are repeated as follows:

- The first line of the first stanza is repeated in the last line of the second and fourth stanzas and as the penultimate line of the final quatrain.
- The third line of the first stanza is repeated in the last line of the third and fifth stanzas and as the last line of the quatrain.

So the two repeated lines form the final couplet of the poem.

Some tips to help you:

- Choose your repeating lines carefully – and don't be afraid to modify them slightly when they are repeated to make your poem read better.
- Write yourself as long a list as you can of your 'a' rhymes and your 'b' rhymes.
- The meter used for a villanelle is usually tetrameter (4 feet) or pentameter (5 feet).

Good luck!

Live Theatre 2012



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A good title can be the difference to the reader finding a way into a poem, it can be the very reason why we pick a book up from a shelf and it can twist the thrust of a story. The title is the thing we talk about, the thing we remember and as such vital to the success of any piece of writing. As far as I'm concerned the more time I spend thinking about titles the better I get at recognising good ones.

Theatres are good places to do some of this thinking as a play can live or die by its title. When a potential audience member flicks through the glossy programme and decides which show they want to see, the only words that they have at their disposal is the title and a paragraph or two about the production.

Copyright law doesn't apply to titles as, according to the UK Copyright Service, they are (along with names, colours and short phrases) "not considered unique or substantial enough to be awarded copyright protection in their own right." Great. Little do those copyrighters know but they are most probably the most substantial part of a piece of writing but as long as they continue to think that we can be the good poet and steal away to our heart's content. Let's try.

1. Find the brochure for the current season of shows at Live and then find somewhere comfortable to sit.
2. Read the first title in the programme and write freely for 2-3 minutes using the title as a prompt.
3. Move on to the next title and repeat step 2. Continue with this until you've either exhausted the titles in the programme.
4. Leave the writing alone for a week.
5. Go back to the rough writing that you did and look for any pieces which suggest something, perhaps a poem or a story or a scene / character from a play.
6. Before you work these pieces up into whatever it is they want to be (if anything at all) take some time to consider the titles that provoked the strongest response in you. What was it about them that inspired you? Did they suggest something more than themselves? How are they different from the others?

Life Science Centre 2012



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Science Six Word Secret

For the purposes of this task, a 'science secret' is simply a scientific fact that you didn't know about before your trip to the Centre for Life. You could read the info boards, play with the displays or ask a member of staff.

- 1) Wander through the halls and exhibitions at the Life Science Centre until you discover a science secret.
- 2) Take this science secret and write it down as three sentences.
- 3) Try to use scientific vocabulary. Make the sentences as concise and interesting as possible.
- 4) Now condense each sentence into only two words: you're trying to make a six word story that is evocative and clear.
- 5) Shift the order of your six words and see if the meaning of your story also shifts.
- 6) What happens if you change one of the words?

The Lit & Phil 2012



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The Lit and Phil is historically a home for writers, philosophers, artists and thinkers of the deepest ilk.

The beauty of this talking library is that often you can sit and listen to the witty, wise, and simply weird conversations people have during gaps in the activity they're there to undertake.

For some the witty, wise and weird conversations are exactly the activities they have come to take part in.

- Sit in the Lit and Phil casually leafing through journals, papers, or magazines, or tapping away at your laptop keys as though you're engaged in a great work.
- Now, surreptitiously listen to the conversations that are going on around you.
- Hone in on one conversation and follow it for approximately five minutes.
- Write down the elements of this conversation that you remember and use it to start a piece of dialogue about two characters.
- Write for approximately 15 minutes then read over the piece to see what you have: is anything about the characters distinctive yet? What do you know about them already? What would you like to know about them? Where could this story go?

Continue listening surreptitiously, continue writing...

Bessie Surtees House 2012



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The last private owner of Bessie Surtees House, Lord Gort, noted in his preface to the catalogue which accompanied the opening of the Surtees House Exhibition in 1934, that the house had borne witness to many changes, both in itself and within Newcastle and England. He personified the buildings, saying they 'have been the silent watchers of the pageant of time'. Using Lord Gort's phrase as a starting point, think about how Bessie Surtees House has been shaped by time; by the various people and events that have inhabited and been part of it.

To get started, try this brief warm-up exercise:

- Look out of the window in the main room. Take 3 or 4 minutes to 'free-write' the scene as you look down to the street below. Think about what is and isn't visible. How busy is it? Do you see many people? Can you see the river?
- Now, think about what the same scene might have looked like when Lord Gort opened the Exhibition here in 1934, or when Bessie Surtees eloped with John Scott on the night of 18th November, 1772. What would be different, what would be the same? Think about traffic, ships on the river, how people would have dressed and where they might be going.

An interesting way to take the exercise further is by making two time zones converge within a single narrative, in a common environment. You can do this by imagining the Sandhill, the street on which Bessie Surtees House is situated, existing at two different times simultaneously. This is not as difficult as it might sound: you are simply using fictional license to substitute times and events in order to create something original. So, picture the scene:

You're walking along the Quayside late at night, perhaps after a night out, when you see a ladder placed against the first floor window of Bessie Surtees House and a man helping a woman to climb out of the window.

- What are these people wearing?
- What are their expressions like – grave, eager, nervous?
- Do they see you? If so, do they react, and how?
- Is there anyone else there?
- Is there a mode of transport nearby?
- Do they speak to you? Do they want help?
- Do they ask you where they are; do you ask them where you are?

Begin a piece of writing that illustrates what might happen if a person living in 2012 were to meet John Scott and Bessie Surtees on the night of their elopement. Though the location is the same, time has been fractured in this fictional world, meaning many things will seem strange. You can use this to your advantage and deviate from the original story, or supplement it in some way.

Focus on the details first, such as what you can and can't see, any smells, sounds or differences in the buildings, and then think about more complex things such as what you might talk about, what you have in common and what might happen next.

~Flow 2012



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Did you know that the sonic instruments making those sounds are played by the river itself? They draw water from the River Tyne, passing it through a series of filters, lasers and sensors, which bubble, beep, hiss, creak and groan.

~Flow turns the river into a musician, turns musicians into scientists, turns us from visitors into collaborators. You're going to use your imagination to turn inspiration from ~Flow into a piece of creative writing.

- Start by exploring outdoors; peer over the railings and watch the Tyne flowing past. What can you see bobbing along in the water? Write down three words inspired by the river.
- Turn to look at the tidal water wheel; this wheel generates the power that runs ~Flow. See how the wood is starting to weather by being outside. How fast is it moving today? Write down three words inspired by the wheel.
- It's time to go into the millhouse. Your first port of call is the Salinity Sampler Sequencer; the pitch of the instruments is controlled by the salt levels in the hourly samples of river water moving along the wooden conveyor belt. How do you think that water tastes? Write down three words inspired by the Salinity Sampler Sequencer.
- Move along to the Bubble Synth and look up at the Giant Bellows overhead; the chemical composition of the river controls the sounds made by the resonating bubbles. See how they seem to draw breath and blurt it out as blooping music. Write down three words inspired by the Bubble Synth and Giant Bellows.
- Now look at the laser Turbidatron; gears and cranks drive a laser which emits a beam of light through the water, measuring its turbidity (muddiness) and creating a real-time sound in response to the river. What do the colours remind you of? Write down three words inspired by the laser Turbidatron.

Take your fifteen words and try them out in different patterns. Mix them into one long line; a ~Flow of inspiration. Expand each word into a sentence. Does your choice of words suggest a story? Can you edit this into a poem?