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.
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?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Point of View</th>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Adult</th>
<th>Mix (using flashbacks)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Benefits</strong></td>
<td>More intimacy and elicits empathy from reader.</td>
<td>Creates a bigger picture that contains the consequences of what happened and your adult interpretation.</td>
<td>Provides variety and allows author to present narrative through multiple lenses.</td>
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<td><strong>Drawbacks</strong></td>
<td>Lacks more developed understanding of life.</td>
<td>Lacks intimacy and empathy.</td>
<td>Can be confusing for readers if not done clearly and may be harder for author to focus their writing.</td>
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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 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!
**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*
“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
**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).
Questions? Comments?
Email Rharding@brantfordlibrary.ca