



Guidelines to Improve Creative Writing

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Abstract

Creative writers can and should stretch their imagination in a sanctified manner. At the very outset, the guidelines discussed in this article for creative writing are meant for story writers not for poetry. Writers should choose their words which are fitly spoken; for instance, downbeat and upbeat rhythms (the weather is gloomy today is downbeat; whereas, what a beautiful day is upbeat. Or the writer chooses words fitly so as to be able to cry with the lonely princess). Using action sentence is a must, here the writers can use an important technique 'show' not 'tell'. If a writer narrates the whole story, which is telling, the story will fall flat. The characters in the conversation and dialogue should be real, that is, they should be strong and play their role well and the story should be a deep story not surface story. The story scene should include narration, action, and dialogue. Next is viewpoints. The two main divisions are subjective and objective viewpoints. Common subjective viewpoints are first person and third person where the writer is inside the mind of the speakers. On the other hand, an objective viewpoint is an outside observation. Before the writers write their story, they need to plan well and choose the 'plot' that suits the story. Transitions or linkers or connectives are to be used correctly for the smooth flow of the story. Names and titles are to be chosen carefully to make the story interesting and to keep the readers till the end of the story; therefore, the writer also should include emotions and suspense. And of course, the writers have to begin the story well and bridge it to the main body of the story; and endings should sound complete and bring home the readers.

Keywords: creative writing, action sentence, character, plot, viewpoint, transition

INTRODUCTION

Creative writers can imagine and write about anything of what is familiar around them. Some writers prefer to write at a particular time and place; some like to write on paper and then type it; however, there are those who type straight in a laptop or computer. Some writers have everything in front of them but still suffer the 'Prufrock Syndrome' or 'writers block' (Chindhade, & Thorat (2009). Instead of sitting and thinking what to write, the writer should start writing with 'what shall I write?' write anything, keep writing- 'the pen and paper are here, the blank sheet is staring at me, my topic is...' keeping the momentum of writing, the ideas will soon unfold for the human mind has the natural ability to solve problems. According to Sabrina (2020), all that the writers need is a pen and a paper or a handset or laptop or computer. Some writers keep changing from paper to laptop to notebook etc. depending on a certain part of the story or material they want to write. For instance, some writers use pen and paper/notebook when writing something they need more thinking to describe a place/a character...some start with the streams of consciousness. Streams of consciousness is what the writers think in their mind and write, it may be funny, silly but keep writing whatever comes to the mind and sooner or later they will be able to write better. Literally, a writer can write anything and everything! So, how to start? Writers can write anything they see, hear, and know around them; and all the creative juices will start flowing. It is a good idea to keep a small notebook under the pillow while sleeping or carry a notepad to jot down ideas whenever they pop up. Writers should not trust their memory, they will forget.

The beginning

The beginning of the story should sound like the beginning. Creative writing is a prose that tells a story, sprinkle in with specifics like we season our food. Writers do not begin writing stories the same way. Some of them

"begin with a message or an idea they want to share with readers" or they "follow a kind of 'yo-yo' process changing characters as the plot develops and altering scenes to improve characterization" (Sorenson, S. (2002). Other writers begin their story in medias res etc.

Choice of words

Alex (July 27, 2021) opines that the writers must know the quality of words they use; just like a tailor knows his fabric and the cook knows foods and seasonings. Words are like a double-edged sword, they can kill and they can give life. Therefore, writers must know what words to avoid and what are suitable to use in their story. They should use words which are fitly spoken; for instance, 'food' does not create an image like 'ice cream' does; 'he had a car' is better written 'he owned a car'. Given below are some examples of weak and lazy writing and how to improve them; furthermore, show is better than tell.

Weak and lazy words: He was singing an old song.

There was a mobile torchlight on the table lighting the room.

There were four cows feeding in the meadows.

Improve: He sang an old song.

The mobile torchlight on the table lighted the room.

Four cows are feeding in the meadows.

Showing is better than telling: Writers can show rather than tell, they can use action sentences to show action and movement. Let us look at the examples below:

Telling: She was glad to see me.

Showing: She saw me and ran with open arms.

Telling: John was nervous.

Showing: John clenched his fists, fidgeted with his hands, and keeps on checking his watch as the interview approached.

The story scene

The story scene should include narration, action, and dialogue. Readers must experience the scenes in the story with all their senses: see, hear, feel, taste, and smell. Furthermore, they must also experience the location, the background, and the characters. Conflict in the story is necessary; what does the protagonist want and why is the villain against the hero? If everything goes on smoothly, the story will fall flat. The fight, struggle, and competition will make the readers stay because they create emotions and suspense.

Characters

The characters in the conversation and dialogue should be real, strong, believable, and play their role well. There should be human flaws to make them believable. Sometimes readers know the characters by what they say and do, for example:

"You want some tomatoes ma'am?"

"No, but I'll take some of your sweet potatoes."

"You want a punkin too, since it's gettin' on toward Halloween?"

"Yes, a big one. The children will enjoy it. Give me a basket of those Concord grapes. They make such good jelly" (Youngberg, p. 20, 1968).

The writer does not need to write 'the vegetable peddler said' or 'the lady said' the readers know from the conversation who is speaking. In fact, this short conversation shows several things about the two speakers. The lady has children and she takes care of them; she makes pies and jelly; from her attitude, the readers know that the peddler is a nice and honest person. This conversation also shows the readers the time of the year, near Halloween and it is the season when pumpkins and Concord grapes are ripe.

Viewpoints

The two main divisions are subjective and objective viewpoints. Common subjective viewpoints are first person and third person where the writer is inside the mind of the speakers. On the other hand, an objective viewpoint is an outside observation.

The first-person viewpoint uses 'I, me, my, ours. The writer enters the person's mind and tells a story as if it were his own. There are three advantages in this view point: firstly, the writer finds it easy to stay in the viewpoint, secondly, it gives authenticity, and thirdly, the writer feels comfortable. However, the disadvantages are that the writer cannot record brave and heroic actions because 'I' will sound braggy; and one cannot keep any secret.

Third person subjective viewpoint uses 'he, she, they, them, their, and people's name. The writer is still inside the hero's mind but he does not use 'I' he uses third person.

Second person subjective is the most intimate viewpoint; it is commonly known as the 'I-You' viewpoint. It is rarely used in stories. It is used in letter writing, textbooks, and inspirational articles.

The omniscient viewpoint is the most comprehensive viewpoint; the writer enters all minds and can use all subjective and objective viewpoints. It has a complete knowledge of knowing everything on all aspects- past, present, and future time. This viewpoint is like God, know all, understand all of human affairs. Therefore, an omniscient viewpoint is not easy to write; even established writers do not use it throughout the story. Charles Dickens used it only in his final chapter of *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Conflict

The conflict starts when the protagonist, the main character, faces some problems. The obstacle which the protagonist faces could be one or both of the following conflicts: the internal and the external conflicts; the internal conflict is within the protagonist himself. He

may struggle with his own frustration, guilt, and sorrow. On the other hand, the external conflict is the struggle with the outside force. It could be something to do with the environment (such as weather, water, and fire) or a person, the antagonist.

Plot

Before the writers write their story, they need to plan well and choose the 'plot' that suits the story. Given below are some example plots we can find in Youngberg, N. (1968).

1. The '*biter bit*' plot- the character in the story wants to harm someone but gets caught in his own evil trap. He wants to bite someone but he gets bitten himself.
2. The '*love transformation*' plot- love for something enters a human heart and transforms it. For instance, the story of the lily's pure white beauty is about a lady who lives in a dirty cottage. One day someone gives her a lily growing in a flowerpot, she likes it and she takes care of it; she cleans the window and the lily looks really nice. Finally, her love for the lily transformed her life. She cleans the whole house.
3. Another common plot is the '*search for something lost*' plot. Stories that come under this plot are: stories of missing/stolen children, buried treasure, lost cattle come under this plot. Occasionally, the 'lost' is intangible: courage, faith, peace, and security.
4. The '*Pygmalion and Galatea*' plot. Originally, this plot comes from an old Greek tale about a sculptor, Pygmalion, who fell in love with the ivory statue he had carved. Some stories are written in this plot, for example, *The Light that Failed* by Rudyard Kipling.
5. The '*Humpty-Dumpty*' plot- Humpty-Dumpty falls from the wall and he is never the same again. Stories such as

King Nebuchadnezzar, *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, and *Hard of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad.

Transitions

Transitions or linkers or connectives are to be used correctly for the smooth flow of the story.

These transitional words can be of great help in connecting sentences, ideas, and paragraphs from one to the next. They can also improve their writing style. Transitions such as the following words and phrases can make the reading smooth and easy; but writers must make sure that they choose and use what suits their writing well. Here are some examples of transitions that writers can use:

"Also; besides; accordingly; in addition; next; likewise; furthermore; on the contrary; thus; further; meanwhile; on the other hand; then; therefore; as a result; at the same time; but; however; similarly; in conclusion; again; moreover; consequently; finally" (Talang-Rao, 2021, p. 168).

Here is a sample paragraph with transitions: "To sum up, words and phrases such as these can be used effectively to smooth transitions and thus make for easier reading. However, make sure you are certain what the word means and choose the one that best fits your writing. Finally, use a variety of these transition words" (Vyhmeister, 2001, p. 96).

Names and titles

Having the right name creates magic in the story. Therefore, names should fit the story.

Doubtfire (2003) says that it is not easy to envisage the name for a character. The writers have to listen carefully to the inner voice so they will be guided by their intuition.

Names such as Mary Matthews and John Smith are unattractive and faceless as compared to Yank Hazelton and Rumpelstiltskin.

In the story if the character is a kind man but his name is Rube Klindt, then it does not fit because it sounds hard and harsh. Perhaps names such as Abhinav, Ryia, Hans fit the kind, the good, and the simple characters. Similarly, Phillip Bose and Pamila are stronger characters than Lee Ellis and Shirlee. Names such as Sue and Sam; Eddie and Freddie should be used only if they are twins.

Giving names to two groups of people such as 'The Good People and The Bad People' is colourless as compared to "The Beeblebean and The Beebleboo' (Singer, 1994).

Story titles should be three to five words. Modified nouns in general are good titles. For instance, *A New Walking Sticks*; *Unwanted Guest*; *Dreadful*, *Sorry Clementine*, et cetera.

Titles such as *Jimmy's Victory* and *Peter Saves the Plane* reveal the solution of the problem; therefore, they are weak titles; they dissipate the interest of the readers, they already have the idea what to expect. In short, names and titles should belong to the story and create excitement to the readers.

Endings

The endings of the story writing are of two kinds according to Youngberg, N. (1968). the closed ending and the open ending.

The four common closed endings stories have all loose ends and threads tied up.

1. The traditional tie-up ending- there are two kinds of traditional endings:
 - a. Happy ending- the hero wins; the villain is punished.
 - b. Unhappy ending- the hero fails to attain his goal.

2. The reversed ending- The characters are in a reversed position.

To cite an example, the ugly duckling became a beautiful swan; 'biter bit' stories have a reversed ending.

3. The postscript ending- is closed; however, sometimes writers do write extra paragraphs at the end of the story to provide a surprise twist. It is also known as the epilogue ending. Eg. *The Diamond Necklace* by Guy de Maupassant.
4. The gimmick ending- also known as the 'O. Henry ending' he uses this type of ending. For instance, *The Gift of the Magi*.

The two common open endings the stories end without tying up loose ends. The story leaves the readers to conclude what happens to the characters:

- The periscope ending- the last paragraph/sentence has a periscope pointing to the future suggesting events yet to happen to the characters.

Eg. *The Alibi*- a story about a man who is going to commit murder

- The true open ending-the story seems incomplete; the readers may have their own ending according to their own understanding. Story ending of this type is usually used in magazines catering to refined readers.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, writing stories is not hard; anyone can write about what they know and what they like; that is, if writing stories is their cup of tea. It can be fun because they can use their imagination. However, it should be a sanctified imagination, not lies. The characters and the location should be real to life so also the problems the hero faces should be one that is believable. Furthermore, writing improves writing skills, like a practice reader, a writer will learn different writing styles. Writing stories provide writers a lot of fun and facts which otherwise they will not have known. When writing a variety of topics, writers learn more and therefore, widen their experience and can communicate and share their ideas, feelings, and beliefs with others. Writing enhances writers with infinite benefits.

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