

Writing your story in 500 words – topic ‘Failure’

‘Write about a failure you’ve experienced – from the commonplace to the catastrophic – in 500 words’. (ABC Open - April 2017)

“First, split the 500 words into five segments with varying word counts in each. These are not fixed, but if you go over the limit in one segment you’ll need to cut something else. Remember, for this exercise, the total is set in stone.

1. **Headline – generate curiosity.** You want to grab the reader’s attention. (Not usually included in the word count.) For example:

“The day I didn’t climb Uluru.”

Now we start counting...

2. **50 words – the Hook.** The reader has taken the bait, now keep them reading....

“So what if I was well into my 60s, with dodgy balance and a crook hip. I had attitude enough to do it twice! Besides, my daughter and her husband were with me so what could go wrong? It’s only a rock.”

3. **100 words – the Intro.** Why I wanted to do this – give the reasons for your actions...

“It was the challenge to push myself a little further out of the ‘comfort zone’. The trip had been an unexpected opportunity etc, etc.....

4. **200 words – Evidence.** The climb – describe the surroundings, weather, give them the feeling.

“The blood red desert sands in the morning sunlight..... is the tingling chill on my arms the breeze or a little touch of panic as the elevation and ‘a long way down’ view sets in about 100 metres into the climb..... and now at two thirds of way up, I know I can’t go on...”

5. **100 words - Proof.** Here you give the reasons, details of the ‘what went wrong’ ...

“I saw the storm clouds pushing up out of the distant desert horizon. I knew going down was going to be the difficult part for me. And a wet and slippery rock? Did I have time to complete the climb and still get back down safely before the storm hit? Decision time. Probably not – and I would be putting others at risk... As the rest of the party waved goodbye and continued at a faster pace without me, I started back down – disappointed but...”

6. **50 words – Outcome.** What did I learn from this event?

“Spot the hazard, assess the risk – we should have checked the weather forecast before starting out! But the unexpected reward was seeing the rare ‘raining on the rock’ event.” “