

The Ethics of Writing

On May the 17th, England will take its next step easing back into regular life with pubs and restaurants opening their doors and allowing for inside dining again.

On June the 19th, usually crowded settings such as clubs will also open up again, and we also no longer have the rule of everything needing to shut at 10 o'clock.

What do you think of this? Is it too soon, or have we waited long enough? How do you think we as people will react to resuming normal life? Are there any aspects of life during the pandemic that will influence our normal lives from now on?

Write a short piece thinking about these questions and how you personally feel about this. You have **5 minutes**.

As writers, it's important to consider the ethics behind what we write.

Culture and the values we hold as a society is informed by the art and media we consume. Any time we create, whether that be a poem, a story, or any other form of art, we are adding to culture.

People will see our work not only as a reflection of ourselves, but as a reflection of the society or culture we live in.

Because of this, the question of what is and isn't ethical to write about is a highly debated topic.

Jen Webb, a professor of creative, says: “It comes up, from time to time. Ethics and writing. Two concepts that are chained together in a dysfunctional marriage. How to write, ethically? How to write ethically while remaining true to the aesthetic of the piece, the narrative of the piece, and a reader’s requirements? And, by the way, what is ethical writing?”

Her straightforward answer is “In the field of education the answer is straightforward: to write ethically means avoiding plagiarism and resisting the impulse to make up ‘facts.’”

Is that enough? Is the field of education the right discipline to look for an answer? Is merely avoiding plagiarism enough when writing? Even if you don’t make up the facts in your writing, are you even close to writing ethically just by avoiding plagiarism?

Ethical writing is writing with a level of inclusion, respect, and acknowledgement of diversity.

The line of what is and isn't ethical is thin and can change depending on who you ask.

A white straight cisgender male writer writing a piece that only consists of other white straight cisgender males can be considered to be unethical, as it would not be an accurate representation of society.

However, the same white straight cisgender male writer writing a piece that's from the perspective of a black transgender woman could also be considered unethical as the writer is making a commentary on a group he doesn't belong to.

What do we think about this? When is and isn't it ethical to write about experiences that aren't your own? Have you personally ever experienced reading or watching a piece of writing that featured a character or perspective close to your own identity, and not felt this portrayal was accurate?

So what is the answer? What is and isn't ethical when writing?

There are no set rules we all must adhere to. We, as creators, have to decide ourselves what is ethical for us to write and what isn't, and this can vary person to person.

Writing ethically means considering the cultural impact of the words we write and the impact it will have on others.

I'm going to give you three major historic events we have recently lived through.



The Covid-19 Pandemic



The Donald Trump – Joe Biden presidency



The death of Prince Philip

I want you to imagine you're writing a piece that will be discovered in a hundred years time. This piece will inform people what we, those living through these moments, thought at the time. You're creating a piece that will represent the thoughts and feelings of the masses. What do you think is important to say? What is the most ethical way of writing about this event, both in terms of how others will perceive this writing and what is staying true to your viewpoint and beliefs?

You have **10 minutes**.