

CREATIVE WRITING SHORT FICTION PACKET

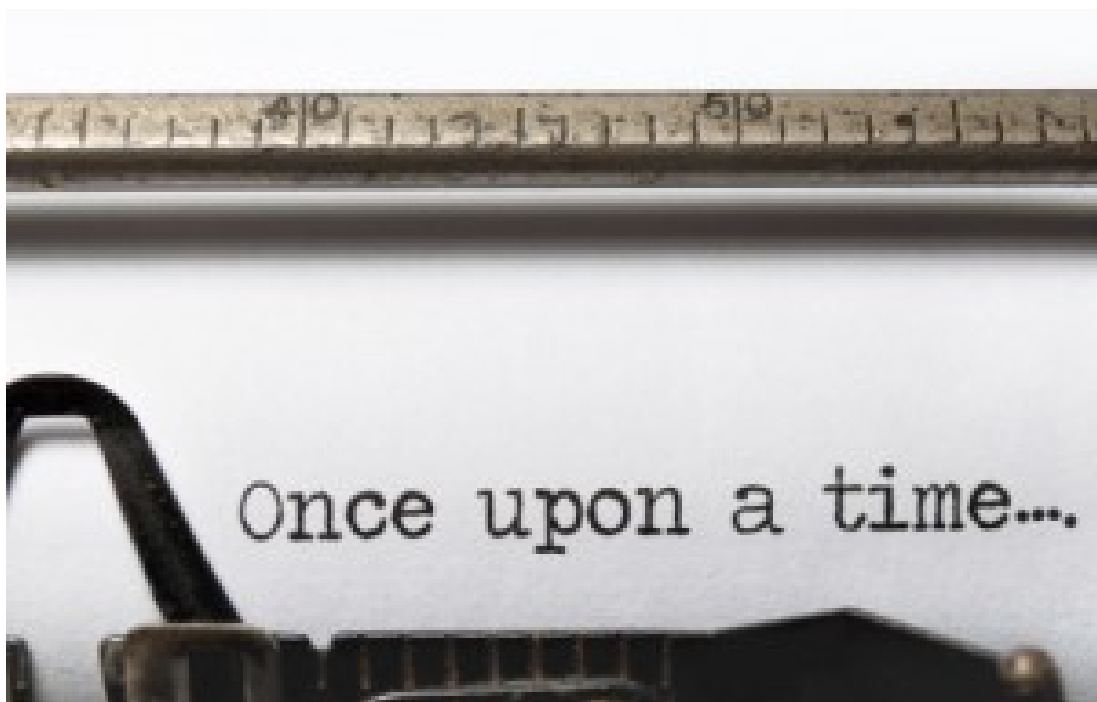


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FICTION RUBRIC

Name _____ Title _____

Criteria for Evaluation	Rating
Organization: The story has a beginning, middle and end and events follow in a logical sequence.	4 3 2 1 0
Plot: The plot is interesting and keeps the reader in suspense. Setting is clearly established.	4 3 2 1 0
Characters: Characters are well-developed through dialogue, action or thoughts. They are rounded and fully dimensional.	4 3 2 1 0
Point of view: One point of view is used consistently throughout the story. The point of view is ideal for the story submitted.	4 3 2 1 0
Conflict: Conflict is clearly established, developed and resolved in a way that makes sense. The story begins with conflict and captures the reader's attention.	4 3 2 1 0
Grammar/Usage/Mechanics: Correct grammar, sentence and paragraph structure, spelling, punctuation and capitalization is used for this grade level.	4 3 2 1 0
Dialogue: Dialogue is purposeful and moves the story along. The characters sound and act as expected.	4 3 2 1 0
Description: Appeals to the five senses. The author owns the scene and invites the reader in.	4 3 2 1 0
Pre-Writing: V-Diagram, character questionnaire, rough draft, etc.	4 3 2 1 0

Total points=_____/36 x 2.5 (90pts)

Percentage and Letter Grade=_____/_____

Short Story Writing Project: What is a Short Story?

By: [John Hewitt](#)

What is the definition of a short story?

I define a short story as a brief, focused fictional piece that contains at minimum the following key elements: plot, setting, characterization and some sort of resolution.

How long should a short story be?

In my opinion, the optimal length for a short story is between ten and fifty double-spaced pages of text. To me, anything longer than this is a novella (a short novel). Some other ways of defining the length of a short story are:

- Short stories are short enough to be read in a single sitting (from a half hour two hours). This definition can be traced back to Edgar Allen Poe, one of the first great short story writers.
- Short stories are less than 5000 words.
- Short stories are shorter than a novel.

How is a short story different from a novel?

In my opinion, the true difference between a short story and a novel is that a short story has a unity of theme, character and plot that is much more focused than a novel. Here are some other ways of stating the difference:

- Short stories tend to concentrate on one major event or conflict.
- Short stories have only one or two main characters.
- Short stories create a single specific effect.
- Short stories are more compressed than novels.
- Short stories do not have sub-plots.

What are the minimum elements of a short story?

In my opinion, a short story has all of the elements of a novel. Specifically, they tell a story, as the name suggests. One or more characters experience an event or conflict, and that event or conflict has an observable effect on the character or characters. This differentiates a short story from a character sketch, which serves only to illustrate or flesh out a character. It also differentiates a short story from anecdotes or parables, which are often amusing or demonstrate a lesson, but which do not necessarily call for a character to be changed in any real way.

What kind of short stories are there?

Short stories are as varied as novels. They can come from such genres as horror, fantasy, romance, erotica, adventure and science fiction. They can be action packed and exciting or introspective and philosophical. They can be romantic, sexy, satirical, cynical, bleak or optimistic. I tend to write what are called *literary short stories*. Literary short stories focus more on character and tone than plot. In most cases they avoid other genres. I also tend to include a lot of humor in my stories, often unintentionally. That is simply my style. Your style can be whatever you want it to be.

What are some good short stories that I can read online to get myself ready for this project?

The downside of the web is that most of the stories we can access by major authors are older, public domain stories. With that said, I found a nice variety of short stories to get people started.

- [The Tell-Tale Heart — Edgar Allan Poe](#)
- Hills Like White Elephants — Ernest Hemingway
- Cathedral — Raymond Carver
- [To Build a Fire — Jack London](#)
- [Eyes of a Blue Dog — Gabriel Garcia Marquez](#)
- [What You Pawn I Will Redeem — Sherman Alexie](#)
- Softcore — Joyce Carol Oates

Short Story Writing Project: How do you get started?

By: [John Hewitt](#)

One of the differences between a short story and a novel is that the idea for a short story doesn't have to be as complex. In the case of a novel, you will usually want to have a pretty good plan going in. You will want to know all about your protagonist and have a pretty clear idea of the plot. The reason for this is commitment. Before you commit to writing 50,000 words or more about a single topic, you will want to feel confident in your ability to finish.

In the case of a short story, your preparation does not have to be as thorough. It certainly CAN be. You are welcome to outline your stories and create character profiles in the same way that you would for a novel. Because the commitment for a short story is so much less though, you can feel free to sit down and just start typing away with whatever comes to mind. You only have to fill a few thousand words at the most, so you don't have that much to lose.

There is, of course, a middle ground between starting with no preparation and starting with a full outline and character sketches. Most people, when they sit down to write a short story have some idea of where they are going. They might have a character in mind, a situation they have been thinking about or even a setting that they find particularly interesting. Many short stories begin as a "what if" question. For example:

- What if a man inadvertently found himself stranded in an unfamiliar city just after the end of a serious relationship and decided to hole up in a hotel until he could figure out what to do with his life?
- What if two women met in a Las Vegas bar and figured out that they were both in town to marry the same man?
- What if a couple traveling across country decided to pass the time by playing a game of ever-escalating dares?

From a simple what if question, you can build a story. You may decide to map out character histories or plots, or you may dive right into the writing. With a short story, any of these options are viable. You just have figure out what works for you.

What methods do you use to prepare for a short story?

Step 1

Think of a story idea

-Short Story Starters

-First lines or Storymatic

Step 2

-Fiction Essentials

Step 3

-Character Questionnaire

Step 4

-“V” Diagram

Step 5

-Types of Beginnings and Endings

Step 6

-Have everything approved

Step 7

-Write

Fiction Essentials

- **Create a character with a desire**
 - **Ex.: Desires to find love**

- **Give that character two contrasting traits**
 - **Ex.: Good looking/shy**

- **What is your stories question?**
 - **Ex.: Will “Tom” find love? Notice how the question is based on the desire.**

- **Give the character obstacles/conflicts that will stop them from reaching their desire**
 - **Ex.: The girl that works with “Tom” finds him annoying. His jokes are bad, he dresses like it’s 1987, and he loves steak, but she is a vegetarian.**

Character Questionnaire

ORIGINS & FAMILY:

Name:

Nickname:

Reason for name:

Birthday:

Age:

Gender:

Place of birth:

Places lived since:

Parents' names, backgrounds, occupations:

Number of siblings:

Relationship with family (close? estranged?):

Happiest memory:

Childhood trauma:

Children of his/her own?:

If so, relationship with their mother/father?:

Age he/she gave birth/became a father:

PHYSICAL

Height:

Weight:

Build:

Nationality:

Disabilities (physical or mental, including mental illnesses):

Complexion (freckles, acne, skin tone, birth marks):

Face shape:

Distinguishing facial features:

Hair color:

Usual hair style:

Eye color:

Glasses? Contacts?:

Style of dress/typical outfit(s):

Typical style of shoes:

Health (is this person usually sick? or very resilient?):

Grooming (does she/he wear makeup? shower daily? wear only clean clothes? pluck her eyebrows?):

Jewelry? Tattoos? Piercings?:

Accent?:

Unique mannerisms/physical habits (bites nails, talks with hands, taps feet when restless):

Athletic?:

INTELLECT

Level of education (high school drop out, undergrad BA/BS, PhD, MD, etc.):

Level of self esteem:

Gifts/talents:

Shortcomings:

Style of speech (loud, mumblor, articulate, etc.):

"Left brain" or "right brain" thinker?:

Artistic?:

Mathematical?:

Makes decisions based mostly on emotions, or on logic?:

Neuroses:

Life philosophy:

Religious stance:

Cautious or daring?:

Most sensitive about/vulnerable to:

Optimist or pessimist?:

Extrovert or introvert?:

Level of comfort with technology:

RELATIONSHIPS

Current marital/relationship status:

Sexual orientation:

Past relationships:

Primary reason for being broken up with:

Primary reasons for breaking up with people:

Level of sexual experience:

Story of first kiss (if any—if not, how does he/she want it to happen?):

Story of loss of virginity (if any—if not, how does he/she want it to happen, if at all?):

A social person? (popular, loner, some close friends, makes friends and then quickly drops them):

Most comfortable around (person):

Oldest friend:

How does he/she think others perceive him/her?:

How do others actually perceive him/her?:

VOCATION

Profession:

Past occupations:

Passions:

Attitude towards current job:

Attitude towards current coworkers, bosses, employees:

Salary:

SECRETS

(Every character—no matter how minor—should always have secrets!)

Phobias:

Life goals:

Dreams:

Greatest fears:

Most ashamed of:

Most embarrassing thing ever to happen to him/her:

Compulsions:

Obsessions:

Secret hobbies:

Secret skills:

Past sexual transgressions:

Crimes committed (and was he/she caught? charged?):

What he/she most wants to change about his/her current life:

What he/she most wants to change about his/her physical appearance:

DETAILS/QUIRKS

Daily routine:

Night owl or early bird?:

Light or heavy sleeper?:

Favorite food:

Least favorite food:

Favorite book:

Least favorite book:

Favorite movie:

Least favorite movie:

Favorite song:

Least favorite song:

Coffee or tea?:

Crunchy or smooth peanut butter?:

Type of car he/she drives (or wishes he/she drove):

Lefty or righty?:

Favorite color:

Cusser?:

Smoker? Drinker? Drug user?:

Biggest regret:

Pets?:

10 Days of Character Building: Defining Characters By Their Roles

By: John Hewitt

One of your first considerations when creating a character should be the role you intend them to play in your story. Is the character a hero or a villain. If the character is a hero, is she a straightforward hero, a dark hero or a comic hero? Below is a short list of character types that borrows heavily from Christopher Vogler's book, [The Writers Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers](#). One thing to keep in mind is that you can have more than one character in the same role, and that characters often play more than one role.

Hero: Heroes come in many forms, but the essential trait of a hero is that at some point they make a major sacrifice in order to achieve a goal. A hero may be willing or unwilling, serious or comic, a leader or a loner.

Mentor: The essential trait of mentors is that they provide guidance and tools that the hero or heroes may need. The guidance that a mentor gives often varies in quality, but it is there nonetheless. A mentor can be anything from a slightly more experienced friend, a parent, or a boss to a former hero that succeeded or failed in their own quest.

Threshold Guardian: The essential trait of a threshold guardian is that they represent a barrier that the hero attempts to pass through. Threshold guardians are often minor villains, but may also be good or neutral people whose position happens to represent a barrier or a competing goal. Their job is to test the hero in some way.

Herald: A herald is a character whose information or actions alter the lives or goals of the hero. They may deliver a challenge or simply inform the hero of a change in the status quo. Heralds are often fairly minor characters.

Shapeshifter: A shapeshifter is a character whose role and even personality change dramatically throughout a story. They may start out as a villain but become an ally. They may begin as a romantic interest but become a villain. They may even wear a disguise and appear as more than person. In many cases, the hero's love interest is a shapeshifter,

Shadow: A shadow is the hero's dark counterpart. Shadows often serve as the central villains of a story, but may also serve as a cautionary victim. They often have many of the same traits as the hero, but have somehow become corrupted. They represent what can happen to the hero if she loses her way.

Trickster: The trickster represents mischief and misdirection. Tricksters often serve as comic relief, but can sometimes be threatening or heroic in their own ways. Mentors can also come in the guise of a trickster.

When creating a character based on their role in a story, you need to do more than simply decide what category (or categories) the character falls into, you need to decide what traits, skills, goals, flaws and experiences lead that character to take on that role. There are many ways to go about this. Here are a series of questions you can use to probe the character.

- What is my character's primary role?
- If my character has a secondary role, what is it?
- What personality traits lead my character to take that role?
- What skills does my character have that might help to fulfill that role?
- What are my character's goals and how do they relate to their role?

- How are my character's goals changed by their role?
- What flaws does my character have that influence their role?
- What experiences lead my character to take that role?

10 Days of Character Building: 12 Questions

By: [John Hewitt](#)

1. How would I describe this character in a single sentence?
2. What type of **personality** does this character have?
3. What is this character's purpose in the story?
4. How is this character different from any other character in the story?
5. What makes this character interesting to readers?
6. What does this character care most about?
7. What are this character's key physical traits?
8. What is the most important thing that has ever happened to this character?
9. What are the things this character cares the most about?
10. How does this character deal with problems?
11. What would it take to make this character change significantly?
12. What relationship does this character have with the other characters?

10 Days of Character Building: Brainstorming

By: [John Hewitt](#)

Brainstorming is a proven technique for exploring just about any idea. The process consists of quickly recording (without editing yourself) all of the options/descriptions/ideas /thoughts you have about a topic. You then sort through your items and pick the ones that work. This process can easily be applied to creating characters.

Step One

Get a large sheet of paper, notebook, a set of index cards or a computer application that you can use to write ideas on.

Step Two

Write down the information that you already know about the character. This could be as basic as the name and gender. The point is, get the things that you are sure about out of the way first.

Step Three

Begin writing down every possible potential detail that you can think of for the character. The details can be random and even contradictory. Your record every possible thing you can think of that seems to fit the character. Spend as much time as you need, but no less than fifteen minutes.

Step Four

Review the potential details and discard details that you are sure won't apply to your character. Separate the rest into details you are absolutely sure that you want, details that might work, and details that are still interesting but contradict each other.

Step Five

Create your profile of the character, grouping details into categories of similar items. Concentrate on the details you are sure about but give the other details a final review to decide which ones should be added.

I have purposely tried to leave the sort of details you should review as vague as possible. If you *really* need more guidance, however, you might want to start with appearance, friends, goals, quirks, flaws, problems, values, morals, history, possessions, skills, fears, favorites, enemies, education, finances, pets, and family. Don't feel as if you need to include all of these categories or limit yourself to these categories. Just write what comes to mind.

Eight Ways to Reveal Character by Dewey Hensley

Actions

As Kevin moved down the street his feet made a steady echo sound against the pavement. He whistled despite the loud rumble of the traffic and the car horns. When someone yelled out the window of his or her car to watch where he was going, he just waved back like he was watching a best friend heading home. He passed by the garbage on the sidewalk and the old woman pushing the shopping cart filled with newspaper, and continued to smile as he headed toward Cindy's house. Nothing could erase that smile from his face, not even the coldness of the streets he called home.

Dialogue

"I ain't gonna leave you here, Ma'am . . . not with you needin' help and all," Jimmy said as he walked back to his truck to get the jack. "I'd help anybody who needed it; my momma taught me better'en to just leave people. The good Lord'll make it up to me."
"I don't know . . .," Linda stuttered. She had barely rolled down her window to hear Jimmy when he had left his pick-up truck and offered help. "You know what they say about your kind . . ."

Physical Description

Other guys walking through the hallway were taller and even more handsome, but there was something about Billy Belaire. His arms swung loose at his side and his dark hair was long and pulled back behind his head, held by a rubber band. The dark jacket he wore was straight out of the local thrift shop, she could tell, but the way he wore it suggested a sense of pride, or at least a lack of caring what others thought about him.

Idiosyncracies

Junior tapped his fingertips against the table and looked at his watch constantly. His leg bounced up and down and he gulped the hot coffee as if it would hurry up his friend's arrival.

Objects/Possessions

Michael touched the locket around his neck and rolled it between his fingers. His mother had given him that locket, with her picture inside, when he had left to live with his father. What would she think of him now?

Reactions

Tony's words stung Laura. It wasn't what she expected to hear. They had been dating for over a month now, how could he do this to her? How could he break her heart? All three of their dates had been fun; he had said so himself.

As Tony watched the floodgate of her eyes begin to open he looked at his watch. Jeez, I hope I can make it to the gym on time.

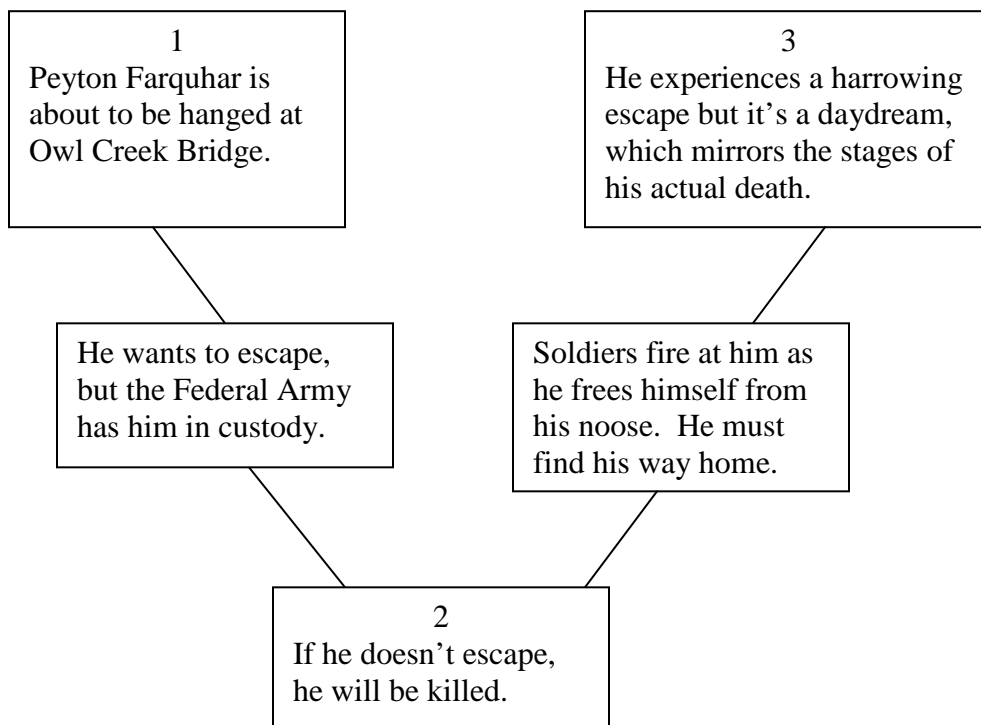
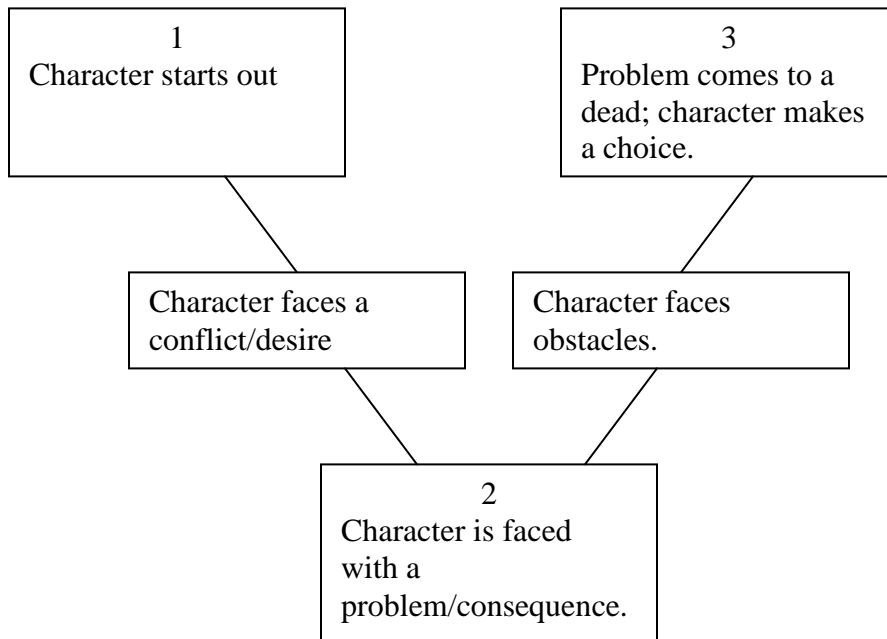
Thoughts

He began to remember when he was a freshman in high school. The seniors really thought they were something back then, always trying to play their little pranks on the ninth graders. He knew at that moment he couldn't be one of those kinds of people. He walked over to Jeff and Larry to tell them it was time to stop.

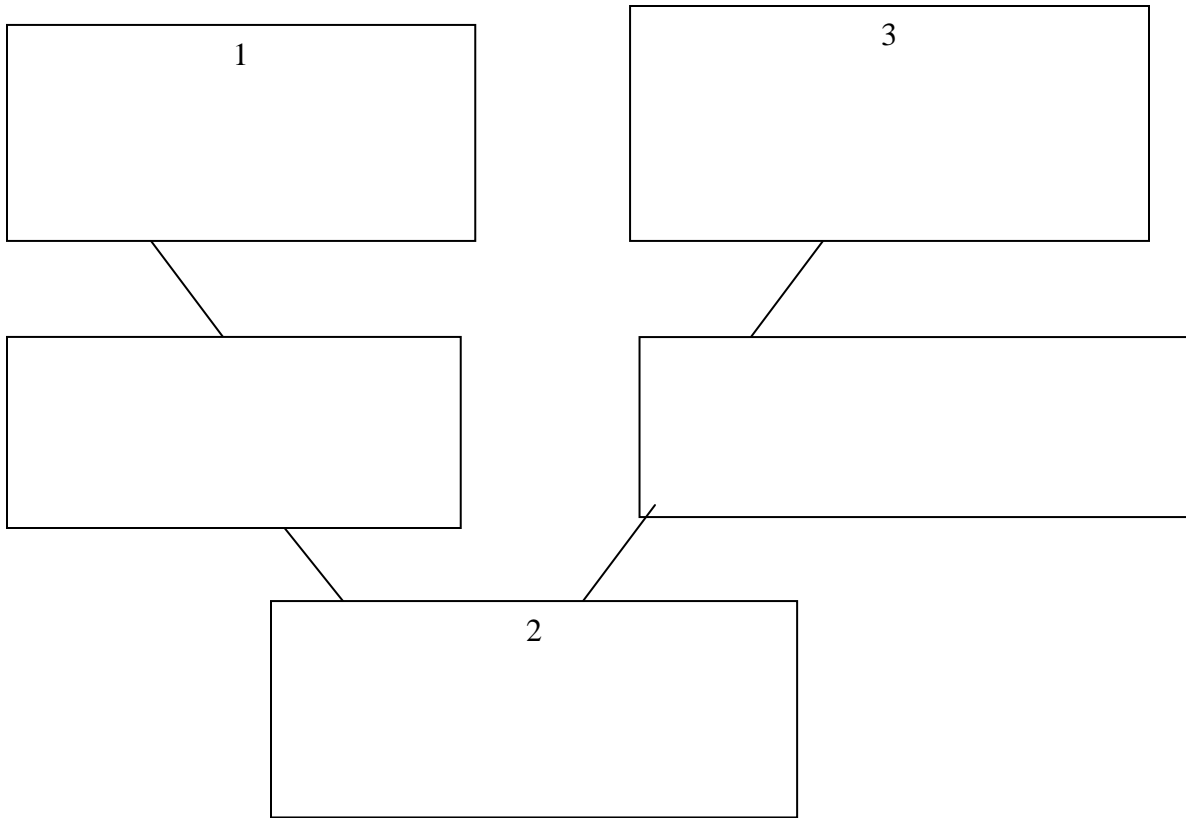
Background Information

Miles knew what it meant to be alone. When he was a child growing up his father had been in the military. They had traveled from Florida, to Georgia, to California, to Kentucky. He had rarely had a friend for very long. By the leap from California he had already decided having friends was a risk; the fewer the friends, the easier it was to leave. This philosophy had made him a real outsider at Glenview High School. In the six months he had been there he had not really made a single friend but as he stood there staring at Sheila, he realized that just might have to change

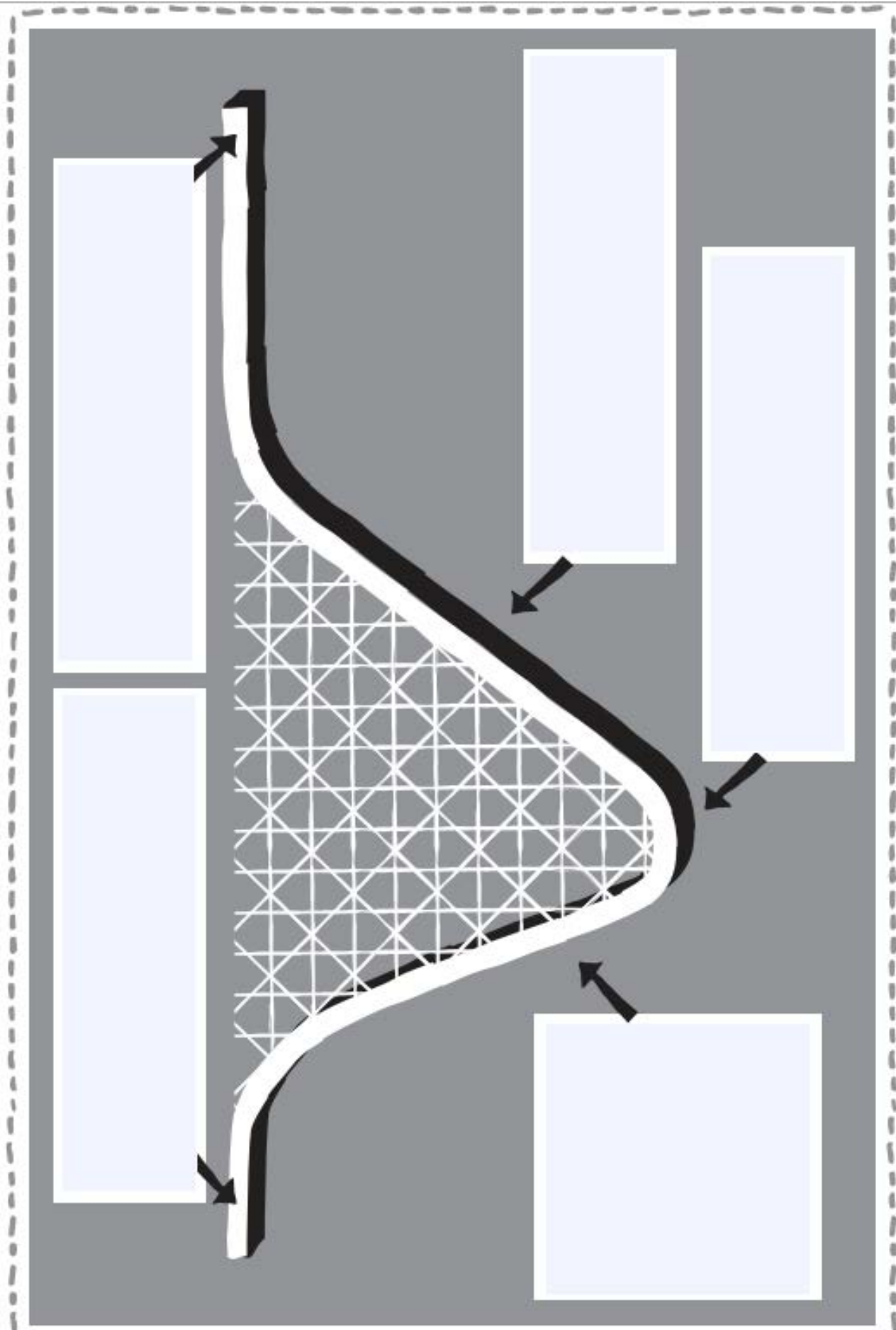
“V” Diagram-Use the “V” diagram to sketch out the movement of your story. Identify the three most important points in your story’s beginning, middle, and end, and write them into a “V” diagram like the one on the next page.



“V” Diagram-



Plot Rollercoaster



Types of Beginnings:

- **Setup**-Begin with a background sketch or background information-Exposition. This can cover anything from the setting to the main character to the inciting incident. Give the readers credit and do not lay out everything for them.

In the town of Vladimir lived a young merchant named Ivan Dmitrich Aksionov. He had two shops and a house of his own.

Aksionov was a handsome, fair-haired, curly-headed fellow, full of fun, and very fond of singing. When quite a young man he had been given to drink, and was riotous when he had too much; but after he married he gave up drinking, except now and then.

One summer Aksionov was going to the Nizhny Fair, and as he bade good-bye to his family, his wife said to him, "Ivan Dmitrich, do not start to-day; I have had a bad dream about you."

- **ANALYSIS**-We learn name, location, and occupation. We find out how successful he is. We obtain his looks and personality. Essential facts are listed. He doesn't list the first days of kindergarten. We are immediately curious about the wife's dream
- **In Media Res**-Latin for "in the middle of things". Jump-start the action without any delay. Background information comes later. Readers will have to work a bit to find out what is going on.

The night was hot and overcast, the sky red, rimmed with the lingering sunset of mid summer. They sat at the open window, trying to fancy the air was fresher there. The trees and shrubs of the garden stood stiff and dark; beyond in the roadway a gas-lamp burnt, bright orange against the hazy blue of the evening. Farther were the three lights of the railway signal against the lowering sky. The man and woman spoke to one another in low tones.

"He does not suspect?" said the man, a little nervously.

"Not he," she said peevishly, as though that too irritated her.

"He thinks of nothing but the works and the prices of fuel. He has no imagination, no poetry."

"None of these men of iron have," he said sententiously. "They have no hearts."

- **ANALYSIS**-There is a little setup in the brief description of the night, but we're not really sure where we are, what's going on, or who the two people are who begin to speak. We don't know their names or the exact nature of their relationship, but we get the sense that they're having an affair. There's another man involved, probably the man getting cheated on.

This opening gets our interest because we don't know all of the details yet. There is an air of mystery.

- **Flash Forward**-Start with the finish if you want to establish what is at stake. Take the most dramatic moment of the story and serve it up front to the reader. The story becomes less smooth at times and less believable when you mess with chronology.

True!-nervous-very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses-not destroyed-not dulled them.

Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken! And observe how healthily-how calmly I can tell you the whole story.

It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night. Object there was none. Passion there was none. I love the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! Yes, it was this!! He had the eye of a vulture—a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees—very gradually—I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever.

- **ANALYSIS**-The jittery narrators spills the beans right at the start. We know that the old man is dead, and we know the narrator did it. This is a great hook. We want to find out how he killed the man and how the events unfolded.

Types of Endings:

- **Explicit**-Tells readers exactly where things stand. No questions will remain. The question of your story has been answered.
- **Implicit**-Readers have to do a little work. The answer to the question in the story is implied, but there may be a lot of room for interpretation. For example, if the main character was trying to work up the nerve to confront a bully, in an implicit ending he may spend the last paragraph forcefully tying his sneakers. Although we're pretty sure he's found the courage he needed, the writer doesn't come right out and tell us.
- **Twist**-Everything you've set up to make readers believe in one view of the world gets turned on its head. There is a surprise ending. For example, a young wife has cut off her hair to raise money to buy her husband a chain for his watch. At the end of the story, we learn that the husband has sold his watch to buy combs for his wife's hair. There is order, irony, and closure.
- **Tie-back**-Connects to the beginning of a story. Provides continuity. For example, the lead character's heart trouble is described in the beginning, then at the end she dies of heart disease.
- **Unresolved**-Questions do not have to be answered. For example, you might have two horsemen bringing a package to the king across thousands of miles of prairie. Along the way the horsemen may bicker, feud, and ultimately reconcile. At the story's end, we may not see the meeting with the king or even find out what was in the package. It may not matter, however. This type of story really lies with the characters and their relationship.
- **Dialogue and monologue**-You can end with characters speaking to each other. "A Good Man is Hard to Find" by Flannery O'Connor employs a dialogue ending. The final five lines of the story are an exchange between two supporting characters.
- **Long view**-You can jump ahead ten or twenty years for your conclusion. These are usually better for novels.

Fifteen Writing Exercises

Writing exercises are a great way to increase your writing skills and generate new ideas. They give you perspective and help you break free from old patterns and crutches. To grow as a writer, you need to sometimes write without the expectation of publication or worry about who will read your work. Don't fear imperfection. That is what practice is for.

Task: Pick one exercise to complete this week.

1. **Pick ten people** you know and write a one-sentence description for each of them. Focus on what makes each person unique and noteworthy.
2. **Record five minutes** of a talk radio show. Write down the dialog and add narrative descriptions of the speakers and actions as if you were writing a scene.
3. **Write a 500-word biography** of your life. Think about the moments that were most meaningful to you and that shaped you as a person.
4. **Write your obituary.** List all of your life's accomplishments. You can write it as if you died today or fifty or more years in the future.
5. **Write a 300-word description** of your bedroom. Think about the items you have or the other elements of your room that give the best clues about who you are or who you want others to think you are.
6. **Write an interview with yourself**, an acquaintance, a famous figure or a fictional character. Do it in the style of an appropriate (or inappropriate) publication such as *Time*, *People*, *Rolling Stone*, *Huffington Post*, *Politico*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Seventeen* or *Maxim*.
7. **Read a news site, a newspaper** or a supermarket tabloid. Scan the articles until you find something that interests you and use it as the basis for a scene or story.
8. **Write a diary or a blog of a fictional character.** Write something every day for two weeks.
9. **Rewrite a passage from a book**, a favorite or at least favorite, in a different style such as noir, gothic romance, pulp fiction or horror story.
10. **Pick an author** you like, though not necessarily your favorite. Make a list of what you admire about the way the author writes. Do this from memory first, without rereading the author's work. After you've made your list, reread some of the author's work and see if you missed anything or if your answers change. Analyze what elements of that author's writing style you can add to your own, and what elements you should not or cannot add. Remember that your writing style is your own. Only try to think of ways to add to your style. Never try to mimic someone else for more than an exercise or two.
11. **Take a piece of your writing** that you have written in first person and rewrite it in third person, or vice-versa. You can also try this exercise changing tense, narrators, or other stylistic elements. Don't do this with an entire book. Stick to shorter works. Once you commit to a style for a book, never look back or you will spend all of your time rewriting instead of writing.

12. **Try to identify your earliest childhood memory.** Write down everything you can remember about it. Rewrite it as a scene. You may choose to do this from your current perspective or from the perspective you had at that age.
13. **Remember an old argument** you had with another person. Write about the argument from the point of view of the other person. Remember that the idea is to see the argument from their perspective, not your own. This is an exercise in voice, not in proving yourself right or wrong.
14. **Write a 200-word or longer description of a place.** You can use any and all sensory descriptions but sight. You can describe what it feels like, sounds like, smells like and even tastes like. Try to write the description in such a way that people will not miss the visual details.
15. **Sit in a restaurant or a crowded area** and write down the snippets of conversation you hear. Listen to the people around you. Listen to how they talk and to what words they use. Once you have done this, you can practice finishing their conversations. Write your version of what comes next in the conversation. Match their style.

Point of View

What should I consider when choosing a Point of View?

- **1. Who is speaking: a narrator or a character?**
- **2. Whose eyes are seeing the events of the story unfold?**
- **3. Whose thoughts does the reader have access to?**
- **4. From what distance are the events being viewed?**

First Person

- A story told from first-person POV is narrated by a character in the story, usually the protagonist. The narrator tells the story of what *I* did. The character is our eyes
- Ex.-I saw my wife laughing as she parked the car. I saw her get out of the car and shut the door. She was still wearing a smile. Just amazing. She went around to the other side of the car to where the blind man was already starting to get out. This blind man, feature this, he was wearing a full beard! A beard on a blind man! Too much, I say.
- Advantages: The narrator's voice is intimate. We can learn a lot about who they are as a person.
- Disadvantages: The writer is stuck in the narrator's skin. You're not free to wander off anywhere. You're limited by the character's knowledge. Can a six year old narrate a story with full understanding?

First Person Peripheral

- First Person: Peripheral-Story is told from the eyes of a character who is not the protagonist or antagonist. If there is a couple getting divorced and they both believe that they are the victim, you may show the story through the eyes and words of their son who might see things more fairly.

Unreliable First Person

- The Unreliable First Person-We can't trust a narrator. What if the author is autistic, young, a psychopath, a jealous lover, a habitual liar.
- "The Tell-Tale Heart" by Edgar Allen Poe

Third Person Single Vision

- The narrator is not a character in the story. This is a voice created by the author to tell the story.
- [Dixon] tried to flail his features into some sort of response to humour. Mentally, however, he was making a different face and promising himself he'd make it actually when next alone. He'd draw his lower lip in under his top teeth and by degrees retract his chin as far as possible, all this while dilating his eyes and nostrils. By these means he would, he was confident, cause a deep and dangerous flush to suffuse his face.
- Advantages: The narrator can be smart and informative.
- Disadvantages: They must be present for everything that takes place in the story.

Third Person Omniscient

- Third Person: Omniscient-God's-eye view. Zeus at the top the mountain. All knowing narrator.
- Ex. Eudora Welty's "No Place for You, My Love"
- They were strangers to each other, both fairly well strangers to the place, now seated side by side at luncheon-a party combined in a free-and-easy way when the friends he and she were with recognized each other across Galatoire's. The time was a Sunday in summer-those hours of afternoon that seem Time Out in New Orleans.
- Advantages-We get inside the head of every character
- Disadvantages-You have to keep us informed about every detail of every character

How Setting Influences Story

By: John Hewitt

Most good stories are very heavily influenced by their settings. Consider this simple story setup. A young couple has just gotten married. At the reception, the bridesmaid reveals that she and the best man had drunken fling the night before the wedding. As they head off on their honeymoon together, the bride and the groom must work through this crisis or their marriage will end before it has truly even begun.

This is a story that could happen virtually anywhere, and at almost any time in history. It could be a comedy, melodrama or tragedy. All of the elements are there for any sort of story you can imagine. The overt crisis (though not the underlying conflict) is clear and the stakes are equally clear. Consider though, the effect that setting would have on this story.

Setting #1: 2008. The wedding took place at a posh hotel in Chicago, The bride and groom now face a long plane ride to Hawaii, where they have secured a small villa right on the beach. While they are in Hawaii they are scheduled to attend a luau, an island tour and snorkeling in a private lagoon.

Setting #2: 1988. The couple were married at a Las Vegas chapel by an Elvis impersonator. The reception was held at the Circus Circus hotel buffet, which is the hotel they will be staying at, surrounded by their family and friends, for the next several days. They have tickets to see Rich Little and have booked a helicopter tour of the Las Vegas Strip.

Setting #3: 1954. Rural Virginia. The couple were married in a large church wedding with the reception at the Elk's Lodge. For their honeymoon they are driving down to a small motel in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Their car is a ten-year old Cadillac.

Obviously these are rudimentary setting details, but I think you can get an idea that the three different settings lend themselves to dramatically different effects. A posh villa in Hawaii will influence the characters much differently than a garish casino or a small-town motel. The morals and general atmosphere of the 1950s, the 1980s and the 2000s are very different. The economics of the three settings are also dramatically different. The feeling of being surrounded by family or being isolated during a crisis has influences the characters.

The setting can either have a weak or a strong influence on the plot and the themes of a story, depending on how the writer uses it. Here are a few ideas for choosing your settings:

- Choose settings that matter to the characters
- Choose settings that can influence the action
- Choose settings that you know enough about to describe comfortably
- Choose settings that will be of interest to the readers
- Take the time to describe the settings in enough detail for the readers to have a clear idea of where the characters are.

Ping Pong Dialogue vs. Descriptive Dialogue

Ping Pong Dialogue

“Did you see that?” Tony asked excitedly.

“I sure did,” Janet replied quickly.

“I have never seen anything like that before,” Tony firmly said.

Janet responded, “Me either. What do you think we ought to do?”

“The first thing we should do is get our butts out of here!” he yelled.

“I agree with that.”

They took off in the car back toward the town away from the lights they had just seen.

Descriptive Dialogue

“Did you see that?” Tony yelled as he slammed on the brakes of his Mercury. Janet was nearly thrown into the windshield, but Tony’s strong hand against her sleeve held her back. The bright lights from the night sky lit up the car like a neon sign.

“How could I miss it?” she stuttered. Both of them stared out the window toward the hillside. Covered Bridge Road was mostly farmland and hills; it wound like a black ribbon from Prospect to Crestwood. Few cars ever traveled it, especially at night. Now, with bright lights hovering mysteriously over the hill and the car, it was as bright as daylight. Every crook and crevice of the road was illuminated.

Tony pulled Janet across the seat closer to him. She could smell his aftershave and feel the vinyl of his varsity basketball jacket against her bare arms.

“I have never seen anything like that before,” he whispered.

“Me either,” she replied. Her voice was high pitched from fear. “What do you think we ought to do?”

Suddenly Tony grabbed the gearshift next to her leg. “The first thing we are going to do is get our butts out of here!”

Janet agreed. Tony quickly shifted into reverse and the car began to move backwards. Janet could smell the burning rubber of the tires as Tony turned the car around and headed back toward town.

“You Talkin’ to Me?” What Are the Rules for Quotation Marks?

Use quotation marks to show the exact words of a character.

“I don’t know when he will be back,” Jeff said as he stared down at Cindy’s feet. She bent down slightly to catch his eyes. “Yes, you do, Jeff. Don’t you lie to me.”

New speaker means new paragraph.

I knew about Frankie and all the trouble he had at Glendale. He had spent more time in detention than Algebra class. “So, Frankie, are you trying to be the valedictorian or what?” I whispered to him as he sat there in the library staring intently at a book of poetry. He did not reply at first. He just remained focused. I stood up and shook my head. “You sure are different than what I expected,” I said.

“People change,” he said. “Maybe you should think about it.”

“Yeah, right,” I mumbled as I made my way toward the library doors.

Quotation marks stop when the direct words stop. They start up again when the direct quote begins again.

“I can’t tell you,” Paula whispered, “because this could be really dangerous.”

Punctuation goes inside the quotation marks in dialogue.

She growled across the room, “Shut up.”

Don’t use quotation marks with indirect quotes.

William said he wanted to stop the violence, but he was too late.

Other times to use quotation marks . . .

To place emphasis on a word or phrase: Johnny was too “uptown” for the rest of us.

To indicate a short story title or title of a poem, song, or chapter:

“Feedsack”

“To an Athlete Dying Young”

“Stowawitch”

The name of the book or cd these came from would be underlined or italicized.



Writing Really Good Dialogue

You're doing great! You've got some original characters, an action-packed plot, and some settings like no other. In fact, you're moving so fast we're having a hard time keeping up with you. Give us a minute so we can eat a delicious energy bar.

(Cue sounds of delicious munching.)

All right! Now all that's left is learning how to write dialogue. **Dialogue**, as you probably know, is what happens when two or more characters speak to one another. We experience dialogue all the time in our everyday lives.

Here's some dialogue you might've heard today. Notice how the author indents each new quote and places quotation marks after the end marks:

"Hey, dude. How are you?" Isobel said.
"I'm really good. Thanks for asking. And you?" Gabe said.
"Good, thanks," Isobel said.

Of course, this kind of dialogue is important. If we didn't say hello and ask people how they were doing, we might lose a lot of friends, fast. But in a novel, long scenes of daily dialogue end up being boring. Readers want to hear characters make interesting or exciting declarations, or challenge each other, or reveal the whereabouts of hidden treasure.

In a novel, dialogue should do one, if not all, of the following:

1. Reveal characters' relationships to one another.
2. Move the story forward.
3. Increase the tension.

It should also include indents and quotation marks in the right spots. You may have seen dialogue that does not follow this rule in other places, such as in a comic book or IM chat. When you write a novel, however, follow the rules so that readers won't get confused.

Here's a couple of example exchanges to illustrate each:

Dialogue that shows the relationship between characters:

"What's the capital of Spain?" Jerry asked, pausing over his crossword puzzle.

Susan looked up from her book and rolled her eyes. "Madrid, duh."

"Why are you so sarcastic all the time?" Jerry slammed his pencil on table. He looked like he was going to cry. "I don't think I can take much more of this."

Jerry and Susan have a tense and unhappy relationship. It's clear from this exchange that they've probably known each other for a while, and that Susan treats Jerry with disrespect. Jerry's reaction to Susan in this exchange shows that he has been putting up with Susan's behavior for too long and is at his wit's end. We've learned about how these two characters interact—and a lot about who they are—all through a few simple lines of dialogue.

Dialogue that moves the story forward:

The phone rang, and Jerry picked it up. "Hello?"

There was a moment of silence on the other end.

"Is this Jerry Simmons?" a male voice asked.

"Yeah. Who is this?"

The man paused. Jerry could hear him take a deep breath.

"Jerry, my name is Dave. I'm your brother"

"If this is a prank, it isn't funny," Jerry said. "My family died a long time ago."

"Not your whole family," Dave said. Jerry hung up the phone.

Right away, we want to know who this Dave guy is, if he's telling the truth, and why Jerry hung up on him. Basically, we want to know what will happen next. In fact, this is a great inciting incident. The discovery of a long-lost sibling is certain to move your story forward in interesting ways.

"Dude, totally!"

In your own novel, you might think about the ways an accent, some slang, or funny quirks of speech can really work to enhance and define your characters. A character that says "Shiver me timbers!" all the time is certainly a different person than a character that says "Dude, totally!"

Dialogue that increases the tension:

"Dave!" Jerry shouted. "We've got to get away from here! The building's gonna blow!"
"We've got to go back!" Dave screamed.
"Why?"
Dave pointed at the roof. "Susan's still up there!"

Talk about tense. Are Dave and Jerry going to save Susan? It's a matter of life and death here, and this little exchange of dialogue has us wanting more.

**Dialogue Tags
Other Than "Said":**

acknowledged
admitted
agreed
answered
argued
asked
barked
begged
bellowed
blustered
bragged
complained
confessed
cried
demanded
denied
giggled
hinted
hissed
howled
interrupted
laughed
lied
mumbled
muttered
nagged
pleaded
promised
questioned
remembered
replied
requested
roared
sang
screamed
screeched
shouted
sighed
snarled
sobbed
threatened
warned
whimpered
whined
whispered
wondered
yelled

12 Exercises for Improving Dialogue

By: [John Hewitt](#)

Dialog (also spelled dialogue) is one of the most difficult aspects of writing to master.

There are many pitfalls you must try to avoid, such as:

Stilted Language: Dialog that does not sound like natural speech.

Filler: Dialog that does not further the scene and does not deepen your understanding of the characters.

Exposition: Dialog that has the character explain the plot or repeat information for the benefit of the audience.

Naming: Having one character use another character's name to establish identity. People almost never say other people's names back to them, and if they do it is a character trait typical of a used car salesman.

Overuse of Modifiers: Too many dialog modifiers such as shouted, exclaimed, cried, whispered, stammered, opined, insinuated, hedged and a million others. Modifiers such as this can sometimes be useful, but are often annoying and used as a crutch for poorly designed dialogue.

Here are a few exercises to help you master dialog as a tool for writing:

1. Write down the things you say over the course of the day. Examine your own speech patterns. You don't have to get every word, but you may find that you say less than you think and that your statements are surprisingly short. You might also find that you rarely speak in complete sentences.
2. Find a crowded place such as a restaurant, a bar, or a shopping mall and write down snippets of the conversations you hear. Avoid trying to record whole conversations, just follow along for a brief exchange and then listen for your next target. If you are worried about looking suspicious, you might want to purchase a Palm Pilot, Handspring Visor or other hand-held PDA device. These handy spy tools make it look like you are conducting business or playing with your favorite electronic toy rather than eavesdropping.
3. Test responses to the same question. Think of a question that will require at least a little thought, and ask it of several different people. Compare their responses. Remember that you are focused on their words. Write them down as soon as you can.
4. Record several different TV shows. Some choices include: sitcom, news, drama, talk show, infomercial, sporting event, etc.). Write down a transcript using just the dialog and people's names. If you don't know the names, just use a description such as announcer or redheaded woman. You can also transcribe two shows of the same genre, using one show you like and one you dislike. Compare dialog between the fiction and non-fiction programming you recorded. Look for such things as greetings, descriptions of physical actions, complete sentences, slang, verbal ticks (Such as like, you know, uhhhh, well, etc.). Compare how these dialog crutches change according to the show format and quality.
5. Rewrite one or more of the shows in exercise 4 as prose, trying to recreate the show as accurately as possible. Note how easy or difficult it is to work in the entire dialog from the show. Does it seem to flow naturally and read well or does it get in your way. Rewrite again eliminating any dialog you feel is unnecessary. Try not to change any dialog though until your final draft. Work with what you have. Remember that you don't necessarily have to rewrite the whole show. Do enough to be sure you have the feeling for it.

6. Rewrite one of the transcripts from exercise 4 using as much of the dialog as possible, but changing the scene in as many ways as possible. Change the setting, change the people's intent, and change the tone. See how easy or difficult it is to give the same words a different intent. Again, do enough to be sure you have the feeling for it.
7. Write the dialog for a scene without using any modifiers. Just write down a conversation as it goes along naturally. After you have completed the dialog, add narrative description, but not dialog tags such as said, shouted or ordered. Instead, try to work the dialog into the action as a logical progression of the statements. Finally, add any dialog tags that are absolutely necessary, and keep them simple such as said, told, or asked. Again, only put them in if you can find not other options. Compare this to the previous dialog you have written and see what you like or dislike about the changes.
8. Write a scene in which one person tells another person a story. Make sure that you write it as a dialog and not just a first person narrative, but clearly have one person telling the story and the other person listening and asking questions or making comments. The purpose of this scene will be both to have the story stand alone as a subject, and to have the characters' reactions to the story be the focal point of the scene.
9. Write a scene in which one person is listening to two other people have an argument or discussion. For example, a child listening to her parents argue about money. Have the third character narrate the argument and explain what is going on, but have the other two provide the entire dialog. It is not necessary to have the narrator understand the argument completely. Miscommunication is a major aspect of dialog.
10. Write a conversation between two liars. Give everything they say a double or triple meaning. Never state or indicate through outside description that these two people are lying. Let the reader figure it out strictly from the dialog. Try not to be obvious, such as having one person accuse the other of lying. That is too easy.
11. Write a conversation in which no character speaks more than three words per line of dialog. Again, avoid crutches such as explaining everything they say through narration. Use your narration to enhance the scene, not explain the dialog.
12. Write a narrative or scripted scene in which several characters are taking an active role in the conversation. This can be a difficult aspect of dialog to master, because with each additional character, the reader or audience must be able to keep track of the motivations and interests of the individuals involved. This can be especially difficult in prose, where the time between one character speaking and the next can be interrupted by action or description. See how many characters you can sustain within the scene and still have it make sense and be engaging.

Are Your Characters Well Spoken, or is it Just You?

By: [John Hewitt](#)

How Articulate Are Your Characters?

Most writers are articulate. Because they work with the written word on a daily or near daily basis, and because they have a love of language, most writers express themselves well. Just because a writer is articulate, however, doesn't mean that a character should be articulate. Adjusting your language to suit a character, especially in dialog, is vital to creating a realistic depiction of that character and vital for differentiating that character from others in the story.

Words Reflect Background

When most people think about writing realistic dialog, they think about things such as regional accents and vocal patterns. Those things are important, but it is just as important to adjust your dialog to the specific background of the characters. For example, people know that there is a Boston accent, but most people don't realize that the Boston accent varies greatly according to where in the city that person lives and what their economic and educational background is. Not everyone from Boston sounds the same. A well-educated Boston lawyer is not going to sound like a poorly educated bartender at a local dive.

Don't Distract the Reader

Another mistake people make in tailoring dialog is to go too far into an accent and ignore such things as speech rhythms or word choices. J.K. Rowling, for example, uses very exaggerated accents. In the early books, before the story got particularly dark, the exaggerated accents seemed to work reasonably well considering the stories were fantasy and the intended audience was mostly children. By the final books, however, when the story was very dark and the intended audience was much wider, the exaggerated accents seemed much more unsuitable and distracting.

Unique, Not Extreme

The key with dialog, especially with accents, is to make each person's style differentiated enough that they sound unique and identifiable, but not so extreme that people are paying more attention to the words being said than they are to the intent of the statement. Try to think of what is distinctive about the way each person speaks, and why their word choices make sense for them.

Some Things to Consider

- Is the character concise or long winded?
- Does the character use words they don't fully understand?
- Does the character have influence from different regions (such as a person from Texas now living in California or vice-versa)?
- Is the character used to public speaking?
- Does the character have any particular patterns or phrases that stand out?
- Is there something about the character's role (Boss, employee, teacher, parent) that makes a difference in the way that character speaks in different situations?