

Creative Writing

While there may be some educational and professional settings that will encourage creative writing, the purpose of this practice is more about developing your own voice in writing. Creation in your second language is an important part of both establishing your sense of self and extending your language finesse without the pressure of grades or rigid structure of academic writing.

Purpose

Creative writing is centered on the idea of expressing original ideas and reflecting on experiences. The most common purpose for creative writing is entertainment. This takes many forms, from novels to poetry to movie scripts to song lyrics to a personal history. In all of those forms (and many others), creative writing serves as a vehicle to share ideas and emotions with the audience. Creative writing also often has the purpose of description and reflection, which further connect the audience to your ideas by painting a picture with words in such a way that the reader can see or feel that same experience second-hand. Finally, creative writing is often for the purpose of self-expression. In these cases, the potential audience is less important than you as a writer having a space to explore your internal world through your own words.

In other words, the purpose of creative writing is a varied as the product itself. Although there are many types of creative writing, this chapter will only discuss the short story (fiction) and short memoir (personal non-fiction).

1 Exercise: Creative Purpose

You will need to write a creative essay for this assignment. The first step of the process is to choose a creative writing purpose by selecting one of the prompts below for your writing:

1. Focus your purpose on entertaining with a positive emotion at the center. Your purpose is to make your reader laugh, smile, and feel happy.
2. Focus your purpose on entertaining with surprise. This could be to shock your reader as in a scary story or to present a mystery that will be explained by the end.
3. Focus your purpose on connecting with the reader over self-expression about something difficult. This may take the form of sharing a disappointment, sadness, or struggle.
4. Focus your purpose on describing so carefully that the reader can picture all of the details. There might be some emotion or reflection involved, but the principle reason for writing is to transport a reader somewhere else.

Prewriting

Although some creative writing can be spontaneous, for the purpose of this course, you will be

producing planned and drafted creative work.

Genre Selection

The first step is to decide what type of creative writing you will work on. This begins with deciding between fiction (not based on history or fact) and non-fiction (accurately presents true events). For this assignment, this becomes either a short story or a memoir.

A short story is a fictional writing that focuses on an isolated event (or a simplified series of events) and typically has few characters, but it is fully developed and unified.

A memoir is a true (or at least assumed to be true) retelling of a lived experience. A short memoir is focused on an episode (scene, incident, occurrence).

From here, you can decide on a more specific genre such as humor, romance, horror, action, drama, mystery, etc. Because this chapter is focused on *short* creative writing, you will want to choose the genre carefully so that you can fully develop your narrative in that amount of space. For example, you would not want to attempt to tell the whole story from beginning to end of how you and your significant other fell in love. Likewise, you would not want to try to fit the entirety of a complicated magic world into two pages of writing. Thinking of a specific situation (like an episode of a tv show) will help you to narrow down your ideas to a manageable story within your chosen genre.

2 Exercise: Narrowing by Genre

Decide how you want to achieve your purpose either by telling a fictional story or personal events. The writing assignment is a two page paper, so consider the limits of how much story you can tell in that space.

Character & Setting

Once the genre has been decided, brainstorming about character and setting begins. In order for creative writing to effectively connect with the audience, the reader needs to be able to visualize the story and understand the people involved. In a novel, you have plenty of space to describe physical appearance, give examples of personality in different situations, and describe the full, detailed world inhabited by the characters. However, in a short story or memoir, you need to communicate only the essential points so that there is space for plot.

Because of this limited space, take time to brainstorm details about the people and places first. When you have a full mind map of everything you *could* include in the story, it will be much faster to identify the *essential* details that relate to the episodic plot you will write. First write all of the descriptions you can think of and mark the ones most related to the genre choice. You will then come back and make that selection even shorter after you have outlined the plot.

An additional point to deciding on character is deciding on the narrative style you will use. The most common styles are first person and third person narratives. A first person narrative is the story told with personal pronouns (I, my, me, etc) as if the main character is writing the story. A third person narrative is the story told as an outside observer (using third person pronouns such as he, she, it).

This is a matter of preference in the perspective, but a successful story can be told in either style. The decision does need to be made before you begin writing however, because you must maintain that grammatical style.

Plot Outlining

The importance of the outlining stage of writing becomes more clear when you have limited space. There is no room for extra ideas. You do not have the luxury of anything unnecessary. The shorter the word or page count, the more intentional you need to be about what details you will include.

Plot outlining begins with identifying the problem, conflict, or peak of drama at the center of the episode. This is known as the *story climax*, and it is the most critical part of the story because it answers both the question *what happened* and *why does it matter*. In a humorous story, this would be the *punchline* or the moment that makes you laugh. In a dramatic story, it may be the moment the main character realizes the truth of the situation. You can think of it as a late thesis statement. It is the sentence, or sometimes paragraph, that is the whole purpose of the story. Everything before it builds up to this moment. The conclusion is the reaction to it.

Once the that point of the story has been established, you can work backward to brainstorm the steps leading up to it and the context of character and setting that create a sense of tension around that main point. Again, it may be easier to first write down all of the facts or minor events prior to the main event and all details from immediately after. Getting all of the ideas down on paper during the prewriting stage will clear your mind and you will be able to sort through the necessary and unnecessary.

3 Exercise: Creative Prewriting

1. Take your initial purpose and genre plan and create a 1-2 sentence summary of what the story is about.
2. Create word webs to brainstorm details about characters, setting, and important plot points.
3. Carefully eliminate the unnecessary details.
4. Practice telling the story to a partner using only the remaining brainstorming details.
5. Add or delete any details based on your spoken draft.

Organization

Creative writing is an excellent opportunity to practice "breaking the rules" of writing. It is a common saying that you have to know the rules in order to know how to effectively ignore or change them for a specific task. A great example of this principle can be seen in the artwork of the famous painter Vincent van Gogh.

4 Exercise: Artistic Freedom

1. Take a look at some of van Gogh's early work on [this page from the van Gogh Museum](#).
2. Then click through to see his later self-portraits, landscapes, and floral artwork on [this page from the van Gogh Museum](#).
3. Discuss the differences and similarities between his early artwork and the paintings and drawings he created later in life.
4. How does this relate to writing?

Writing follows a similar pattern. You begin by learning very strict rules about punctuation, organization, appropriate length, etc. However, as you practice and explore and gain skills, you will see that there are many opportunities to break from the rigid structure and expectations to create something that is uniquely designed to fit the task.

This all goes to show that although creative writing is very free and open, there are elements of organization patterns that will be familiar to you from your heavily structured academic writing experiences.

Hook

Just as with an essay, a creative writing draft needs to begin with something that draws your attention. It is often very memorable and connects the reader immediately to the new world they have opened up. Take a little time to open a few different novels, blog posts, or magazines. You should be able to immediately spot the hook that convinces the reader to continue.

The problem/conflict

The problem or conflict in a story is similar to a thesis statement. Everything in the story centers around a main event, issue, or individual. All of the details surrounding that idea are given only to create a richer description of the world so that the problem/conflict feels real to the reader. The story will arrive at a moment when the problem reaches its peak (climax), such as the reveal of the villain, the moment when the character falls in love, or the point when a major decision is made that changes everything.

The solution

The solution is like the conclusion of an essay. It reminds you of how the characters got to the moment where the main problem was solved. It should feel like a natural end, where all the major points (topic sentences) have been addressed. Sometimes the solution includes a message or a clarifying theme (an implied main idea) that emphasizes to the reader a lesson that should have been learned after the experience.

5 Exercise: Outlining

1. Rewrite your summary as a problem/conflict thesis statement.
2. Develop a hook connected to the thesis statement.
3. Write a brief conclusion to show how the story will end.
4. Develop the points left from the brainstorm into complete sentences.
5. Organize the outline logically.

Writing

Aside from the usual practice in presenting clear ideas and logically organized connections between those ideas, creative writing is an opportunity to practice two very useful writing skills.

The first writing skill that gets extra attention in creative writing is word choice. Creative writing should push you to expand your vocabulary and to understand the connotations of synonyms. Finding a more interesting word that conveys an additional meaning (ex. speak vs whisper vs mumble vs rant) can add depth to understanding without using a significant amount of space. This skill transfers very well to academic writing, where you often have strict length limitations and you need to reduce your word count to be more precise.

5 Exercise: Adding Detail

Now that the outline is complete, revisit the word choice in your completed sentences to add more descriptive language. Don't just focus on adding adjectives and adverbs. Think about how synonyms with more specific connotations can add interest to all of the parts of speech.

As you add to the existing sentences, keep a list of any extra words you find that do not fit now but could be used in your supporting sentences.

The other writing skill frequent in creative writing that can benefit you in academic writing as well is the use of literary devices. The main literary devices that often crossover between these two genres of writing are *analogy*, *metaphor*, and *simile*.

An *analogy* is a comparison between two different things that emphasizes the similarities to make a point. This comparison explains important attributes of the first thing by drawing connections with the second object or concept. An analogy is typically longer than a sentence or two because of the purpose of explaining with details.

- "O! be some other name: What's in a name? that which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet; So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd" (*Romeo and Juliet*, William Shakespeare)
- "My mom always said life was like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get." (*Forrest Gump*)

A *metaphor* is a short analogy that does not require explanation, and uses equivalent language that x is y. The comparison is simple and the reader is expected to infer the meaning of the comparison without much difficulty.

- Her anger was a hurricane.
- The truth is a light in the darkness.

A *simile* is a different type of short analogy that also does not require explanation, but uses language for similarity such as x is like y or s is as y. Again, the comparison is simple and the reader is expected to infer the meaning of the comparison without much difficulty.

- He is as strong as an ox.
- The teenager was growing like a weed.

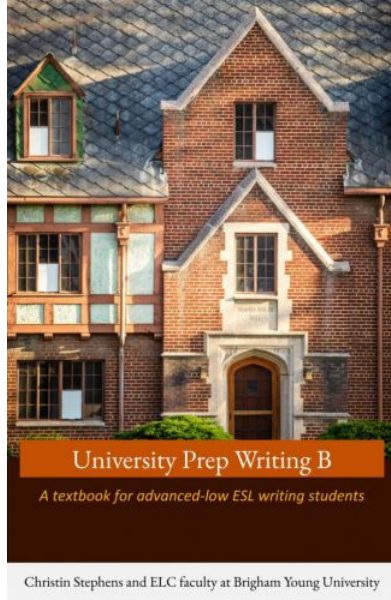
6 Exercise: Literary Devices

1. Add three literary devices (analogy, metaphore, or simile) to your draft.
2. Switch drafts with a partner and evaluate their literary devices.
3. Identify what literary device is used.
4. Give suggestions of how to integrate the phrase more fully into the story.

7 Exercise: Creative Draft

Submit a draft of your creative writing online for your teacher to review.

- 2 pages (double-spaced)
- fiction or memoir
- descriptive language (including 3 literary devices)
- clear story structure and purpose



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