



LESSONS: LESSON PLAN

This Lesson at a Glance:

Grade Band: 5-8

Integrated Subjects:

- Theater
- Language Arts

Materials:

For the teacher:

 [Standards for Rubrics](#)

For the student:

 [Building a Plot](#)

 [Developing a Story](#)

Related WebLinks:

[ReadWriteThink](#)

Targeted Standards:

The National Standards For Arts Education:

Theater (5-8)

Standard 1: Script writing by the creation of improvisations and scripted scenes based on personal experience and heritage, imagination, literature, and history

Theater (5-8)

Standard 2: Acting by developing basic acting skills to portray characters who interact in improvised and scripted scenes

Theater (5-8)

Standard 3: Designing by developing environments for improvised and scripted scenes

Other National Standards:

Language Arts III (6-8)

Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process

Language Arts III (6-8)

Standard 2: Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing

Language Arts III (6-8)

Standard 3: Uses grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions

Language Arts III (6-8)

Fiction, Plotting the Story

Part of the Unit: Fiction Writing

Lesson Overview:

In this lesson, students explore how the elements of fiction can enhance and develop their writing. Students investigate plot as an element of fiction. They consider how details and events are selected and arranged to contribute to the outcome of the story.

Length of Lesson:

Three 45-minute periods

Instructional Objectives:

Students will:

- demonstrate the ability to write for the purpose of expressing personal ideas.
- explore plot as an element of fiction
- write for a variety of audiences: peers, teachers, parents, school-wide community, and beyond.

Supplies:

- Ruled paper
- Pens and/or pencils

Instructional Plan:

Establish with students that plot, one of the elements of fiction, is the sequence of events in a story. (For the elements of fiction, see the ReadWriteThink lesson, Book Report Alternative: The Elements of Fiction.) Plot is the writer's plan for what happens when and to whom. It centers on some internal or external conflict. In a carefully constructed plot, details and events are selected and arranged in a cause-effect relationship so that each is a necessary link leading to the outcome of the story. The events usually follow a pattern: a situation is established; a conflict or problem arises; certain events bring about a climax, or a character takes a decisive action; and the conflict is resolved (resolution).

Conflict

In the plot, the writer develops a conflict—a struggle between opposing forces. It creates tension and suspense in a story. Sometimes there may be only one main conflict. Sometimes characters may be involved in

prescribed order

↳ Falling Action / Denouement

hrs staff pack pg. 2-3

Standard 4: Gathers and uses information for research purposes

several conflicts.

ICON LEGEND:

- = part of the current spotlight
- = opens in a new window
- = kid-friendly
- = printable
- = interactive
- = audio
- = video
- = images

- **External Conflict:** In this type of conflict, a character struggles with some outside person or force. One character may oppose another character. Sometimes a character struggles against a force such as a blizzard, a flood, poverty, etc.
- **Internal Conflict:** In this type of conflict, a struggle takes place within the mind of a character. For example, the character might struggle with himself or herself to do the right thing.

Climax

The climax, or turning point, is the high point of interest or suspense in a story. It takes place when the reader experiences the greatest emotional response to a character's problem, when the situation is such that the conflict must be resolved one way or another, or when a character starts to take a decisive action to end the conflict.

Resolution

The resolution is the point in the plot at which the loose ends are tied up. The conflict is resolved and closure occurs.

Types of Plots

A plot moves a story from point A to point Z. Some commonly used plot patterns that move stories include the following:

- from problem to solution
- from mystery to solution
- from conflict to peace
- from danger to safety
- from confusion to order
- from dilemma to decision
- from ignorance to knowledge
- from questions to answers

Ask students the following discussion questions:

Think about the plots of some of your favorite books. Can you pick out which plot pattern or patterns are at work in each of them? Do your favorite books tend to have similar plot patterns or a wide variety of them? Why do you think a certain type of plot appeals to you?

General Guidelines for Plot Building

(These are also included in the accompanying Building a Plot handout).

- Let characters influence the plot. Think about the characters in a particular situation, and plot ideas will emerge. Suspense author Andre Jute says, "Plot flows most easily and genuinely from character . . . and the actions characters undertake because of the relationships they have and the frictions built into such contact. On the other hand, if you first work out the plot and then simply people it with characters who can carry out the actions you've dreamed up, your characters will seem wooden and unreal."

Discuss/Notes

For students difficulty choosing general plot - Discuss "Developing a Story" options - they can choose a story part to build remainder

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- Avoid too much plot. Don't create a crisis every two pages, too many characters and story lines, characters that are "in action" so much they do not have time to think, etc. Many writers go back through a first draft and look for story lines, characters, and plot events they can cut to improve the story's focus on the theme.
- Know when to start the story. The action of your story should begin at the point at which the characters start moving toward the end of it. For example, a story about a family coping with the breakup of the parents' marriage might begin on the day one parent moves out.
- Let readers wait. Anticipation is part of the fun for readers. Readers get involved because they want to know what happens to the characters. If you answer that question too soon, you may have to dream up another plot to finish the story.
- Pace the plot. Think of your plot as having a kind of wave motion: with ups and downs, action sequences and calm scenes (sitting, talking, thinking, etc.), and tension that builds up, comes to a crest, and then settles down. This kind of pacing sets your reader up for the final climax.
- Let your characters grow. In most stories, plot is about how life affects people or characters. Between the beginning and the end of your story, your main characters should learn, grow, and be in some way affected by the events they have just lived through.

Have students complete one of the writing activities on the accompanying Developing a Story handout.

Instruct the students to share their stories with the class. The students will select one story to turn into a small play. (If necessary, divide the class into small groups and let them work on adapting different stories.) Allow students to create simple costumes and props to support the production. This can be done in class or at home. If possible, arrange for the students to perform the play for a kindergarten or lower-grade class within the school.

Assessment:

Assessment of student writing will occur through the social dynamics of the classroom (peer response, cooperative learning, student-teacher conferences, discussions, etc.) A scoring rubric and checklist will be developed with students to help evaluate their writing. See the Standards for Rubrics guide for reference.

Extensions:

Create a literary magazine for the class, in which students' drawings and stories can be published.

Sources:

Print:

- Klugerman, Rita, et al. *Globe Writing Program, Book A*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Globe Book Company, 1989.
- Gregory, Cynde. *Childmade: Awakening Children to Creative Writing*. Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Press, 1990.

See + complete
 "Problem Graphic Organizer"
 Fill in Story Map for Narratives
 Problem
 Events
 Resolution

- Hubert, Karen M. *Teaching and Writing Popular Fiction*. New York: Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 1976.
- Mellon, Nancy, *Storytelling and the Art of Imagination*, Rockport, MA: Element, Inc., 1992.
- Millet, Nancy C. and Raymond J. Rodrigues. *Explorations in Literature*. Glenview, IL: Scott Foresman and Company, 1989.
- Rico, Gabriele Lusser. *Writing the Natural Way*. Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, Inc., 1983.
- Willis, Meredith Sue, *Blazing Pencils*. New York: Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 1990.
- Willis, Meredith Sue, *Personal Fiction Writing*. New York: Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 1984.
- "Writing." Delran, NJ: Weekly Reader Company. November 1993, December 1993, March 1994, April 1994, October 1994, March 1995, September 1995, April/May 1995, February 1996, and March 1996.

Web:

- [ReadWriteThink: Book Report Alternative: The Elements of Fiction](http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=138)
http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=138

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Assignment

Developing a Story

Choose and complete *one* of the following assignments:

1. Select a portrait—a painting or a photograph—and write a brief story featuring the subject of the portrait, adding traits such as height or tone of voice. Use the basic elements of a story: setting, character, plot, conflict, climax, and resolution. The main character should be revealed gradually through the elements of the story.

2. Write an original humorous toy story using your favorite childhood toys as characters. Make your story as original as possible.

3. Select one of the following beginnings as a starting place for your own story. Write a story, developing all the elements of fiction (setting, character, and plot):

a. There once lived a King's son who had a bride whom he loved very much.

b. There was once a wonderful musician, who went forlorn through a forest and thought of all manner of things, and when nothing was left for him to think about, he said: "Time is beginning to pass heavily on me here in the forest. I will fetch hither a good companion for myself."

c. There was once upon a time an old queen who was ill, and thought to herself, "I am lying on what must be my deathbed."

d. Once upon a time there was a girl who did nothing but spin and weave.

4. Provide the following endings and have students write a story that leads to this ending:

a. On the rock, hidden beneath the Old Woman's rose bush, a tiny elf sat happily watching the party, one leg crossed over the other.

b. She came out of the water and lay down in the grass under the dazzling golden light. She noticed all the fruit on the trees and many green birds in the trees. She saw people coming through the meadow. She went out to meet them. They came up to her and took her hands and embraced her.

c. "I think we have learned much today," he said. They embraced and they danced for a long time between the darkness and the light.

d. After ridding the castle of cobwebs and bandits, the prince and princess became king and queen of the land. At last, rule was restored and I imagine they are living there still.

5. Write a story in which your main character sees things with unusual clarity, as if from above, and says what he or she sees very plainly.

6. Write a story about someone or something that travels from a beloved home and, coming full circle, finds it unchanged.

7. Write a story about someone or something that leaves a beloved home and returns by the same route after a long time to find it almost unrecognizable.

8. Create an imaginary mountain that you would truly like to visit. What is its dominant color? Who and/or what inhabits this place? How do you get there? What treasure is held there? Cast this mountain into a story. In front of the mountain, imagine two or three giants or other guards who must be outwitted or understood in order to pass safely through the heights and depths of your mountain.
9. Write a story of a noble traveler who has gone in search of a key to an important place that has been locked up perhaps for a very long time. He or she will have to overcome obstacles on the way; helpers will have to come forward to solve riddles and show the way. In the course of your story, you can discover where, and why, the key had been hidden or lost.
10. Write the story of a very beautiful palace that is turned into a hovel by a wicked enchantment. Who comes to break the enchantment and set things right?
11. Write a story about a creature who so longs to become human and possess human qualities that it overcomes all obstacles and throws off its animal nature.
12. Write a story about a dragon that is holding an individual, a family, or a whole town in terror. Create a hero or heroine, or both together, who meet this dragon and successfully absorb its power as their own, putting its power compassionately and cleverly in the service of others.



Building a Plot

Before you start writing, read these tips for creating engaging plots:

1. *Let characters influence the plot.*

Characters develop out of the situation for a story. Think about the characters in a particular situation, and plot ideas will emerge. Suspense author Andre Jute says, "Plot flows most easily and genuinely from character . . . and the actions characters undertake because of the relationships they have and the frictions built into such contact. On the other hand, if you first work out the plot and then simply people it with characters who can carry out the actions you've dreamed up, your characters will seem wooden and unreal."

2. *Avoid too much plot.*

Don't create a crisis every two pages, too many characters and story lines, characters that are "in action" so much they do not have time to think, etc. Many writers go back through a first draft and look for story lines, characters, and plot events they can cut to improve the story's focus on the theme.

3. *Know when to start the story.*

The action of your story should begin at the point at which the characters start moving toward the end of it. For example, a story about a family coping with the breakup of the parents' marriage might begin on the day one parent moves out.

4. *Let readers wait.*

Anticipation is part of the fun for readers. Readers get involved because they want to know what happens to the characters. If you answer that question too soon, you may have to dream up another plot to finish the story.

5. *Pace the plot.*

Think of your plot as having a kind of wave motion: with ups and downs, action sequences and calm scenes (sitting, talking, thinking, etc.), and tension that builds up, comes to a crest, and then settles down. This kind of pacing sets your reader up for the final climax.

6. *Let your characters grow.*

In most stories, plot is about how life affects people or characters. Between the beginning and the end of your story, your main characters should learn, grow, and be in some way affected by the events they have just lived through.



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This Lesson at a Glance:

Grade Band: 5-8

Integrated Subjects:

- Theater
- Language Arts

Materials:

For the teacher:

[Standards for Rubrics](#)

For the student:

[Revealing a Character: An Example](#)

[Writing Dialogue](#)

[Point of View Assignment](#)

Related WebLinks:

[ReadWriteThink](#)

Targeted Standards:

The National Standards For Arts Education:

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Standard 1: Script writing by the creation of improvisations and scripted scenes based on personal experience and heritage, imagination, literature, and history

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Language Arts III (6-8)

Standard 3: Uses grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions

Language Arts III (6-8)

Standard 4: Gathers and uses information for research purposes

ICON LEGEND:

= part of the current spotlight

Fiction, Creating Characters

Part of the Unit: [Fiction Writing](#)

Lesson Overview:

How can I use the Elements of Fiction to enhance and develop my writing? Students will explore these themes in this lesson. Students will explore characterization as an element of fiction. They will learn how authors use characterization, dialogue, and point of view to reveal a character. They will then experiment with constructing characters of their own.

Length of Lesson:

Three 45-minute periods

Instructional Objectives:

Students will:

- demonstrate the ability to write for the purpose of expressing personal ideas.
- explore the elements of fiction: setting, character and plot.
- write for a variety of audiences: peers, teachers, parents, school-wide community, and beyond.








Supplies:

- Ruled paper
- Pens and/or pencils
- Examples of vivid character descriptions from famous literary works, such as *Great Expectations* or *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens.

Instructional Plan:

Establish with students that characterization is one of the elements of fiction. (For the elements of fiction, see the ReadWriteThink lesson, [Book Report Alternative: The Elements of Fiction](#).) A character is a person or animal who takes part in the action of a work of literature. Generally, the plot of a short story focuses on one character—the main character. A story may also have one or more minor characters. They keep the action moving forward and help the reader learn more about the main character. A character is not usually described in a story all at one time. Rather, the information is given to the reader in pieces and clues throughout the story. Sometimes, however, it may be necessary to give a short sketch of your

see hhsbstaff sheets
Antagonist/
Protagonist
1) static
2) Dynamic

-  = opens in a new window
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main character at or near the beginning of the story.

Characterization

Characterization is the use of literary techniques to reveal the nature of a character. A writer may reveal a character in four different ways. The writer may:

- describe the character's appearance.
- report the character's speech and behavior.
- describe the reactions of other characters to the individual.
- reveal the character's thoughts and feelings.

see sheet for exp.

Most authors use a combination of methods. Refer to the handout, Revealing a Character: An Example, and read to students a passage in which all four techniques are used to characterize a girl named Kelly who is visiting Sally O'Brien, her best friend. In the passage, Mrs. O'Brien is Sally's grandmother.

Show the students the following statements, and have them point out the lines from the excerpt that prove the statement and name the method or methods of characterization used.

- Kelly has a ponytail.
- Kelly thinks that Mrs. O'Brien has a sour face.
- Kelly is concerned about Sally.
- Sally's mother was nice to Kelly.

Have students try one (or more) of the following writing assignments:



- Write a characterization of someone you know. Let the reader decide from your writing what kind of person you are describing. Show, do not tell.
- Create a character. Describe your character completely. Use details that help your readers imagine completely your creature or person.
- Describe a person or character whose physical appearance impressed you. The person may have been stunning, extraordinarily plain, physically challenged, cruel or sinister looking, etc. In what kind of mystery/riddle could the character be involved?

Create characters for story

Name

Characteristics / traits

Physical - looks, movements

Actions / Reactions

Life

static/dynamic

Descriptions / Adjectives

↳ How you will reveal pieces about character

On each of several slips of paper, write five adjectives that might describe a person. Then divide the class into groups of four and give each group a list. Have each group create a character who illustrates its list of adjectives but without using the actual adjectives. Then have each group read its characterization aloud so other students can attempt to determine which adjectives the character exemplifies. If time allows, try a variation of this activity. Give every group a list of the same adjectives; the class could then analyze differences in the ways that different groups illustrated the same characteristics.

Charles Dickens excelled at creating vivid characters. Have students read the descriptions of Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations* or Mr. Micawber or Uriah Heep in *David Copperfield*, paying particular attention to Dickens's word choice and the other ways in which he revealed his characters.

As a further exercise, have students clip animal photographs from newspapers or magazines and write brief journal entries that seem to fit the postures or expressions.

Dialogue

Explain to students that dialogue is a conversation between two or more characters. Dialogue can reveal the moods and personalities of the characters:

"I came to tell you I'm sorry," said Jim.

"BE QUIET!" Nancy screamed.

Dialogue can also reveal who the characters are, and where:

"The one thing I hate about these trips," said Amanda, "is the cold. Each year the wind gets sharper and the air gets clammier. And my nose gets runnier. Next year I'm staying home."

"You can't do that," Becky answered. "People expect us to be out on this night."

"Well, there's no reason to travel like this. Everybody else flies in airplanes, with cushioned seats and food served on little trays. And movies. Why can't we have movies?"

"Be quiet, Amanda. How can you put a movie screen on a broomstick?" said Becky with a sniff.

Dialogue can tell you what's going on:

"Harold! Please get that parakeet out of my hair!"

"Yes, Mrs. Hallway, I'll try. But I think he has his foot caught in that comb thing on the back of your head."

Point out to students that different kinds of people use different kinds of speech. Also, a person's speech changes according to the situation. Speech reflects where the characters are living and when. For example, a girl of the Civil War period would not use twentieth-century slang.

Distribute the student Writing Dialogue handout containing guidelines for writing dialogue and the choices for writing assignment topics. Students should complete one or more of the writing assignments outlined on the handout.

Discuss
use/
distribute
for edits

Point of View

Explain that "point of view" refers to the perspective from which a story is told. The writer chooses a narrator for every story. The narrator tells the story from either the first-person or the third-person point of view. The author's choice of narrator for a story determines the amount of information a reader will be given. The following are the four major points of view:

- *first person*: The narrator ("I") is a character in the story who can reveal only personal thoughts and feelings and what he or she sees and is told by other characters.
- *third-person objective*: The narrator is an outsider who can report only what he or she sees and hears.

- *third-person limited*: The narrator is an outsider who sees into the mind of one of the characters.
- *third-person omniscient*: The narrator is an all-knowing outsider who can enter the minds of more than one of the characters.

The four passages that follow tell the same incident from different points of view. Notice how the amount of information given about each character depends upon the point of view used.

Notes

- As I placed the carefully wrapped package on the park bench, I looked up and saw Molly walking across the street. I hoped that she hadn't seen me. (first-person)
- As George placed the carefully wrapped package on the park bench, he looked up and saw Molly walking across the street. (third-person objective)
- George, anxiously hoping that no one was watching him, placed a carefully wrapped package on an empty park bench. When he looked around, he saw Molly watching him from across the street. (third-person limited)
- George, anxiously hoping that no one was watching him, placed a carefully wrapped package on an empty park bench. Molly, who was walking home, saw him and couldn't help thinking that he was acting strangely. (third-person omniscient)

Have students complete one or more of the following assignments (instructions also included on the accompanying Point of View Assignment handout):

- Write a piece of fiction based on an ancient or historical event. Imagine what the story behind this event might be. Write a paragraph of first-person narration. Use first-person pronouns to describe events and thoughts. Think of an exciting, funny, or special event in your own life. Describe the event from your point of view. Next, write a third-person paragraph about the event. This paragraph will use the pronouns he, she, it, or they to describe the event. How do the two paragraphs differ?
- Write a brief, first-person narrative of a teenager describing his or her test for a driver's license. In the first version, the narrator is telling a friend about the test; in the second, the narrator is the teenager's parents; in the third, it is the driver education teacher. (For this assignment, have students discuss the characteristics of each narrative, analyzing the different voices of the narrator.)
- Have you ever read a book or article written from the point of view of a plant or animal? What was your reaction? How was the effect different from what it would have been if the perspective were that of a human character? If your pet or the pet of someone you know well were to write a journal, what kinds of things might be included? What might an animal "comment on" that might not be noticed by humans? How might an animal understand everyday objects or events from the human world?
- Select an animal and write a journal entry for yesterday from the animal's point of view, without specifically mentioning what kind of animal is "writing" the entry. Read your entry to the class and see if they can guess what type of animal wrote the entry. As you read, you will need to portray the characteristics of the animal that you

are dramatizing.

Assessment:

Assessment of student writing will occur through the social dynamics of the classroom (peer response, cooperative learning, student-teacher conferences, discussions, etc.). A scoring rubric and checklist will be developed with students to help evaluate their writing. See the Standards for Rubrics guide for reference.

Extensions:

Create a literary magazine for the class, where students' drawings and stories can be published.

Sources:**Print:**

- Dickens, Charles. *Great Expectations*. New York: Penguin, 1998.
- Dickens, Charles *David Copperfield*. New York: Penguin, 1997.
- Gregory, Cynde. *Childmade: Awakening Children to Creative Writing*. Barrytown, NY, Station Hill Press, 1990.
- Hubert, Karen M. *Teaching and Writing Popular Fiction*. New York: Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 1976.
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http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=138

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Revealing a Character

In the following passage, the author uses all four techniques (describing the character's appearance, reporting the character's speech and behavior, describing the reactions of other characters to the individual, and revealing the character's thoughts and feelings) to characterize Kelly, a girl who is visiting Sally O'Brien, her best friend. Mrs. O'Brien is Sally's grandmother.

"Good morning, Mrs. O'Brien."

"Goodness, you scared me! Where did you come from?"

"Across the street, of course," Kelly said.

"Don't be fresh, Kelly. How many times have I asked you to use the doorbell?"

Mrs. O'Brien rubbed her red, puffy eyes, and turned back to folding the tumble of fresh-smelling laundry in front of her.

"I suppose you want to see Sally," said Mrs. O'Brien, keeping her back to Kelly. "Well, I am afraid she's not feeling up to having visitors today."

"Again?" Kelly thought, twisting the loose strands of hair that had escaped from her ponytail. She knew she should probably just leave without a fuss. Ever since the funeral, it had been hard to talk to Sally anyway. All she did was sit in her room and play video games.

Kelly couldn't blame her. The O'Brien house just wasn't the same since Sally's mom died. Before then, Kelly never had to ring the bell. She just threw open the door and shouted for Sally to come out and play.

While she was waiting, Sally's mom would greet her with a hug and maybe offer her a cookie that was still warm from the oven.

"Kelly, what are you standing there for?" snapped Mrs. O'Brien, "Didn't you hear me? You can't see Sally today!"

At that moment, something inside Kelly snapped. She was sick of Mrs. O'Brien and her sour face. Sally was her best friend, and Kelly needed to make sure that she was okay. She was going to see her today—NOW.



Assignment

Writing Dialogue

Writing dialogue—a conversation between two or more characters—is easy if you follow these guidelines:

1. All words spoken by a character must be surrounded by quotation marks. A direct quotation can come at the beginning or the end of a sentence.
2. A direct quotation begins with a capital letter. If a quotation is interrupted, the second part begins with a lower-case letter.
3. A direct quotation is set off from the rest of a sentence by commas. If a direct quotation is interrupted, commas are placed before and after the interruption. The comma before a direct quotation falls outside the quotation marks. The comma—or any punctuation—after a direct quotation falls inside the quotation marks.

Examples:

Ted smiled and thought, "I can't wait to get to the ball game!"
"Yes, I am the one who baked the chocolate cake," admitted Granny
"Jim," she said with a grin, "I'm going to make sure you lose this match."

4. Dialogue is less formal than other kinds of writing. To make your characters sound natural, you may use short sentences and contractions in dialogue.
5. In a conversation between characters, start a new paragraph each time the speaker changes.
6. Be careful not to use the word "said" too often. Use other livelier verbs, such as "whispered," "yelled," "mumbled," "cried," and "confessed."

Writing Assignment

Complete one (or more) of the following assignments:

1. Create two characters: a younger person deeply in need of affection and warmth and an older person willing to give it. Write a one- to two-page conversation between the characters. The details (their relationship, situation, etc.) are up to you, but make the reader care.
2. Using yourself and your best friends as the models, try writing a fictionalized conversation among three or more characters. Try to capture the style of your crowd's real-life speech: slang, rhythms, who interrupts whom, etc.
3. Write a dialogue between abstract characters, such as Love and Hate, Happiness and Sadness, Greed and Generosity, etc.



Assignment

Point of View

1. Write a piece of fiction based on an ancient or historical event. Imagine what the story behind this thing or event might be. Write a paragraph of first-person narration. Use first-person pronouns to describe events and thoughts. Think of an exciting, funny or special event in your own life. Describe the event from your point of view. Next, write a third-person paragraph about the event. This paragraph will use the pronouns he, she, it, or they to describe the event. This paragraph will use the pronouns he, she, it, or they to describe the event. How do the two paragraphs differ?
2. Write a brief, first-person narrative of a teen describing his or her test for a driver's license. In the first version, the narrator is telling a friend about the test; in the second, the narrator is the teen's parents; in the third, it is the driver education teacher.
3. Have you ever read a book or article written from the point of view of a plant or animal? What was your reaction? How was the effect different from what it would have been if the perspective were that of a human character? If your pet or the pet of someone you know well were to write a journal, what kinds of things might be included? What might an animal "comment on" that might not be noticed by humans? How might an animal understand everyday objects or events from the human world? Select an animal and write a journal entry for yesterday from the animal's point of view, without specifically mentioning what kind of animal is "writing" the entry. Read your entry to the class and see if they can guess what type of animal wrote the entry. As you read, you will need to portray the characteristics of the animal that you are dramatizing.



LESSONS: LESSON PLAN

This Lesson at a Glance:

Grade Band: 5-8

Integrated Subjects:

- [Visual Arts](#)
- [Language Arts](#)

Materials:

For the teacher:

 [Standards for Rubrics](#)

Related WebLinks:

[ReadWriteThink](#)

Targeted Standards:

The National Standards For Arts Education:

Visual Arts (5-8)

Standard 3: Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas

Visual Arts (5-8)

Standard 5: Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others

Other National Standards:

Language Arts III (6-8)

Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process

Language Arts III (6-8)

Standard 2: Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing




Language Arts III (6-8)

Standard 3: Uses grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions

Language Arts III (6-8)

Standard 4: Gathers and uses information for research purposes

ICON LEGEND:

-  = part of the current spotlight
-  = opens in a new window
-  = kid-friendly

Fiction, Setting the Story

Part of the Unit: [Fiction Writing](#)

Lesson Overview:

Students will explore how to use the elements of fiction to enhance and develop their writing. Students will learn how authors manipulate time and space, mood, and spatial order in descriptions of settings.

Length of Lesson:

Three 45-minute periods

Instructional Objectives:

Students will:

- demonstrate ability to write for the purpose of expressing personal ideas.
- explore the elements of fiction: setting, character, and plot.
- write for a variety of audiences: peers, teachers, parents, school-wide community, etc.

Supplies:






- A short passage from an illustrated children's book (of the teacher's choosing) that describes a setting.
- Drawing paper
- Pens
- Markers and/or colored pencils
- Ruled paper

Instructional Plan:

Read a passage from an illustrated children's book that introduces the setting. Do not show students the illustration. Have students sketch the setting, based on the information in the description. Allow students to share the pictures. Have them explain why they drew the setting the way that they did. What words or phrases influenced their interpretation and depiction of the setting? Show the illustration in the book. Discuss similarities and differences among the all of the drawings.

Establish with students that setting, one of the elements of fiction, is the time and place of the action of a story. (For the elements of fiction, see the

*or
give my desc.
of a setting
before showing
them the
picture*

-  = printable
-  = interactive
-  = audio
-  = video
-  = images

ReadWriteThink lesson, Book Report Alternative: The Elements of Fiction.) The setting may be specific and detailed and introduced at the very beginning of the story, or it may be merely suggested through the use of details scattered throughout the story. Customs, manners, clothing, scenery, weather, geography, buildings, and methods of transportation are all part of setting. The importance of setting differs from story to story. Sometimes the setting is fairly unimportant, as in most fables. In other stories, the setting is very important. It may have an effect on the events of the plot, reveal character, or create a certain atmosphere. Discuss the specific elements of setting, which are outlined below.

Examples

"Setting Graphic organizer"

Time and Place

Read the following passage to students:

On a rainy November morning in 1776, a soldier trod a solitary path along a road in western Virginia. His gait was slow, and his face—barely visible beneath untold layers of grime—betrayed an anguished, exhausted expression.

Ask students the following:

- Where does the story take place? What details tell you this?
- When do the events of this story take place? What clues tell you so

Have students complete one of the following writing activities:

- Write a description of a place—real or imaginary—that you would like to visit. The description should include the name of the place, as well as a description of the inhabitants, the landscape, the weather, and any other factors that might be important to developing an understanding of this place.
- Write two descriptions of the same place—for example, your home. The first description should be told from the perspective of a child, and the second should be written as if an adult were viewing the home.
- Write a description of a favorite person in a natural setting that seems "right" for that person's character. Then write a description of a person who doesn't fit into a natural setting.
- Authors often use similes and metaphors to describe the setting in a vivid and colorful way. For example, a writer might say, "The thunder claps stamped across the sky like a herd of wild buffalo." Write a description of a weather phenomenon using an animal to make the description more vivid.
- Write a description of an ideal outdoor spot—real or imagined. Use vivid details to describe light, water, plants, rocks, etc. Incorporate personification.

See "Story Moods" sheet

Mood

Establish with students that the setting can help develop and establish the mood of a story. A vivid description of the setting will help the reader to see, hear, smell, taste, and touch the environment of the story.

Share with students the following passage:

It was a cold and cheerless evening. The fog seemed to hover over the street, clutching the buildings, the

streetlamps—the entire city—in a damp, icy grip. If one were to stand still, passers-by would emerge briefly from the gloom, only to disappear from view after taking just a few steps. These ghostly apparitions tormented James as he impatiently waited for his valet to return with his carriage.

(Note: For another good example of an author's use of setting to create mood, see Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. Have students read and respond to representative passages describing London on Christmas Eve.)

Ask students the following:

- What sensory details does the author use to draw the reader into the setting?
- What mood do these details help create?

Have students complete one of the following writing activities:

- Post a picture of a group of people, perhaps in a city or town or at a public event such as a baseball game. Have each student write two descriptions of the scene, one happy and the other sad or ominous.
- Describe a familiar place, such as a classroom or a mall, under two different sets of circumstances, such as day and night, summer and winter, or crowded and empty.
- Write a description of a festive holiday scene. Use details that appeal to your reader's five senses. Your reader should be able to visualize a picture of holiday foods, music, colors, etc., that is appropriate to the mood you are trying to create. Next, try writing a description of a dreary or scary holiday scene. Be sure to use appropriate sensory details again. The smells, tastes, sounds, objects, etc., should be very different from those you picked for your "festive" description. Can you create a story that grows out of one or both of these descriptions?
- Think of a natural setting that has affected you. The place may be one you visited on vacation once, one you visit frequently, or perhaps it is even your backyard. How does this place affect your thoughts, feelings, mood, and actions? Write an autobiographical piece describing how this setting interacts with your thoughts and/or the actions of your characters.

Spatial Order

Establish with students that there are several ways to organize a description of a place. You could start at the right and move to the left. You could start at the top and move to the bottom. Or you could start at the place closest to you and move to the place farthest from you, as in the following passage:

The door of the mansion dwarfed anyone who approached it. Even the tallest visitors had to reach up high to grasp the ornate door knocker (which surely was made of solid gold). The door swung open into a grand hallway, with floors of spotless pink marble. The walls were covered in gigantic mirrors, so that the foyer appeared to be at least three times larger than its already impressive size. At the end of the hallway, a grand white staircase spiraled up and

① on back of "Setting Graphic Organizer" write (1 P min) about 1 place in story

② Activity: see no evil

③ Complete "Setting Graphic Organizer"

④ Complete "Character Graphic Organizer 1" for each event

⑤ Write Story/Assemble

⑥ Edit/Revise ⑦ Publish/Share

up—so far that you might have expected an angel to greet you when you reached the top. But that was not so. The stairs actually led to a large, but surprisingly ordinary looking hallway with slightly worn, green carpeting and a long row of nearly identical doors. It almost resembled a hotel.

(Note: For another good example of a setting description that establishes spatial order, see J.R.R. Tolkien's description of a hobbit hole in *The Hobbit*.)

Have students complete the following writing activity:

Describe a place that is familiar to you. Organize your description from either right to left, top to bottom, or closest to farthest point from you. Choose the spatial order that makes your description easiest to understand.

Allow time for students to share one or more of their writing assignments with a classmate(s). You may wish to group students in pairs, having one student read a setting description while his/her partner sketches the scene described. Students should analyze the drawing to see where their interpretations were similar, where they differed, and why.

Assessment:

Assessment of student writing will occur through the social dynamics of the classroom (peer response, cooperative learning, student-teacher conferences, discussions, etc.). A scoring rubric and checklist will be developed with students to help evaluate their writing. See the Standards for Rubrics sheet for reference.

Extensions:

Create a literary magazine for the class, in which students' drawings and stories can be published.

Sources:

Print:

- Dickens, Charles. *A Christmas Carol*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997.
- Klugerman, Rita, et al. *Globe Writing Program, Book A*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Globe Book Company, 1989.
- Gregory, Cynde. *Childmade: Awakening Children to Creative Writing*. Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Press, 1990.
- Hubert, Karen M. *Teaching and Writing Popular Fiction*. New York: Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 1976.
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- Millet, Nancy C., and Raymond J. Rodrigues. *Explorations in Literature*. Glenview, IL: Scott Foresman and Company, 1989.
- Rico, Gabriele Lusser. *Writing the Natural Way*. Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, Inc., 1983.

- Tolkein, J.R.R. *The Hobbit*. New York: Random House, 1981.
- Willis, Meredith Sue. *Blazing Pencils*. New York: Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 1990.
- Willis, Meredith Sue, *Personal Fiction Writing*. New York: Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 1984.
- "Writing." Delran, NJ: Weekly Reader Company. November 1993, December 1993, March 1994, April 1994, October 1994, March 1995, September 1995, April/May 1995, February 1996, and March 1996.

Web:

- ReadWriteThink: Book Report Alternative: The Elements of Fiction
http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=138

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6th Edition

ANNOTATED INSTRUCTOR'S EDITION

The Prentice Hall Guide For College Writers

STEPHEN REID
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY



UPPER SADDLE RIVER, NJ 07458

BACKGROUND ON REMEMBERING

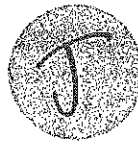
In this chapter, autobiographical writing is an end in itself, but in later chapters, "remembering" becomes an invention strategy for expository and argumentative writing. This chapter builds on the observing skills from Chapter 3 and shows how writers can use specific examples from their own experiences in a variety of writing situations.

*Time passes and the past
becomes the present. . . .*

*These presences of the
past are there in the
center of your life today.
You thought . . . they had
died, but they have just
been waiting their
chance.*

—CARLOS
FUENTES,

MEXICAN ESSAYIST AND
NOVELIST, AUTHOR OF THE
CRYSTAL FRONTIER.



THE HUMAN BRAIN IS A PACK RAT: NOTHING IS TOO SMALL, OBSCURE, OR MUNDANE FOR THE BRAIN'S COLLECTION. OFTEN THE BRAIN COLLECTS AND DISCARDS INFORMATION WITHOUT regard to our wishes. Out of the collection may arise, with no warning, the image of windblown whitecaps on a lake you visited more than five years ago, the recipe for Uncle Joe's incomparable chili, or even the right answer to an exam question that you've been staring at for the past fifteen minutes.

Remembering is sometimes easy, sometimes difficult. Often careful concentration yields nothing, while the most trivial occurrence—an old song on a car radio, the acrid smell of diesel exhaust, the face of a stranger—will trigger a flood of recollections. Someone tells a story and you immediately recall incidents, funny or traumatic, from your own life. Some memories, however, are nagging and troublesome, keeping you awake at night, daring you to deal with them. You pick at these memories. Why are they so important? You write about them, usually to probe that mystery of yesterday and today. Sights, sounds, or feelings from the present may draw you to the past, but the past leads, just as surely, back to the present.

Direct observations are important to learning and writing, but so are your memories, experiences, and stories. You may write an autobiographical account of part of your life, or you may recall a brief event, a person, or a place just as an example to illustrate a point. Whatever form your writing from memory takes, however, your initial purpose is to remember experiences so that you can understand yourself and your world. The point is not to write fiction, but to practice drawing on your memories and to write vividly enough about them so that you and others can discover and learn.

The value of remembering lies exactly here: Written memories have the power to teach you and, through the *empathy* of your readers, to inform or convince them as well. At first, you may be self-conscious about sharing your personal memories. But as you reveal these experiences, you realize that your story is worth telling—not because you're such an egotist, but because sharing experiences helps everyone learn.

Techniques for Writing About Memories

Writing vividly about memories includes all the skills of careful observing, but it adds several additional narrative strategies. Listed below are five techniques that writers use to compose effective remembering essays. As you read the essays that follow in this chapter, notice how each writer uses these techniques. Then, when you write your own remembering essay, use these techniques in

your own essay. Remember: Not all writing about memories uses all five techniques, but one or two of them may transform a lifeless or boring account into an effective narrative.

- Using *detailed observation of people, places, and events*. Writing vividly about memories requires many of the skills of careful observation. Give actual dialogue where appropriate.
- Creating *specific scenes set in time and space*. Show your reader the actual events; don't just tell about events; Narrate specific incidents as they actually happened. Avoid monotonously summarizing events or presenting just the conclusions (for instance, "those experiences really changed my life"). **Show vs. Tell**
- Noting *changes, contrasts, or conflicts*. Changes in people or places, contrasts between two different memories or between memories of expectations and realities, and conflicts between people or ideas—any of these may lead to the meaning or importance of a remembered person, place, or event.
- Making *connections between past events, people, or places and the present*. The main idea of a narrative often grows out of changes and conflicts or arises from the connections you make between past and present.
- Discovering and focusing on a *main idea*. A remembering essay is not a random narrative of the writer's favorite memories. A narrative should have a clear main point, focus on a main idea, or make a discovery. The essay should clearly show why the memories are important.

All of these techniques are important, but you should also keep several other points in mind. Normally, you should write in the *first person*, using *I* or *we* throughout the narrative. Although you will usually write in *past tense*, sometimes you may wish to lend immediacy to the events by retelling them in the *present tense*, as if they are happening now. Finally, you may choose straightforward *chronological order*, or you may begin near the end and use a *flashback* to tell the beginning of the story.

The key to effective remembering, however, is to get beyond *generalities and conclusions* about your experiences ("I had a lot of fun—those days really changed my life"). Your goal is to recall *specific incidents set in time and place* that show how and why those days changed your life. The specific incidents should show your main point or dominant idea.

The following passage by Andrea Lee began as a journal entry during a year she spent in Moscow and Leningrad following her graduation from college. She then combined these firsthand observations with her memories and published them in a collection called *Russian Journal*. She uses first person and, frequently, present tense as she describes her reactions to the sights of Moscow. In these paragraphs, she weaves observations and memories together to show her main idea: The contrast between American and Russian advertising helped her understand both the virtues and the faults of American commercialism.

TEACHING TIP

Although all five of these strategies are important, two are critical for writing remembering essays. In their own essays, encourage students to focus on *specific scenes* that occurred at a defined time and place. Narrating a past event in the present tense, as Alice Walker does, may help students focus and develop their scenes. Second, be sure to stress the importance of *focusing on some main idea, point, or discovery*. A remembering essay should clearly answer the question "So what?" or "What's the point?"

moved to block 28, right up next to one of the old pear orchards. That's where we stayed until the end of the war, and those trees stand in my memory for the turning of our life in camp, from the outrageous to the tolerable.

Papa pruned and cared for the nearest trees. Late that summer we picked the fruit green and stored it in a root cellar he had dug under our new barracks. At night the wind through the leaves would sound like the surf had sounded in Ocean Park, and while drifting off to sleep, I could almost imagine we were still living by the beach.

REMEMBERING EVENTS

COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITY

The selection by Richard Rodriguez offers an excellent opportunity to show how observing and remembering strategies work together. Have students from one half of the class divide into groups of three or four and annotate this passage for observing techniques while groups from the other half of the class annotate for remembering techniques. Each group should write its collaborative annotations on a transparency made from a photocopy of this passage. Allow ten minutes for group annotations. Then one member from each group should place his or her group's transparency on an overhead projector and explain the group's annotations to the rest of the class. *Note:* Provide each group's recorder with a special marking pen for the transparencies.

In the following essay, called "The Boy's Desire," Richard Rodriguez recalls a particular event from his childhood that comes to mind when he remembers Christmas. In his memory, he sorts through the rooms in his house on Thirtieth Street in Sacramento, recalling old toys: a secondhand bike, games with dice and spinning dials, a jigsaw puzzle, and a bride doll. In this passage, Rodriguez describes both the effort to remember and the memory itself—the one memory that still "holds color and size and shape." Was it all right, he wonders, that a boy should have wanted a doll for Christmas?

The fog comes to mind. It never rained on Christmas. It was never sharp blue and windy. When I remember Christmas in Sacramento, it is in gray: The valley fog would lift by late morning, the sun boiled haze for a few hours, then the tule fog would rise again when it was time to go into the house.

The haze through which memory must wander is thickened by that fog. The rooms of the house on 39th Street are still and dark in late afternoon, and I open the closet to search for old toys. One year there was a secondhand bike. I do not remember a color. Perhaps it had no color even then. Another year there were boxes of games that rattled their parts—dice and pegs and spinning dials. Or perhaps the rattle is of a jigsaw puzzle that compressed into an image . . . of what? of Paris? a litter of kittens? I cannot remember. Only one memory holds color and size and shape: brown hair, blue eyes, the sweet smell of styrene.

That Christmas I announced I wanted a bride doll. I must have been seven or eight—wise enough to know not to tell anyone at school, but young enough to whine out my petition from early November.

My father's reaction was unhampered by psychology. A shrug—"Una muñeca?"—a doll, why not? Because I knew it was my mother who would choose all the presents, it was she I badgered. I wanted a bride doll! "Is there something else you want?" she wondered. No! I'd make clear with my voice that nothing else would appease me. "We'll see," she'd say, and she never wrote it down on her list.

By early December, wrapped boxes started piling up in my parents' bedroom closet, above my father's important papers and the family album. When no one else was home, I'd drag a chair over and climb up to see. . . . Looking for the one. About a week before Christmas, it was there. I was so certain it was mine that I punched my thumb through the wrapping paper and the cellophane window on the box and felt inside—lace, two tiny, thin legs. I got other presents that year, but it was the doll I kept by me. I remember my mother saying I'd have "to share her" with my younger sister—but Helen was four years old, oblivious. The doll was mine. My arms would hold her. She would sleep on my pillow.

And the sky did not fall. The order of the universe did not tremble. In fact, it was right for a change. My family accommodated itself to my request. My brother and sisters played round me with their own toys. I paraded my doll by the hands across the floor.

The other day, when I asked my brother and sisters about the doll, no one remembered. My mother remembers. "Yes," she smiled. "One year there was a doll."

The closet door closes. (The house on 39th Street has been razed for a hospital parking lot.) The fog rises. Distance tempts me to mock the boy and his desire. The fact remains: One Christmas in Sacramento I wanted a bride doll, and I got one.

WARMING UP: JOURNAL EXERCISES The following topics will help you practice writing about your memories. Read all of the following exercises, and then write on three that interest you the most. If another idea occurs to you, write a free entry about it.

1. Select one moment in your past that either changed your life or showed you how your life had already changed. What was the event? What were you like before—and afterward?
2. Go through old family photographs and find one of yourself, taken at least five years ago. Describe the person in the photograph—what he or

*Some very small incident
that takes place today
may be the most
important event that
happens to you this
year, but you don't know
that when it happens.
You don't know it until
much later.*

—TONI MORRISON,
NOBEL PRIZE-WINNING
AUTHOR OF *BELOVED* AND
SONG OF SOLOMON

TEACHING TIP

To screen those topics that may be overly emotional or excessively personal, have students write their tentative topics at the board. For any topics that seem highly personal, traumatic, or sexually explicit, have your class discuss the key issues of *appropriateness* and the *other students' rights to privacy*. Although remembering essays are personal and expressive, they must still consider the rights and sensibilities of readers.

trasts, or conflicts; and (4) seeing relationships between past and present. In your opinion, which of these techniques does she use most effectively?

4. What is Walker's main idea in this autobiographical account? State it in your own words. Where in the essay does she state it most explicitly?
5. How many scenes or episodes does Walker recount? List them according to her age at the time. Explain how each episode relates to her main idea.
6. Walker also uses images of sight and blindness to organize her essay. The story begins with a description of a father who has "beautiful eyes" and ends with her dancing in her dream to a song by Stevie Wonder. Catalog the images of sight and blindness from each scene or episode. Explain how, taken together, these images reinforce Walker's main idea.
7. Walker writes her essay in the present tense, and she uses italics not only to emphasize ideas but to indicate the difference between past thoughts and events and the present. List the places where she uses italics. Explain how the italicized passages reinforce her main point.

Remembering: The Writing Process

■ **ASSIGNMENT FOR REMEMBERING** Write an essay about an important person, place, and/or event in your life. Your purpose is to recall and then use specific examples that recreate this memory and show why it is so important to you.

Think also about your possible audience and genre. Usually the audience for memoirs, autobiographical essays, and personal essays is fairly general. Since many people are interested in events from our lives, we may not want to restrict our audience too much. You may want to write just for your family or friends, however, or put your memories in the form of a letter you wish to send to a particular person. Also, you may want to think of a particular magazine that frequently publishes personal essays. Nearly every speciality magazine (sports, nature, outdoors, genealogy, cooking, clothing, style) occasionally publishes personal essays with memories that focus on the subject of the publication. Browsing through magazines may give you an idea for an audience and genre that would work for the event you wish to narrate.

*Memory is more indelible
than ink.*

—ANITA LOOS,

AUTHOR OF KISS
HOLLYWOOD GOODBYE

CHOOSING A SUBJECT

If one of the journal entry exercises suggested a possible subject, try the collecting and shaping strategies below. If none of those exercises led to an interesting subject, consider the following ideas:

- Interview (in person or over the phone) your parents, a brother or sister, or a close friend. What events or experiences do they remember that were important to you?
- Get out a map of your town, city, state, or country and spend a few minutes doing an inventory of places you have been. Make a list of trips you have taken, with dates and years. Which of those places is the most memorable for you?
- Dig out a school yearbook and look through the pictures and the inscriptions that your classmates wrote. Whom do you remember most clearly? What events do you recall most vividly?
- Go to the library and look through news magazines or newspapers from five to ten years ago. What were the most important events of those years? What do you remember about them? Where were you and what were you doing when these events occurred? Which events had the largest impact on your life?
- Choose an important moment in your life, but write from the *point of view* of another person—a friend, family member, or stranger who was present. Let this person narrate the events that happened to you.

Note: Avoid choosing overly emotional topics such as the recent death of a close friend or family member. If you are too close to your subject, responding to your reader's revision suggestions may be difficult. Ask yourself if you can emotionally distance yourself from that subject. If you received a C for that essay, would you feel devastated?

COLLECTING

Once you have chosen a subject for your essay, try the following collecting strategies:

Brainstorming Brainstorming is merely jotting down anything and everything that comes to mind that is remotely connected to your subject: words, phrases, images, or complete thoughts. You can brainstorm by yourself or in groups, with everyone contributing ideas and one person recording them.

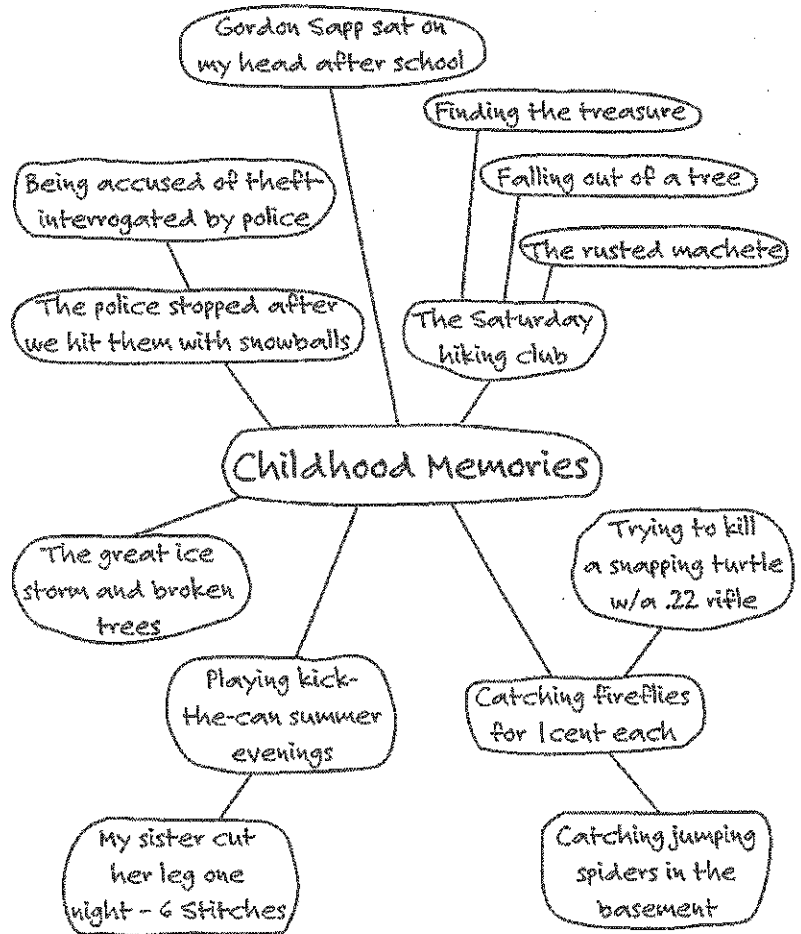
Looping Looping is a method of controlled freewriting that generates ideas and provides focus and direction. Begin by freewriting about your subject for eight to ten minutes. Then pause, reread what you have written, and *underline*

TEACHING TIP

Try small-group brainstorming for memories. Groups can focus on families, trips, school memories, or personal discoveries. Ask students to brainstorm individually in their journals for five minutes, share their memories in the group for eight to ten minutes, and then record ideas for five more minutes in their journals.

the most interesting or important idea in what you've written so far. Then, using that sentence or idea as your starting point, write for eight to ten minutes more. Repeat this cycle, or "loop," one more time. Each loop should add ideas and details from some new angle or viewpoint, but overall you will be focusing on the most important ideas that you discover.

Clustering Clustering is merely a visual scheme for brainstorming and free-associating about your topic. It can be especially effective for remembering because it helps you sketch relationships among your topics and subtopics. As you can see from the sample sketch, the sketch that you make of your ideas should help you see relationships between ideas or get a rough idea about an order or shape you may wish to use.



SHAPING

First, reconsider your purpose; perhaps it has become clearer or more definite since you recorded it in your journal entry. In your journal, jot down tentative answers for the following questions. If you don't have an answer, go on to the next question.

- *Subject:* What is your general subject?
- *Specific topic:* What aspect of your subject are you interested in?
- *Purpose:* Why is this topic interesting or important to you or your readers?
- *Main idea:* What might your main idea be?
- *Audience:* For whom are you writing this? What is your reader like, and why might he or she be interested in this topic?

Narrow and focus your subject. If you're going to write a three-page essay, don't try to cover everything in your life. Focus on one person, one episode, one turning point, one day, even one *part* of one day, and do that in depth and detail.

As you start your shaping activities, use the observing strategies discussed in Chapter 3. *Spatial order* may help you shape your description of a place you are remembering; *classification* or *definition* can shape your memories of people, places, or events. *Similes*, *metaphors*, and *analogies* will make your writing more vivid and may also suggest a shape or help you develop your subject.

In addition, use the following strategies for shaping written memories. Try each strategy to see if it works for your subject. Although some strategies may not be appropriate, others will work naturally, suggesting ways to shape and develop your writing.

Chronological Order If you are writing about remembered events, you will probably use some form of chronological order. Try making a *chronological list of the major scenes or events*. Then go through the list, deciding what you will emphasize by telling about each item in detail and what you will pass over quickly. Normally, you will be using a straightforward chronological order, but you may wish to use a (flashback) starting in the middle or near the end and then returning to tell the beginning. In his paragraph about a personal relationship, for example, student writer Gregory Hoffman begins the story at the most dramatic point, returns to tell how the relationship began, and then concludes the story.

Her words hung in the air like iron ghosts. "I'm pregnant," she said as they walked through the park, the snow crackling beneath their feet. Carol was looking down at the ground when she told him, somewhat ashamed, embarrassed, and defiant all at once. Their relationship had only started in September, but both had felt the uneasiness surrounding them for the past months. She could remember the beginning so

TEACHING TIP

Some writers may prefer to read this section, devise plans using several of these strategies, and then draft their essays. Others may want to read this section for ideas, start drafting, and, after finishing the drafts, reread this section to see which of these strategies they intuitively chose. Then they can amplify those shaping strategies already suggested by their drafts. Short workshop sessions asking students to *identify the shaping strategies* they find in each other's drafts may help both kinds of writers revise their essays.

WRITE TO LEARN

Encourage your students to write a "discovery draft" or "zero draft" to get their ideas on paper. Collecting and shaping strategies can be effective invention strategies, but actual drafts may help—if students know that the purpose is to let their writing lead them to *discover the focus for their memories*. Some teachers have students trade "zero drafts" with peers, discuss what the writer discovered and learned, have each writer make written plans based on the draft and the discussion, and then hand in the drafts. Teachers may read the drafts and return them later, in time for a revision activity *after* students have written a complete draft.

well and in such favor, now that the future seemed so uncertain. The all-night conversations by the bay window, the rehearsals at the university theater—where he would make her laugh during her only soliloquy, and most of all the Christmas they had spent together in Vermont. No one else had existed for her during those months. Yet now, she felt duped by her affections—as if she had become an absurd representation of a tragic television character. As they approached the lake, he put his arm around her, "Just do what you think is best, babe. I mean, I think you know how I feel." At that moment, she knew it was over. It was no longer "their" decision. His hand touched her cheek in a benedictorial fashion. The rest would only be form now. Exchanging records and clothes with an aside of brief conversation. She would see him again, in the market or at a movie, and they would remember. But like his affection in September, her memory of him would fade until he was too distant to see.

Comparison/Contrast Although you may be comparing or contrasting people, places, or events from the past, you will probably also be comparing or contrasting the past to the present. You may do that at the beginning, noting how something in the present reminds you of a past person, place, or event. You may do it at the end, as Andrea Lee does in *Russian Journal*. You may do it both at the beginning and at the end, as Richard Rodriguez does in "The Boy's Desire." You may even contrast past and present throughout, as Alice Walker does in "Beauty: When the Other Dancer Is the Self." Comparing or contrasting the past with the present will often clarify your dominant idea.

Image Sometimes a single mental picture or recurring image will shape a paragraph or two in an essay. Consider how novelist George Orwell, in his essay "Shooting an Elephant," uses the image of a puppet or dummy to describe his feeling at a moment when he realized that, against his better judgment, he was going to have to shoot a marauding elephant in order to satisfy a crowd of two thousand Burmese who had gathered to watch him. The italicized words emphasize the recurring image.

Suddenly I realized that I should have to shoot the elephant after all. The people expected it of me and I had got to do it; I could feel their *two thousand wills pressing me forward*, irresistibly. And it was at this moment, as I stood there with the rifle in my hands, that I first grasped the hollowness, the futility of the white man's dominion in the East. Here was I, the white man with his gun, standing in front of the unarmed native crowd—*seemingly the leading actor* of the piece; but in reality I was only an absurd *puppet pushed to and fro* by the will of those yellow faces behind. I perceived in this moment that when the white

man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys. He becomes a sort of *hollow, posing dummy*, the *conventionalized figure* of a sahib. For it is the condition of his rule that he shall spend his life in trying to impress the "natives" and so in every crisis he has got to do what the "natives" expect of him. He *wears a mask*, and his face grows to fit it. I had got to shoot the elephant. I had committed myself to doing it when I sent for the rifle. *A sahib has got to act like a sahib*; he has got to appear resolute, to know his own mind and do definite things.

Voice and Tone When you have a personal conversation with someone, the way you look and sound—your body type, your voice, your facial expressions and gestures—communicates a sense of personality and attitude, which in turn affects how the other person reacts to what you say. In written language, although you don't have those gestures, expressions, or the actual sound of your voice, you can still create the sense that you are talking directly to your listener.

The term *voice* refers to a writer's personality as revealed through language. Writers may use (emotional, colloquial, or conversational language to communicate a sense of personality. Or they may use abstract, impersonal language either to conceal their personalities or to create an air of scientific objectivity. }

Tone is a writer's attitude toward the subject. The attitude may be positive or negative. It may be serious, humorous, honest, or ironic; it may be skeptical or accepting; it may be happy, frustrated, or angry. Often voice and tone overlap, and together they help us hear a writer talking to us. In the following passage, we hear student writer Kurt Weekly talking to us directly; we hear a clear, honest voice telling the story. His tone is not defensive or guilty: He openly admits he has a "problem."

Oh no, not another trash day. Every time I see all those trash containers, plastic garbage bags and junk lined up on the sidewalks, it drives me crazy. It all started when I was sixteen. I had just received my driver's license and the most beautiful Ford pickup. It was Wednesday as I remember and trash day. I don't know what happened. All of a sudden I was racing down the street swerving to the right, smashing into a large green Hefty trash bag filled with grass clippings. The bag exploded, and grass clippings and trash flew everywhere. It was beautiful and I was hooked. There was no stopping me.

At first I would smash one or two cans on the way to school. Then I just couldn't get enough. I would start going out the night before trash day. I would go down the full length of the street and wipe out

every garbage container in sight. I was the terror of the neighborhood. This was not a bad habit to be taken lightly. It was an obsession. I was in trouble. There was no way I could kick this on my own. I needed help.

I received that help. One night after an evening of nonstop can smashing, the Arapahoe County Sheriff Department caught up with me. Not just one or a few but the whole department. They were willing to set me on the right path, and if that didn't work, they were going to send me to jail. It was a long, tough road to rehabilitation, but I did it. Not alone. I had the support of my family and the community.

TEACHING TIP

Many beginning writers have trouble revising because they believe that the words of their remembering essay are exactly equivalent to their experiences. Changing a draft thus means altering or even falsifying their experiences. Asking students to adopt a persona, or mask, to tell their story not only gives them a new perspective but may enable them to take revision suggestions more objectively.

Persona Related to voice and tone is the *persona*—the “mask” that a writer can put on. Sometimes in telling a story about yourself, you may want to speak in your own “natural” voice. At other times, however, you may change or exaggerate certain characteristics in order to project a character different from your “real” self. Writers, for example, may project themselves as braver and more intelligent than they really are. Or to create a humorous effect, they may create personae who are more foolish or clumsy than they really are. This persona can shape a whole passage. In the following excerpt, James Thurber, a master of autobiographical humor, uses a persona—along with chronological narrative—to shape his account of a frustrating botany class.

I passed all the other courses that I took at my university, but I could never pass botany. This was because all botany students had to spend several hours a week in a laboratory looking through a microscope at plant cells, and I could never see through a microscope. I never once saw a cell through a microscope. This used to enrage my instructor. He would wander around the laboratory pleased with the progress all the students were making in drawing the involved and, so I am told, interesting structure of flower cells, until he came to me. I would just be standing there. “I can’t see anything,” I would say. He would begin patiently enough, explaining how anybody can see through a microscope, but he would always end up in a fury claiming that I could too see through a microscope but just pretended that I couldn’t. “It takes away from the beauty of flowers anyway,” I used to tell him. “We are not concerned with beauty in this course,” he would say. “We are concerned solely with the mechanics of flowers.” “Well,” I’d say, “I can’t see anything.” “Try it just once again,” he’d say, and I would put my eye to the microscope and see nothing at all, except now and again a nebulous milky substance—a phenomenon of maladjustment. You were supposed to see a vivid, restless clockwork of sharply defined plant cells. “I see what looks like a lot of milk,” I would tell him. This, he

claimed, was the result of my not having adjusted the microscope properly, so he would readjust it for me, or rather, for himself. And I would look again and see milk. I finally took a deferred pass, as they called it, and waited a year and tried again. (You had to pass one of the biological sciences or you couldn't graduate.) The professor had come back from vacation brown as a berry, bright-eyed, and eager to explain cell-structure again to his classes. "Well," he said to me, cheerily, when we met in the first laboratory hour of the semester, "we're going to see cells this time, aren't we?" "Yes, sir," I said. Students to the right of me and to the left of me and in front of me were seeing cells; what's more, they were quietly drawing pictures of them in their notebooks. Of course, I didn't see anything.

"We'll try it," the professor said to me, grimly, "with every adjustment of the microscope known to man. As God is my witness, I'll arrange this glass so that you see cells through it or I'll give up teaching. In twenty-two years of botany, I—" He cut off abruptly for he was beginning to quiver all over, like Lionel Barrymore, and he genuinely wished to hold onto his temper; his scenes with me had taken a great deal out of him.

So we tried it with every adjustment of the microscope known to man. With only one of them did I see anything but blackness or the familiar lacteal opacity, and that time I saw, to my pleasure and amazement, a variegated constellation of flecks, specks, and dots. These I hastily drew. The instructor, noting my activity, came back from an adjoining desk, a smile on his lips and his eyebrows high in hope. He looked at my cell drawing. "What's that?" he demanded, with a hint of a squeal in his voice. "That's what I saw," I said. "You didn't, you didn't, you didn't!" he screamed, losing control of his temper instantly, and he bent over and squinted into the microscope. His head snapped up. "That's your eye!" he shouted. "You've fixed the lens so that it reflects! You've drawn your eye!"

Dialogue Dialogue, which helps to *recreate* people and events rather than just tell about them, can become a dominant form and thereby shape your writing. Recreating an actual conversation, you could possibly write a whole scene using nothing but dialogue. More often, however, writers use dialogue occasionally for dramatic effect. In the account of his battle with the microscope, for instance, Thurber uses dialogue in the last two paragraphs to dramatize his conclusion:

"We'll try it," the professor said to me, grimly, "with every adjustment of the microscope known to man. As God is my witness, I'll arrange this glass so that you see cells through it or I'll give up teaching. In

twenty-two years of teaching botany, I—" . . . "What's that?" he demanded. . . . "That's what I saw," I said. "You didn't, you didn't, you didn't!" he screamed. . . . "You've fixed the lens so that it reflects! You've drawn your eye!"

Title, Introduction, and Conclusion In your journal, sketch out several possible titles you might use. You may want a title that is merely an accurate label, such as *Russian Journal* or "The Boy's Desire," but you may prefer something less direct that gets your reader's attention. For example, for his essay about his hat that appears at the end of this chapter, student writer Todd Petry uses the title "The Wind Catcher." As a reader, what do you think about Alice Walker's title, "Beauty: When the Other Dancer Is the Self"?

Introductions or beginning paragraphs take several shapes. Some writers plunge the reader immediately into the action—as Gregory Hoffman does—and then later fill in the scene and context. Others are more like Kurt Weekly, announcing the subject—trash cans—and then taking the reader from the present to the past and the beginning of the story: "It all started when I was sixteen. . . ." At some point, however, readers do need to know the context—the *who*, *what*, *when*, and *where* of your account.

Conclusions are also of several types. In some, writers will return to the present and discuss what they have learned, as Andrea Lee does in *Russian Journal*. Some, like Alice Walker, end with an image or even a dream. Some writers conclude with dramatic moments, or an emotional scene, as student writer Juli Bovard does in the essay "The Red Chevy" that appears at the end of this chapter. But many writers will try to tie the conclusion back to the beginning, as Richard Rodriguez does at the end of "The Boy's Desire": "The closet door closes . . . the fog rises." In your journal, experiment with several possibilities until you find one that works for your subject.

*I start at the beginning,
go on to the end, then
stop.*

—GABRIEL GARCÍA
MÁRQUEZ,
AUTHOR OF ONE HUNDRED
YEARS OF SOLITUDE

*I always know the
ending; that's where I
start.*

—TONI MORRISON,
NOBEL PRIZE-WINNING
NOVELIST

DRAFTING

When you have experimented with the above shaping strategies, reconsider your purpose, audience, and main idea. Have they changed? In your journal, re-examine the notes you made before trying the shaping activities. If necessary, revise your statements about purpose, audience, or main idea based on what you have actually written.

Working from your journal material and from your collecting and shaping activities, draft your essay. It is important *not* to splice different parts together or just recopy and connect segments, for they may not fit or flow together. Instead, reread what you have written, and then start with a clean sheet of paper. If you're working on a computer file, you can start with your list of events or one of your best shaping strategies and expand that file



PEER RESPONSE

The instructions below will help you give and receive constructive advice about the rough draft of your remembering essay. You may use these guidelines for an in-class workshop, a take-home review, or a computer e-mail response.

Writer: Before you exchange drafts with another reader, write out the following information about your own rough draft.

1. State the main idea that you hope your essay conveys.
2. Describe the best *one* or *two* key scenes that your narrative creates.
3. Explain one or two problems that you are having with this draft that you want your reader to focus on.

Reader: Without making any comments, read the *entire* draft from start to finish. As you *reread* the draft, answer the following questions.

1. Locate one or two of the *key scenes* in the narrative. Are they clearly set at an identified time and place? Does the writer use vivid description of the place or the people? Does the writer use dialogue? Does the writer include his or her reflections? Which of these areas need the most attention during the writer's revision? Explain.
2. Write out a *time line* for the key events in the narrative. What happened first, second, third, and so forth? Are there places in the narrative where the time line could be clearer? Explain.
3. When you finished reading the draft, *what characters or incidents were you still curious about?* Where did you want more information? What characters or incidents did you want to know more about?
4. What *overall idea* does the narrative convey to you? How does your notion of the main idea compare to the writer's answer to Question 1? Explain how the writer might revise the essay to make the main idea clearer.
5. Answer the *writer's questions* in Question 3.

After you have some feedback from other readers, you need to distance yourself and objectively reread what you have written. Review the advice you received from your peer readers. Remember, you will get both good

(continued)

PEER RESPONSE

Revision requires at least three steps. Writers must first become aware that a bit of text is deficient or could be improved. Then they need to create *alternative versions* of that portion of the text. Finally, they must *choose among those alternative versions*, based on the purpose, audience, and context. Too often, teachers focus revision workshops primarily on the first step, without giving students sufficient time to create alternative language or without showing students how to choose one version based on purpose, audience, or context. Using your own draft of a remembering essay on an overhead transparency or projected computer screen, model all three steps for your students before you assign revision workshops.

(continued from previous page)

and bad advice, so you must decide what you think is important or not important. If you are uncertain about advice you received from one of your peers, ask for a third or fourth opinion. In addition, most writing centers will have tutors available who can help you sort through the advice you have received on your draft and figure out a revision plan. Especially for this remembering essay, make sure your memories are recreated on paper. Don't be satisfied with suggesting incidents that merely trigger your own memories. You must *show* people and events vividly for your reader.

*The difference between
the right word and the
nearly right word is the
same as that between
lightning and the
lightning bug.*

—MARK TWAIN,
AUTHOR OF THE
ADVENTURES OF
HUCKLEBERRY FINN

ESL TEACHING TIP

You finally have complete drafts or essays from your ESL students. *After* you read the papers by your ESL students, but *before* you mark on those essays, read Joy Reid's "Teaching Composition to Speakers of Other Languages" in the Prentice Hall Supplement, *Teaching Composition with the Prentice Hall Guide*. Also, consult Bates, Lane, and Lange, *Writing Clearly: Responding to ESL Compositions* (1993).

as you draft. Concentrate on what you want to say and write as quickly as possible.

To avoid interruptions, choose a quiet place to work. Follow your own writing rituals. Try to write nonstop. If you cannot think of the right word, put a line or a dash, but keep on writing. When necessary, go back and reread what you have previously written.

REVISING

Revising begins, of course, when you get your first idea and start collecting and shaping. It continues as you redraft certain sections of your essay and rework your organization. In many classes, you will give and receive advice from the other writers in your class. Use the guidelines below to give constructive advice about a remembering essay draft.

Guidelines for Revision

- **Reexamine your purpose and audience.** Are you doing what you intended?
- **Revise to make the main idea of your account clearer.** You don't need a "moral" to the story or a bald statement saying, "This is why this person was important." Your reader, however, should know clearly why you wanted to write about the memory that you chose.
- **Revise to clarify the important relationships in your story.** Consider relationships between past and present, between you and the people in your story, between one place and another place, between one event and another event.
- **Close and detailed observation is crucial.** *Show*, don't just tell. Can you use any of the collecting and shaping strategies for observing discussed in Chapter 3?
- **Revise to show crucial changes, contrasts, or conflicts more clearly.** Keller's and Walker's essays, for instance, illustrate how *conflict* and

changes are central to an effective remembering essay. See if their strategies will work in your essay.

- **Have you used a straight chronological order?** If it works, keep it. If not, would another order be better? Should you begin in the middle and do a flashback? Do you want to move back and forth from present to past or stay in the past until the end?

If you are using a chronological order, cue your reader by occasionally using transitional words to signal changes: *then, when, first, next, last, before, after, while, as, sooner, later, initially, finally, yesterday, today.*

- **Be clear about point of view.** Are you looking back on the past from a viewpoint in the present? Are you using the point of view of yourself as a child or at some earlier point in your life? Are you using the point of view of another person or object in your story?
- **What are the key images in your account?** Should you add or delete an image to show the experience more vividly?
- **What voice are you using?** Does it support your purpose? If you are using a persona, is it appropriate for your audience and purpose?
- **Revise sentences to improve clarity, conciseness, emphasis, and variety.**
- **Check your dialogue for proper punctuation and indentation.** See the essay by Alice Walker in this chapter for a model.
- **When you are relatively satisfied with your draft, edit for correct spelling, appropriate word choice, punctuation, and grammar.**

POSTSCRIPT ON THE WRITING PROCESS

After you finish writing, revising, and editing your essay, you will want to breathe a sigh of relief and turn it in. But before you do, think about the problems that you solved as you wrote this essay. *Remember:* Your major goal for this course is to learn to write and revise more effectively. To do that, you need to discover and adapt your writing processes so you can anticipate and solve the problems you face as a writer. Take a few minutes to answer the following questions. Be sure to hand in this postscript with your essay.

1. Review your writing process. Which collecting, shaping, and revising strategies helped you remember and describe incidents most quickly and clearly? What problems were you unable to solve?
2. Reread your essay. With a small asterisk [*], identify in the margin of your essay sentences where you used sensory details, dialogue, or images to *show* or recreate the experience for your reader.
3. If you received feedback from your peers, identify one piece of advice that you followed and one bit of advice that you ignored. Explain your decisions.
4. Rereading your essay, what do you like best about it? What parts of your essay need work? What would you change if you had another day to work on this assignment?

TEACHING TIP

Question 4 asks students to evaluate, in general terms, the final versions of their essays. If teachers intend to help students learn how to revise, *the student's perception of strengths and weaknesses should be the focus of a teacher's written or oral response.* If the student correctly says, for example, that the first scene needs more detail but the final scene is effective, then the teacher can verify the student's judgment. If the student mistakenly thinks that a key scene is effective when it is narrated too hurriedly, then the teacher can explain what the problem is and suggest how to fix it.

NARRATIVE MODE OF WRITING INFORMATION PACKET

Explanation	Considerations	Prompts
<p>Narrative writing recounts a personal experience, tells a story or describes a series of events. Offers writers a chance to think and write about themselves. Examples would include a story (personal, true, imaginative), fable, myth, or biography.</p>	<p>Plot: Narratives tell a story. They have characters; a setting; and a beginning, middle, and end.</p> <p>Style: Narratives may be organized chronologically (according to what happened when in time). All the details are related to the plot. Details are concrete; they "show" the reader the story rather than "telling."</p> <p>Narratives may contain dialogue between characters. They can be written in past or present tense. They can be written in first person (I) or third person (he, she, it).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell a story about your best holiday celebration ever. Write about this celebration and tell why it was your favorite. • Tell about a happy event when you did something enjoyable as a child. • Tell the story of a time when you realized that you suddenly understood an idea, a skill, or a concept you had been struggling with. • Tell the story of a time when you did something that took a lot of nerve, a time when you didn't follow the crowd or a time when you stood up for your beliefs.

NARRATIVE WRITING WEBSITES

Autobiography: Telling Your Story found at <http://web.odu.edu/AL/wts/autopap.htm>
 On this page, you will find tips on choosing a topic with autobiographical significance, using details in your essay, focusing your essay and structuring your storyline.

It's TIME for a New Bibliography for Narrative Writing found at <http://www.geocities.com/oberry1790/narrativebibliography.htm>
 On this page, you will find an expanded, annotated bibliography of children's literature that will serve as excellent models for students and teachers of good literature for narrative writing.

Writing a Narrative Essay at <http://glory.gc.maricopa.edu/%7Eemdinchak/101online/narrative.htm>
 Contains information on purpose, characteristics, planning, and subject suggestions.

Having Our Say, the History at <http://www.havingoursay.com/History.htm>
 Tells the story of two sisters and their lives from 100 years of American history. Also contains the original newspaper article from 1991.

Defining Characterization

Characterization is the process by which the writer reveals the personality of a character. Characterization is revealed through **direct characterization** and **indirect characterization**.

Direct Characterization tells the audience what the personality of the character is.

Example: "The patient boy and quiet girl were both well mannered and did not disobey their mother."

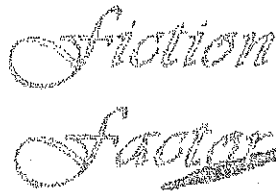
Explanation: The author is directly telling the audience the personality of these two children. The boy is "patient" and the girl is "quiet."

Indirect Characterization shows things that reveal the personality of a character. There are five different methods of indirect characterization:

S peech	What does the character say? How does the character speak?
T houghts	What is revealed through the character's private thoughts and feelings?
E ffect on others	What is revealed through the character's effect on other people? How do other characters feel or behave in reaction to the character?
A ctions	What does the character do? How does the character behave?
L ooks	What does the character look like? How does the character dress?

TIP #1: Use the mnemonic device of STEAL to remember the five types of indirect characterization
TIP #2: Use indirect characterization to analyze visual media:

- Film:** Look at how the character dresses and moves. Note the facial expressions when the director moves in for a close-up shot.
- Drama:** Pay attention to the way that the characters reveal their thoughts during a soliloquy.



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Direct vs. Indirect Characterization
by Terry W. Ervin II

Anyone can write a book - but it takes something special to create a best-seller

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Characterization is an important element in almost every work of fiction, whether it is a short story, a novel, or anywhere in between. When it comes to characterization, a writer has two options:

1. **DIRECT CHARACTERIZATION** - the writer makes direct statements about a character's personality and tells what the character is like.
2. **INDIRECT CHARACTERIZATION** - the writer reveals information about a character and his personality through that character's thoughts, words, and actions, along with how other characters respond to that character, including what they think and say about him.

An alert writer might recognize that the two methods of characterization fall under the decision to "show" or to "tell". Indirect characterization "shows" the reader. Direct characterization "tells" the reader.

As with most "show" versus "tell" decisions, "showing" is more interesting and engaging to the reader, and should be used in preference to "telling". Does that relegate direct characterization to the prose trash heap? No. There are times when direct characterization is useful. Whereas indirect characterization is more likely to engage a reader's imagination and paint more vivid images, direct characterization excels in brevity, lower word count, and moving the story forward. For example, a writer may want to reveal a minor facet of a character's personality without distracting from the action in a scene. It is up to the writer to decide when each characterization method is appropriate.

To observe the difference between direct and indirect characterization, read the paired paragraphs below. Each is written to convey the same basic information. One of each pair demonstrates direct characterization while the other demonstrates indirect characterization. See if you can identify which method is being used.

Paragraph Pair 1:

A. Ed Johnson scratched his head in confusion as the sales rep explained Dralco's newest engine performance diagnostic computer. The old mechanic hated modern electronics, preferring the old days when all he needed was a stack of manuals and a good set of tools.

B. "That Ed Johnson," said Anderson, watching the old mechanic scratch his head in confusion as the sales rep explained Dralco's newest engine performance diagnostic computer. "He hasn't got a clue about modern electronics. Give him a good set of tools and a stack of yellowing manuals with a carburetor needing repair, and he'd be happy as a hungry frog in a fly-field."

Paragraph Pair 2:

A. Julie owned a multitude of outfits and accessories, and it always took her forever to decide which combination might impress Trent. As usual, she called her sister several times for advice. After doing so, Julie decided to give the navy blue skirt with the white sweater a try.

B. Julie held up six different outfits in front of the mirror and pondered which would go best with her navy blue shoes, pastel eye shadow and the diamond earrings she'd already procured from her overflowing vanity. After ninety minutes of mixing and matching, and cell-phoning her sister three times for advice, Julie finally made

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up her mind. She'd give the navy blue skirt and white sweater a try, hoping Trent would love it.

In both instances, Paragraph A illustrates an example of direct characterization (telling) while Paragraph B provides an example of indirect characterization (showing). While one might quibble with the quality of each paragraph (or Julie's fashion sense), the direct characterization examples are shorter, leaving less imagination to the reader, while still getting the same basic information across. Which is most appropriate depends on the needs and concerns of the writer.

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Examples of Indirect Characterization from *The Cat in the Hat*
Character: The Cat

Type of Indirect Characterization	Examples	Explanation
S peech		
T houghts		
E ffect on others		
A ctions		
L ooks		

Examples of Indirect Characterization from *The Cat in the Hat*

Type of Indirect Characterization	Examples	Explanation
S peech	Many of the words spoken by the cat at the beginning of the story have an upbeat connotative meaning. For instance, the cat says to the children, "But we can have / Lots of fun that is funny!" (7). So all we could do was to Sit! Sit! Sit! Sit! And we did not like it. Not one little bit (3).	This reveals that the cat's character is an upbeat character that likes to have fun. These are the thoughts of the narrator as he stares out the window on a rainy day. These thoughts reveal that this character is not happy about his current situation.
E ffect on others	Throughout the first three quarters of the story, three different illustrations portray the fish scowling at the cat (11, 25, and 37) immediately after each of the cat's activities. When the cat returns to clean up his mess at the end of the story the fish is shown with a smile on his face (57). On page 18, the cat engages in "Up-up-up with a fish" an activity that involves the cat standing on a ball while balancing seven objects. Later in the story, the cat releases two "things" that fly kites inside the house.	The scowls on the fish's face support the argument that the cat's behavior at the beginning of the story is not acceptable to the fish. The fish's smile at the end of the story reveals that the cat is engaging in behavior that is now acceptable to the fish. These activities are outrageous, dangerous and should not be conducted in the house. They reveal that the cat's character is not concerned about rules related to safety and appropriateness.
A ctions	Throughout the first three-quarters of the story, the cat is shown with a smile on his face. Towards the end of the story, however, when the cat is told to leave, he is shown leaving the house with slumped shoulders and a sad face.	The smiles reveal that the cat is enjoying himself and is not apologetic for his outrageous behavior. The frown and slumped shoulders at the end of the story show that he is not enjoying himself anymore.
L ooks		



Writing Dialogue

Writing dialogue—a conversation between two or more characters—is easy if you follow these guidelines:

1. All words spoken by a character must be surrounded by quotation marks. A direct quotation can come at the beginning or the end of a sentence.
2. A direct quotation begins with a capital letter. If a quotation is interrupted, the second part begins with a lower-case letter.
3. A direct quotation is set off from the rest of a sentence by commas. If a direct quotation is interrupted, commas are placed before and after the interruption. The comma before a direct quotation falls outside the quotation marks. The comma—or any punctuation—after a direct quotation falls inside the quotation marks.

Examples:

Ted smiled and thought, "I can't wait to get to the ball game!"
"Yes, I am the one who baked the chocolate cake," admitted Granny
"Jim," she said with a grin, "I'm going to make sure you lose this match."

4. Dialogue is less formal than other kinds of writing. To make your characters sound natural, you may use short sentences and contractions in dialogue.
5. In a conversation between characters, start a new paragraph each time the speaker changes.
6. Be careful not to use the word "said" too often. Use other livelier verbs, such as "whispered," "yelled," "mumbled," "cried," and "confessed."

Writing Assignment

Complete one (or more) of the following assignments:

1. Create two characters: a younger person deeply in need of affection and warmth and an older person willing to give it. Write a one- to two-page conversation between the characters. The details (their relationship, situation, etc.) are up to you, but make the reader care.
2. Using yourself and your best friends as the models, try writing a fictionalized conversation among three or more characters. Try to capture the style of your crowd's real-life speech: slang, rhythms, who interrupts whom, etc.
3. Write a dialogue between abstract characters, such as Love and Hate, Happiness and Sadness, Greed and Generosity, etc.

Writing Realistic Dialogue

by Gary Reynolds

Introduction

Evidence presented to me in both novels and short stories suggests that dialogue is one of the hardest parts of fiction writing. Both novice and experienced authors seem to get it wrong from time to time – some more often than others. This can present itself in a number of ways:

- You have to re-read what was said before it makes sense.
- You read a piece of dialogue and then think to yourself 'they just wouldn't say that - it doesn't seem right'.
- You are thinking 'come on, spit it out already'.

Sound familiar? I thought so. Dialogue is hard to write. Fact. But it's not impossible.

Comparison to the real-world

So let's get one thing clear upfront. Dialogue in fiction is not the same as real life conversation. Let me repeat that so it sinks in. Dialogue is NOT the same as real-life conversation. But it should read like real speech.

In real-life, you make small talk - at least most people do. You ask how someone's weekend was, whether they watched *Battlestar Galactica* last night and so on. You talk because it's sociable and enjoyable.

Characters in fiction should never, never talk for the sake of 'making conversation'. They should talk for one reason and one reason only - to move the plot forward. That doesn't mean that the conversation needs to be tremendously exciting all the time, but it should move the story along.

For example:

"Hey, John, fancy coming back to mine for a beer?"

The above snippet of dialogue isn't exciting. Who cares whether John fancies a beer, but it does allow you to switch scene from the current location to someone's house. And that's important.

A small aside - Motivation Reaction Units

The above paragraph is my way of saying that dialogue should always be part of a Motivation Reaction Unit. For the uninitiated, let's introduce MRUs here...

- > At the highest level you have your story - let's say it's a novel.
- > A novel has chapters and each chapter tells a defined part of your story.
- > Each chapter contains scenes and sequels.
- > A scene is where the action occurs.
- > A sequel is the character's reflection on the preceding scene. They digest what has

happened, think about it, resolve to do something about it, etc. When the time comes to act, we're back into the next scene.

- Each scene and sequel contains multiple MRUs. So an MRU is one of the smallest components of your story that can be considered 'self-contained'. Each MRU follows the following format:
 - Something happens.
 - Someone reacts.

That's it - at least at a high level. MRUs will be discussed in more detail in a future article.

The point as far as dialogue is concerned is that it should be part of an MRU. If it's not, then it has no place in your story. And if it *is* in your story, then make sure it's not overly verbose or waffly. Keep it tight.

Style

The 'style' of your dialogue should be appropriate to the story and story-world. For example, a romance novel will probably contain more lengthy dialogue sequences that touch upon emotions than a sci-fi novel would.

So how do you determine what is appropriate? Read other books in your genre – a lot of them – and study how the dialogue is structured and what it tries to achieve. It's also worth bearing in mind that the way people speak changes over time, so:

- Try to read novels released in the last ten years.
- When writing your own dialogue, avoid the use of slang. It will date your story.

Formatting

As the Editor of Concept Sci-fi, I see a lot of problems and uncertainty when it comes to writing dialogue. Let's take a look at an example that beginning authors often get wrong:

WRONG: "I hate you." He said.
CORRECT: 'I hate you,' he said.

Note there are two differences above. The first is that the dialogue appears in single quotes. This is now the accepted norm for fiction. The second is that the words 'he said' are part of the same sentence as the preceding words. So there's no capitalisation on 'he', and 'you' ends with a comma (inside the speech mark). Periods should also appear inside the speech marks, e.g.

He stared at her for a moment. 'Oh, you think so.'

Other factors to bear in mind when it comes to formatting dialogue are:

When someone new starts speaking, start a new line (indented). Consider the following:

Paul looked at her. 'What are you going to do?' She stared blankly. 'I don't know, Paul.'

And compare this to:

Paul looked at her. 'What are you going to do?'
She stared blankly. 'I don't know, Paul.'

Which is easier to read? You need to take time to learn how to punctuate your dialogue correctly, otherwise you risk alienating the reader (if you manage to get past the Editor and actually get your work published).

Accents

Most people have a regional accent. Some are strong, some barely noticeable. Portraying an accent when writing dialogue can be immensely useful. It can give you an idea of a person's background and how they're likely to react in a given situation. You can even use readers' stereotypes of people with different accents to your advantage by making them react in a completely different way. But don't over-do the accent.

Consider the following example:

'Wa' y'all doin' 'ere.' - Yikes!
'What y'all doing here.' - Much better.

You also need to ensure that all of your characters don't sound alike when they talk. This can become very boring and repetitive for the reader. Using an accent in moderation is a good way around this problem. Using grammar is another. People use different grammar when they speak (and they rarely speak using grammatically correct sentences).

If you find you are struggling to make your characters' speech individual, try giving some of them an unusual word or phrase that only they use. But do this sparingly.

Tags

What's wrong with *'he said'*? The short answer is nothing. So why do some many authors insist on using a wide array of tags to try and bring their dialogue alive. *'She gushed'*, *'he exploded'*, *'she exclaimed'*. These can all sound out of place and make the reader cringe – and if they cringe you're losing them.

There is a school of thought which says that *'he said'* and *'she said'* are all you need. If you need something more descriptive, then try including an adverb, such as *'she said softly'*.

Information Dumps

Don't do it! An information dump is where you have two characters talking and the sole purpose of the exchange is to fill in some back-story for the reader.

You can usually identify an information dump in dialogue quite easily. It will often start with *'As you know...'* or some similar phrase.

Readers don't like this and, frankly, it's a little bit lazy. If you need to fill in some back-story, find a more subtle way of doing it.

Umms and Ahhs

When you converse in the real world, you have to think about what you're saying. Your speech rarely comes without the occasional 'uumm' or 'aaahh' as you struggle to find the words you're looking for.

In fiction, this is boring. Use it **very** sparingly.

Pacing

Dialogue can be used for more than just showing a verbal interaction between two people. Here are a few pointers:

- Dialogue between two people without narration is speedy. So use this if you need to pick up the pace.
- Monologue is usually read slower.
- Dialogue with narration is slower still.
- There is a difference between a character whose words dissolve with '...' and those which get terminated abruptly with a '-'. Use them appropriately and to your advantage.
- Page after page of pure dialogue can be tedious. Break it up with some action, e.g.
'Hey, get off me!' She backed away from him, eyes locked on his.

Identifying your speaker

Ever read a long piece of dialogue, only to get half way through before you figure out who's talking? We've all been there!

It's important to get your speech-attribution tags in as early as possible. Identify up-front who is talking, and then remind the reader every fifth or sixth exchange (or less) so they can easily keep track, e.g.

'Hey, what's going on?' said John.

Emily looked at him and smiled. 'Not much. Fancy catching a movie?'

'Sure. What you want to watch?'

'Dunno. What's on?'

His forehead creased for a moment, trying to recall the listings from the evening paper. 'I have no idea!'

Getting it right

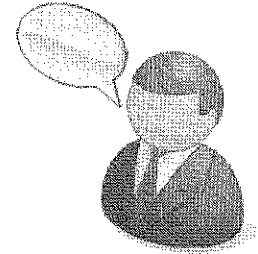
If you consider all of the above, then I think that you'll be able to write more realistic dialogue. But how do you know whether you've got it right. There's one simple piece of advice that I can offer – read it aloud.

If it sounds right when you read it aloud, then it probably is right.

Have fun!

Writing Dialogue

When writing dialogue, begin a new paragraph for each new speaker. That helps the reader to keep track of who is speaking. Be sure to enclose the **actual spoken words** in quotation marks.



Tag Lines and Dialogue

A phrase or **tag line** identifies the speaker and appears in the same paragraph as the speaker's words. Once the flow of conversation is established and it is easy to identify the speakers, the tag lines can be eliminated.

"Do you need a ride?" asked Patti, pulling up in her Jaguar beside her friend.
"Yes, I'm afraid so," said Melissa.
"My Porsche 959 has broken down."
"Hop in; I'll drive you."
"Are you sure?"

Tag lines are treated as **interrupters**. When they appear in the middle of quoted words, they are enclosed by two commas; if a tag line appears at the beginning or at the end of quoted material, one comma is enough because we never begin or end a sentence with a comma.

"If I don't find a ride," Melissa said, "I can't go to the Brain Bowl competition."
Patti said, "Oh, I'll drive you. Don't fret."
"You've save my life," said her friend.

Notice that if speech includes several sentences, we need quotation marks only before and after the whole speech. However, if we interrupt the group of sentences with a tag line, we close the quotation with end quotation marks and then open it again after the interruption.

"What shall I do? My car has broken down," Melissa said tearfully. "If I don't find a ride, I can't go."

A tag line may come **between the two halves of a compound sentence**. In that case, we put the semicolon or the joining word after *said*, like this:

"Hop in," Patti said, "and I'll drive you."
"Hop in," Patti said; "I'll drive you."
"The traffic looks bad," said Patti; "nevertheless, we'll make it on time."

Punctuation and Dialogue

Periods and commas always go inside quotation marks, possibly because they are very small. Other punctuation marks—such as question marks and exclamation marks—go inside if they belong to the quotation and outside if they do not. (Note: only use *one* end punctuation mark.)

He asked, "May I have this dance?"
What do you think of "No new taxes"?
Do you believe in an "eye for an eye"?

If a quotation falls within another quotation, use single quotation marks to set off the internal quotation.

Marta said, "What do you think of 'No new taxes'?"
"Stop!" said Jacob, "or I'll yodel 'My Wild Irish Rose.'"

An **ellipsis mark (...)** may be used to indicate a trailing or falling tone in conversation. An ellipsis is three equally spaced periods, and it can be used as an end punctuation mark *only in* this capacity. (When the ellipsis is used to indicate omitted material at the end of a sentence, it requires a fourth, sentence-ending period as well.)

Kathie said, "I guess I could go..."

A **dash** (-- or -) is sometimes used in dialogue to mark a sudden interruption—for example, a correction, a hesitation, a sudden shift in tone, or an unfinished thought.

Professor McGowan stepped in front of the podium and said, "As I was saying, class—ahem—MISTER Ogden, please pay attention!"

"You could go—or not," said Brian. "Whatever you decide."

Dashes give a loose, casual tone to a piece of writing as well as lend a breathless quality to what's being said. However, too many dashes make a passage seem disorganized and out of control. *Do not use* dashes carelessly in place of periods or commas or in any context that calls for other marks of punctuation.

Thoughts and Dialogue

Thoughts may be put in quotation marks, or they may be *italicized*. It is up to a writer how he or she wishes to indicate the thoughts of a character, but the writer should be consistent throughout the work.

How much do those shoes cost, wondered Chloe. Are they half-price?

Dialogue Punctuation

How do you use punctuation when you have dialogue in your story? Let's look at one of our favorite authors, Joanne Rowling, who wrote the Harry Potter Series. How does she use punctuation?

1. All talking needs to be surrounded by quotation marks ("").

"Go to your cupboard - I mean, your bedroom," he wheezed at Harry.

The first (") is used just before the first word that the person says, and the second (") is used just after the last word. The comma has to go inside the quotation marks.

2. Instead of using a period at the end of the speech, use a comma, if you are going to tell who is talking.

"Las' time I saw you, you was only a baby," said the giant. "Yeh look a lot like yer dad, but yeh've got yer mum's eyes."

After the word baby, Joanne used a comma because she was letting the readers know it was the giant speaking. But after the word eyes, she could use a period to finish the sentence.

3. If you use a question mark, you don't need to change to a comma.

"What do they think they're doing, keeping a thing like that locked up in a school?" said Ron finally. "If any dog needs exercise, that one does."

After the word school, Joanne used a question mark. Usually, we use a comma before telling the readers who the speaker is - but not with a question. The question mark goes inside the quotation marks.

4. If you use an exclamation mark, you don't need to change to a comma.

"A stone that makes gold and stops you ever dying!" said Harry. "No wonder Snape's after it! *Anyone* would want it."

After the word dying, Joanne used an exclamation mark. Again, it needs to be inside the quotation marks, and there is no need for a comma.

5. If you have interrupted speech, to let the reader know who is speaking, a comma is needed before the break, and after the speaker's name.

"Professor," Harry gasped, "your bird - I couldn't do anything - he just caught fire -"

After the word Professor, Joanne used a comma inside the quotation marks to let the reader know that Harry was speaking. When she wanted to start his talking again, she used a comma after gasped to let the reader know about the change. The second (") just before your let the readers know that talking started again.

6. If someone is thinking about something, but doesn't say it out loud, you can either use quotation marks or not. Either way is acceptable.

Of course, he thought bitterly, Uncle Vernon was talking about the stupid dinner party.

Joanne chose not to use quotations around Harry's thoughts. She could just have easily used them like this...

"Of course," he thought bitterly, "Uncle Vernon was talking about the stupid dinner party."

