



Agatha Christie®

WRITING

THE MYSTERY OF AGATHA CHRISTIE'S WRITING METHODS BROUGHT TO LIFE IN GROUNDBREAKING BBC MAESTRO COURSE

What if the world's greatest writer could teach you how to craft the perfect crime novel?

BBC Maestro is making the impossible possible. In a world-first, Agatha Christie - bestselling novelist of all time – will offer aspiring writers an unparalleled opportunity to learn the secrets behind her writing, in her own words.

Using archival interviews, private letters, and writings researched by a team of Christie experts, this pioneering course reconstructs Christie's own voice and insights, guiding students through the art of suspense, plot twists, and unforgettable characters. For the first time, audiences will hear Agatha Christie impart her insights on story structure, cast creation, plot twists, red herrings, and the art of suspense, drawn directly from her own writings and archival interviews.

Bringing Agatha Christie's presence to life, BBC Maestro has collaborated with a professional actress, Vivien Keene, and expert visual effects artists to create a faithful representation of her voice and likeness. Using AI-enhanced technology, licensed images, and carefully restored audio recordings, this pioneering course captures the essence of Agatha Christie's presence and voice, complemented by a script created by academics from Christie's own words and teachings, delivering an experience that feels as though she is speaking directly to the audience.

With over two billion books sold, 66 detective novels, 14 short story collections, and the world's longest-running play, *The Mousetrap*, Agatha Christie's influence on crime fiction is unmatched. The continued demand for adaptations of her work in television and film expresses how timeless her skills of storytelling are.

Now, Agatha Christie's legendary storytelling techniques are being unlocked for the very first time.

The course has been curated by leading Christie scholars Dr. Mark Aldridge, Michelle Kazmer, Gray Robert Brown, and Jamie Bernthal-Hooker, who have painstakingly reconstructed Agatha's philosophy on writing, using her own words. With the full support and approval of Agatha Christie's family, this course offers a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to step into the mind of the Queen of Crime.

James Prichard, Agatha Christie's great-grandson, Chairman and CEO of Agatha Christie Limited, says: *"The team of academics and researchers that BBC Maestro has assembled have extracted from a number of her writings an extraordinary array of her views and opinions on how to write. Through this course, you truly will receive a lesson in crafting a masterful mystery, in Agatha's very own words."*

BBC Maestro Chief Executive Officer Michael Levine says: *"As a lifelong fan of Agatha Christie, bringing this course to life has been a dream come true, and I am immensely proud of it. Agatha Christie's BBC Maestro course on Writing invites anyone and everyone who adores Agatha*

Christie's writing to learn through her own words, exactly how she does it; her background, her inspirations, her craft and the lessons she learnt along the way.

"BBC Maestro was established to offer the next generation of talent a way to get started, to learn, not from teachers, but from those who have done it themselves. To be inspired by learning from the greatest. As an 11-year-old boy reading "Why Didn't they Ask Evans?" I could never have imagined that one day, I'd be watching Agatha Christie teaching me how she did it."

Dr Mark Aldridge, Agatha Christie Expert and Associate Professor of Screen Histories at Southampton Solent University, said: *"Embarking on this project was a journey filled with dedication and collaboration. Working closely with fellow scholars and the Christie family, we meticulously pieced together Agatha Christie's own words from her letters, interviews, and writings. Witnessing her insights come to life has been a profoundly moving experience."*

Vivien Keene, actor, said: *"This role was unlike any other in my 44 years of acting. The process required me to study the few existing clips of Agatha very closely, capturing her subtle mannerisms and expressions. Bringing Agatha's presence to life was both a privilege and a remarkable experience – one that will stay with me."*

Thiago Porto, Visual Effects Artist said: *"Recreating Agatha Christie was a fascinating challenge. With only a handful of photographs and no video footage, we had to carefully study every available detail to capture her likeness authentically. Vivien's performance was the foundation, and through precise craftsmanship and meticulous attention to historical accuracy, we worked to ensure every frame reflected the essence of who she was."*

RESPEECHER, Audio Specialist, said: *"Capturing Agatha Christie's voice was an incredibly detailed process. We started with just a small selection of archival recordings, carefully analysing the unique qualities of her speech—its warmth, rhythm, and character. The voice actress gave a brilliant performance, and our role was to shape and refine the sound, ensuring that every word felt authentic to Agatha herself. It was a painstaking but rewarding process. We hope the result truly honours her legacy."*

This groundbreaking initiative is more than just a writing course - it's a chance to be mentored by the most successful novelist of all time. Whether you're an aspiring author, a devoted fan, or simply captivated by the art of storytelling, *Agatha Christie Writing* is set to be an unmissable experience.

For more information, visit **bbcmaestro.com**

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James Prichard – Great Grandson of Agatha Christie,

Chairman and CEO of Agatha Christie Limited

Agatha Christie changed storytelling forever, particularly crime and mystery storytelling. She refined and defined the boundaries of the genre. Nearly fifty years after her passing, her words still grip, inspire and entertain millions around the world.

She was also my great-grandmother and, though I was very young when she died, I've spent my life surrounded by stories about her and by her. My job here at Agatha Christie Limited is to maintain and further her legacy and help share her stories with new generations all over the world.

When BBC Maestro first approached my family about creating a writing course using my great-grandmother's words and likeness, I didn't know what was possible. But the one thing I did know, was that if we were going to do it, it had to be done well. From the start, we set three essential principles: firstly a non-negotiable, the words and ideas had to be Christie's own; secondly, the visual and audio representation had to be authentic; and finally, the course had to be genuinely valuable to aspiring writers.

The first step in ensuring this was BBC Maestro assembling a team of Agatha Christie academics and researchers under the heading of Mark Aldridge, who did an extraordinary job of collating and distilling everything my great-grandmother said about her craft, from a myriad of sources.

The central part of this project is the words. But to bring those words to life took an extraordinary performance from our actress, Vivien Keene. The combination of acting, production and technology allows us to hear Agatha Christie's words in a new and engaging way. This is not impersonation. It is an interpretation, based on deep study of her voice, speech patterns and mannerisms from archive recordings.

For the first time, aspiring writers and Agatha Christie fans can learn about my great-grandmother's writing process in a way that simply wasn't possible before. This is a chance to learn from the best exponent of the art of crime and mystery writing in the history of the genre. I suspect and hope that there are lessons here too for writers of other genres, while also being a treat for fans. I have never seen a better explanation of the process behind my great-grandmother's writing.

Her stories continue to captivate new generations every day. My 12-year-old son has just discovered a love for her books. Hearing his amazement when he reaches the end of another story, surprised at how he has been outwitted once again, perfectly illustrates the timeless power of great storytelling.

As a family, we approached this project with the utmost care and love for my great-grandmother. And on the basis that my father, who knew her best of all people alive today, fully approves, I have no hesitation in saying that we are incredibly proud of what we've created.

I hope the wider world finds it just as extraordinary and inspiring as we do.

Dr Mark Aldridge – Agatha Christie Expert

You are a historian and author and Agatha Christie expert. How did you become so interested in Christie and her life? Associate Professor of Screen Histories at Southampton Solent University

Like many people, I was introduced to Agatha Christie as a young reader, exploring my first ‘grown up’ books. My mum had a near-complete run of Christie titles, and we were both fans of watching the adaptations on television, so it was a natural fit. It also didn’t hurt that I lived in South Devon, just a few miles from Christie’s birthplace of Torquay, so she was always a big figure in my life.

What did you think when you first heard about this project? And did that change by the end?

I was a little cynical about it when I was first contacted, simply because I thought that there were likely to be problems that would be insurmountable. Firstly, I wasn’t at all sure that the Christie estate would be interested in co-operating, and of course that would be essential. I was also particularly concerned that Mathew Prichard, Christie’s grandson, should be happy with the idea and the final product. I was assured that he could withdraw permission at any point if he had concerns, and that was extremely important to me, as I wanted to be respectful of his grandmother, who was a real person not just the towering literary figure we know. Also, I wondered if BBC Maestro realised how much work would be needed on the research side of things! But, over time, everybody got more and more excited by the possibilities, as I was given everything we needed – an excellent team to work with, and the time we needed to get this right. I was also thrilled and honoured that the Maestro team took my suggestions, queries and concerns seriously – everybody wanted this to work, and they invested money and time into ensuring that the quality is as high as it can be. I was on set for much of the filming and it was a fantastic, if surreal, experience, to be sat alongside Christie’s great-grandson, James Prichard, watching her words come to life. Viv (Vivien Keene), playing Agatha, gave an amazing performance.

Please tell me where you started with this project, and did you have a team to help you? What research did you do for this project? Where did you look and find all the necessary information?

One of the big concerns from the family at the beginning was whether there would be enough original material to make up a complete course. I was sure there would be, having spent well over a decade researching Agatha Christie’s works. So, I put together a list of sources we could use and at the beginning simply set to work creating a ‘master document’ of Christie’s own words about her writing. This drew on a good range of written material, including her

autobiography, and other things like introductions she wrote for some of her books, and some of her correspondence.

In the end this first basic document ran to over 20,000 words! This meant that we were sure that there would be enough for a full course. It was essential to all of us that we used Christie's words as much as possible with the core of what she is saying from Christie herself. We only added material that was unambiguously factual, such as citing examples of where Christie uses particular methods in her writing.

From the beginning, I told the Maestro team that I wanted to bring other researchers in to work on the project, partly because of the amount of work, but also because of individual specialisms. I was thrilled when these experts agreed to join. They are the Christie specialist Dr J.C. Bernthal, expert in language Professor Michelle Kazmer, and the writer Gray Robert Brown. All know their Christie extremely well but have focused on different areas. Once we had a rough shape for the course breakdown each of us worked on different sections that linked with our specialisms in some way. Then we reviewed each other's work, and I made sure that everything flowed and had the same tone and style, while avoiding repetition, as we found that there were some favourite stories that everyone wanted to tell.

What is your role in creating this course?

I was the co-ordinator for the research aspects from the beginning, before we even had the green light. A big part of my own work was in finding the original source material, including locating examples of her voice that could be potentially used to help train the AI – and there wasn't a lot! I had some good leads, though, and some material of my own. Then it was about leading the team, who made their own brilliant contributions and supplied some excellent ideas that we made full use of in the course. The final scripts were written by the whole team, and they deserve a lot of credit.

How do you feel about people being able to learn from Agatha, why is she the perfect Maestro?

This is what really excites me. In higher education there is often discussion of 'knowledge exchange', and what that can mean. For me, this is a perfect example of what can be done if we think outside of the box a little. It's really a distillation of advice from the world's best-selling novelist, presented in an accessible and entertaining way. I think that it's difficult to imagine any writer who wouldn't benefit from hearing what Agatha Christie has to say about writing.

What was the importance of involving the family?

Absolutely crucial. I had no interest in working on something that didn't have their full co-operation. I was particularly cautious about how Mathew Prichard might feel, as Agatha Christie was his grandmother and they were very close. Nobody else who is alive today knows her as well as he does. We had a few private discussions about the project, I think to reassure each

other that we both felt happy with it. Similarly, James Prichard is now in charge of both preserving the reputation of his great-grandmother while also ensuring her legacy continues and she remains fresh for readers, old and new. There are very few – if any – writers who were first published over a century ago who still sell like Agatha Christie does. People still love her books, because they are excellent pieces of writing that stand the test of time. Who better to give advice?

Vivien Keene - Agatha Christie

Could you explain how you won this role? And is it like anything you've ever done before?

This job was absolutely unlike any other that I have had in 44 years of acting! I believe that the Casting Directors had to scan hundreds of actresses faces in order to try and find the correct biometrics, so that the AI process could be put on top of that to create Agatha Christie's face. So, initially, it was a case of 'well, if the face fits...' Quite a few of us were asked to create self-tapes from home. There was a very specific requirement though, that we had to film straight on to camera and must keep our eyes forward. Apparently, the AI process couldn't follow if we moved our heads or rolled our eyes.

They then called a much smaller number in to see them. It was incredibly exciting, as nobody was quite sure whether the process was going to work and so it felt more collaborative than any other audition that I'd done. Again, the key was to keep face forward whilst trying to be animated and engaging. I must have done something right, as I got the job!

Were you an Agatha fan prior to this?

I've always been a fan of Agatha Christie's work - although I have tended to enjoy her stories on screen. I have performed in two of her works - the Mousetrap and Go Back for Murder, which is much less well known. I was really impressed, once I started to work on the two plays, by how complex they are and also how much fun they are to play. Sometimes people will mention that the Mousetrap has been on 'forever' - but there is a reason for that! Her plays are intriguing and filled with interesting characters.

I have met Mathew Prichard, Agatha Christie's grandson, and I remember how vivid his memories of his grandmother were though. Then I had the privilege of meeting her great grandson, James, whilst I was filming for BBC Maestro. You get such a sense of their family commitment to maintaining the memory of Agatha Christie and how proud they are of her.

What research did you do for this role?

There was hardly any film of Agatha Christie, and it was mostly from the front, so I had to watch the existing clips over and over, in order to try and extract mannerisms that I may be able to replicate. She used to lift her eyebrows a lot, and she used to laugh a lot, and I had to try and put a tiny bit of this into my delivery, although it had to be limited because Maestro didn't want her to be too relaxed and informal, because she was going to be teaching. I watched everything that Mathew had produced about his grandmother too and this gave a strong sense of her shyness, her intelligence, her great sense of humour and, indeed, her feistiness. I watched any documentaries that I could find because, once I had the script, I had to try and inject emotional depth into mentions of the family and her husband. This was very important, as I would be so limited by the 'straight-on' physical nature of the filming.

How did you prepare vocally?

I was told that they would take my vocals and tweak it to sound like Agatha. So, I didn't try to replicate her voice, which was extremely 'posh', as a woman of her class and time would have

sounded but spoke in heightened Received Pronunciation to get a general sense of the syntax and warmth that could be blended with Agatha's vocals in post-production.

What was the most interesting fact you learnt about Agatha Christie?

I found out all sorts of things about Agatha, but I think that the most interesting thing is how well travelled she was and how willing she was to look at lives that were different from her own. The more you look at her work and life, the more you realise that a bit like Dickens, she was very much a commentator of her times. I love this about her. She was a product of her background, but she was also intelligent and forward-thinking.

What did you love most about this project?

I loved everything about this project, I have to admit. The team at BBC Maestro are the loveliest bunch of people and, considering that I'd never done anything like this before, or been the centre of attention like this before, they looked after me brilliantly! And everyone, from the CEO to the Runner were just so committed to the project, and so friendly and so excited and enthused by it, that it was a joy to work on. I loved the fact that I was learning new things and that it felt as though this might be something ground-breaking in technical development. I loved learning about Agatha Christie.

What was the hardest thing about your role?

This job was really difficult for me, initially, as it seemed to be so much about technical restrictions. Don't move your head. Don't roll your eyes. Make sure that you face straight on...And so I had to try and find a way to be creative within those restrictions. But, because the Maestro team were so supportive and encouraging, I was able to let the doubts go. I felt sure that they would sort it out. But it was tough. Was it acting? Was it reading? Was it putting on a voice? It was quite unknown.

Why is Agatha the perfect Maestro?

I really hope that anyone who is interested in writing crime thrillers, or just interested in writing, will take a look at the Agatha Christie course. I think that the idea to have a character from history teach a course is genius and Agatha may have died 49 years ago, but her works are still *everywhere*. Constant productions on TV, in film and theatre as well as the books, of course. The more that I was involved, the more it became clear that she was brilliant at what she did. Her success wasn't really about lucky chance. Once her technique was broken down, you realised that nothing was accidental, she had a method, she had a plan and she worked logically through it all. She makes it clear that it wasn't always easy, but that the more that she practiced, the easier it became and that, sometimes if the writing wasn't flowing, she could use her techniques and experience in order to move through the block. Agatha Christie is definitely one of the greatest writers of our time and she has a wealth of knowledge to impart.

Thiago Porto - Visual Effects Artist

Describe your work and what your role was on this BBC Maestro course?

I've been working in Visual Effects since 2010, and since 2017, I've been integrating traditional VFX with AI, machine learning, and Digital Humans. I've worked on digital recreations of characters such as Kendrick Lamar, Messi, Jim Carrey, Willem Dafoe, Juice WRLD, Michael Jordan, Elis Regina, and many others. My projects typically involve high-profile commercials for AAA brands like Apple, Samsung, Gatorade, Volkswagen, and more. I've also contributed to feature films, including the *Sonic* franchise, *The Exorcist*, and various music videos. I split my time between New York and São Paulo, working between the studio office and AI infrastructure. For *Maestro*, I was responsible for recreating the digital likeness of Agatha Christie and seamlessly integrating her into our beautifully shot scenes with our talent, Vivien Keene.

Tell us how you recreated Agatha Christie on screen

Recreating Agatha Christie was a unique challenge since we had very little footage of her -only a limited number of less than 10 licensed photos. Using AI, we trained models to learn her facial features, expressions, and movements based on these images. Vivien delivered an incredible performance, which was meticulously shot, edited and graded in a way that allowed us to seamlessly map Agatha's face onto Vivien's, capturing subtle details that would be difficult to achieve with traditional VFX alone. The AI-generated face was then refined and blended with the footage using traditional compositing techniques, ensuring a natural and polished result. This teamwork of all departments made this hybrid approach possible creating a highly realistic and adaptable recreation that stayed true to her likeness.

Describe the timeline, process, and challenges of the project

The biggest technical challenge was the lack of video references and we only had a handful of photos of Agatha Christie at the target age. This made it extremely difficult to maintain her likeness while also re-animating, re-targeting, and re-lighting her face to match the filmed plates. Achieving this required a full team effort, ensuring we could generate the best AI renderings while maintaining historical accuracy.

Beyond the technical challenges, the greatest responsibility was knowing that we would be presenting our work to Agatha Christie's own family. They know her best, so we had to be meticulous in preserving her likeness and respectfully bringing her back to life on screen. We started talking about this project two years ago, so it was an on-going process till we were in production.

RESPEECHER – AI voice technology

Describe your work, where you are based, examples of big projects you've completed, and what you did on this Maestro course, please?

Respeecher is an ethical AI voice technology company based in Kyiv, Ukraine. Our team of experienced sound engineers backed by state-of-the-art technology has helped create voices of young Luke Skywalker for The Mandalorian, Darth Vader for Obi-Wan Kenobi, Elvis Presley for America's Got Talent, Jimmy Stewart for Calm app and Richard Nixon for Emmy-winning documentary In Event of Moon Disaster.

For the narration of the BBC Maestro course, we helped recreate the voice of Agatha Christie. The recordings you hear throughout the course were made with the help of Respeecher.

Could you explain how you created Agatha Christie's voice for this project, what you based this on, and how it worked with the actor's input?

It was a speech-to-speech conversion, meaning that the voice of the actress playing Agatha (a.k.a. source voice) was recorded and transformed into the voice of Agatha Christie (a.k.a. target voice) with the help of our technology.

To do so, we needed to create an AI-powered voice model for Agatha Christie. This process consists of 3 essential steps:

- First, we obtain permission from the voice owner or their estate. At Respeecher, we ensure that we have explicit permission to use the voice and, through moderation, ensure that the voice is never misused.
- Next, we prepare the recordings and train the voice model. Our software extracts, analyses, and learns the unique features of the voice to clone it, with all the necessary approvals and licenses.
- Finally, we apply the model to the DTC - i.e., "data to convert" or the recorded source voice. Once we get the raw converted voice, our sound engineers polish it to provide the best possible results. At this stage, they are deeply involved, working closely with the production team, processing feedback, and making new iterations to ensure that we provide the highest quality audio that matches the production team's expectations and creative vision.

It's important to note that, despite the common misconception, AI doesn't remove the human element from the voice cloning process - especially when it comes to speech-to-speech conversion. While AI can clone the voice, it can't create a distinguished performance that a human actor can.

So, you still need the voice talent to **perform** as Agatha Christie. AI doesn't replace human talent - it helps empower it, scale it, and discover new applications for it.

How long did this take and what were the biggest challenges?

The work on the sound for the project - from the first demo and sound approvals to the final conversions and edits - took a little over two months.

The biggest challenge was the level of responsibility when recreating the voice of the legend that Agatha Christie is. The output had to sound modern and alive, not like an old vinyl recording. This result wasn't easy to achieve because we needed to craft a natural sound and convey her authentic accent while working with far-from-perfect recorded audio data.

Any interesting facts and figures?

We had about 90 minutes of live recordings at our disposal. However, the main issue was that their quality did not match modern standards.

After extensive data filtering and polishing, we managed to extract a small amount of high-quality audio with contemporary sound. The total duration of these usable segments was only 208 seconds, but we are proud to have created a voice of the best quality possible under these circumstances.

Stephen Davies, SVP Global Licensing at BBC Studios

What is BBC Studios' involvement in this project and why did you want to be part of it?

BBC Studios is thrilled to be involved in bringing this very exciting project to life, working in close collaboration with BBC Maestro, Agatha Christie Limited, and an exceptional team of researchers and creatives.

This is an ideal first AI-enhanced project for us because it represents everything BBC Studios stands for, pioneering storytelling, innovation through technology, and celebrating timeless talent. Agatha Christie is a literary icon whose influence continues to transcend generations. To be able to create a learning experience that captures her essence and brings her insights to a new audience in such a dynamic and respectful way felt like an extraordinary opportunity. It's a unique blend of education and entertainment, something we're incredibly proud to champion.

How does this project reflect the wider work of BBC Studios Brands & Licensing in bringing iconic IP to life in new and engaging ways?

This project is a perfect example of how BBC Studios Brands & Licensing extends our world-class IP beyond the screen, creating experiences that are both meaningful and memorable. Agatha Christie is one of the most iconic names in storytelling, and through this course, we've been able to honour her legacy while introducing her genius to new generations in a fresh, dynamic format.

Our mission is to deepen fan engagement through creative brand extensions and that's exactly what this project does. It sits alongside a diverse portfolio of experiences, from live shows like *Bluey's Big Play* to immersive exhibitions like *Doctor Who: World of Wonder* and concert tours such as *Planet Earth III Live*. Whether it's through entertainment, merchandise, publishing or digital platforms, we're always looking for innovative ways to connect audiences with the stories and characters they love. This collaboration with BBC Maestro is another step in that journey, combining heritage, technology, and storytelling to deliver something truly unique.

What impact do you hope this course will have on aspiring writers and fans of Agatha Christie?

We hope this course inspires a new generation of storytellers. Whether you're an aspiring crime writer or simply a fan of Agatha Christie's work, the opportunity to learn from her through her own words and experiences is incredibly powerful.

It's not just about mastering the mechanics of mystery writing; it's about understanding how Agatha thought, how she crafted suspense, and how she connected with readers. By making this accessible in an immersive e-learning course, we aim to give people the tools, confidence, and inspiration to start writing stories of their own. It's a celebration of creativity, storytelling, and legacy all at once.

Will we be seeing more AI-related projects like this coming from BBC Studios?

This project marks an exciting new chapter for how we can use technology to enhance storytelling and education. What we've achieved here with Agatha Christie is a powerful demonstration of how AI, when used thoughtfully and ethically, can honour legacy, preserve authenticity, and unlock new ways to connect with our audiences. We're just beginning to explore the potential of AI in this space. While we're always cautious and respectful in how we use it, particularly when dealing with historical figures, we see real promise in blending



innovative technology with research and creative vision. BBC Studios and BBC Maestro are committed to innovating in a responsible way and we're always looking for opportunities that use this kind of advanced storytelling to educate, inspire, and entertain.

For more information on BBC Maestro's Agatha Christie Writing course go to:

www.bbcmaestro.com/courses/agatha-christie/writing

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