



# Narrative Writing

Lifescapes 2020



**Goal:** To tell a story

## Uses:

- Entertain
- Gain/hold readers' interest
- Teach/inform
- Change attitudes/social opinions

## Characteristics:

- Point of View
- Voice
- Distance
- Sympathy
- Rhythm
- Descriptive language\*



**Point of View:** Refers to who is narrating (telling) the story.

**General Rule:** Memoirs should be told from a defined point of view (usually that of the subject, or someone with a direct connection to the subject). This invites intimacy and encourages trust.

# Internal vs. External Narrators



**Internal Narrator:** A character in the story.

Can tell the story two ways:

1. As it is happening *or*
2. Retrospectively (popular for memoir writing), often including how the narrator was changed by the event

**External Narrator:** Not a character in the story (stands outside the world of the story, looking in)

Optional components: comments on the story and/or expresses the thoughts of a character in the story

# Distance and Sympathy



Point of view influences *distance* and *sympathy*.

**Distance:** refers to whether the narrator is emotionally distant from the story or very close and involved. Closer distance can make it easier for readers to empathize.

**Sympathy:** refers to how much the narrator empathizes with the characters or judges them.



**Definition:** What your reader “hears” when reading your words. Voice is conveyed by the language of the narration, the tone, the choice of commentary.

**Impact:** indicates the narrator’s personality and their attitudes towards events and others in the story.

# Point of View → Voice



If you are telling a story that took place when you were five *from the point of view of the child you were then*, you will write in the language of a five-year-old.

**vs.**

The same story told *from the point of view of the adult you are now* will contain different insights and vocabulary, as you reflect on times past with the benefit of (and all the perspective gained from) your life experience.

# What point of view should I pick?



Point of View	Child	Adult	Mix (using flashbacks)
<b>Benefits</b>	More intimacy and elicits empathy from reader.	Creates a bigger picture that contains the consequences of what happened and your adult interpretation.	Provides variety and allows author to present narrative through multiple lenses.
<b>Drawbacks</b>	Lacks more developed understanding of life.	Lacks intimacy and empathy.	Can be confusing for readers if not done clearly and may be harder for author to focus their writing.



# Sentence Structure



**Rhythm of the Sentence:** determined by such things as length, wording, and punctuation.

**Purpose:** Sentences are shaped by purpose. (Are you shouting a command or reflecting on something profound?)

**Variety:** Using all all short sentences will sound harsh, choppy and all long sentences will sound stuffy and lose your reader amidst all your meandering. A varied rhythm and pace will flow more naturally. Your reader will appreciate it!

# Stand Out Sentences



**Concern:** a narrative sentence may not serve the purpose of the story if its rhythm is so unexpected or its beauty so dazzling that it pulls the reader out of the narrative.

**Solution:** stand-out sentences serve well as compelling opening lines and to wrap things up in a satisfying and emphatic manner.

# Example Opening Sentences



“It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.”

*Jane Austen, Pride and Prejudice*

“There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it.”

*C.S. Lewis, The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*

“Call me Ishmael. Some years ago - never mind how long precisely - having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on shore, I thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world.”

*Herman Melville, Moby Dick*

# Example Closing Sentences



“The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which.”

*George Orwell, Animal Farm*

“In a place far away from anyone or anywhere, I drifted off for a moment.”

*Haruki Murakami, The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*

“After all, tomorrow is another day.”

*Margaret Mitchell, Gone With the Wind*

# Paragraph Length



**Purpose:** Paragraphs show connections and separations in the flow of the story. They are part of the rhythmic pattern of the work as a whole.

**Use:** It matters where you start a new paragraph – this marks a new idea, a new scene, a new statement.

# Narrative Structure



**Orientation:** introduces the setting (time, place, atmosphere), the plot (memoir storyline), and characters.

**Complication:** a problem, challenge, journey, epiphany, observation, rite of passage for the main character to solve, overcome, or experience.

**Series of Events:** leads towards an event of high tension and suspense (or at least, takes the reader on a journey of some kind along with the narrator).

**Resolution:** solves the aforementioned complication, either happily or unhappily (or doesn't! But you are aiming for a natural endpoint, an end of some kind to the journey you started).

Thanks!



Questions? Comments?  
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