



HMS Press Publishing BookClub BookLits 2020

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Reprints & Originals

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Creative Writing Prose

One of the first and usually the easiest to put down on paper is a diary and/or a personal journal. A diary is primarily a personal accounting of yourself to yourself. Journaling is an expanded set of entries that are not necessarily daily or personal. If an unrelated idea comes to you in your journal, feel free to expand the idea. Don't look at the pen, just start writing. Let it take you outside the box, or at least, your apartment box. When you go on trips or vacations, or meet interesting people etc., Journaling is the best memory maker. Journaling is a good first step toward taking those ideas and expanding them into a poem or a story, or essay, or even a novel.

Once you've stepped up and taken the leap into prose or longer letters etc., a second writing tip comes into play; write first, edit later. Editing while you write can be the frustrating part if you struggle with spelling or words in general. It can hold you back and may take away from the original idea or a creative moment you had. Write first, edit later.

After you put down in words what you want to form into a story, a few things emerge to help make it better and easier. Don't forget, you are not writing for yourself now, you are writing to be read and/or heard by others. Does everyone walk around all day with their eyes closed or their head down or their mouth closed? Wait. That's Cell Phone use in modern society! No, so add clear descriptions and settings and don't forget to use dialogue when necessary. Don't forget about accents where needed.

If you have trouble with description and settings, then you should use a technique developed by Ted Plantos, Toronto's Parliament St. Librarian in the 90's. It's a technique he called storying.

The example I will use is from a story I called Mrs. Wilmot. I begin with the image of her driving in a car on a dark road. It is raining. There may be any number of reasons she may be in this situation. The story develops by introducing another element. There is a package beside her on the seat. There can be any number of related things to expand the story; like someone in the headlights, a ring on her finger, a radio announcement. What kind of car, what color, a dirt road, a paved road, urban, country setting etc.? Each of these added elements would give the story a particular direction. The next element that occurred to me was that she was delivering a package. To do this on a dark rainy night it must be for a friend. Was it a dirt road, paved, wooded fields, lakeshore etc. speed she was going, automatic, standard? The idea is for the different elements added to suggest a story that eventually takes off.

Ok, let's look at an innocent character named Josh. Josh gets on an empty elevator. On the next floor, somebody gets on the elevator; a woman with a small dog, a woman in a bikini, a man in dark glasses or in a cowboy hat, someone whom he has never seen before but knows his name or a man clutching a brief case to his chest. We then ask who these people are and how they may affect Josh. Any number of situations can be built around any number of characters.

The idea is to layer characters, settings and situations until the story takes off. In storying it would also help if the author would create a biographical, psychological and physical sketches of the characters. Much of the things you think about a worked out as the characters are developed and they determine where the story is going. The idea of storying

is to reach a point where you are not consciously layering, but the story takes off and has a life of its own. It all flows out of the original one or two sentence sets and the meeting of characters.

At around the same time that Ted wrote his storying idea, another book came to my attention by Dorothea Brande who had a similar idea in her 1934 book *Becoming A Writer* about storying the characters:

You know how vividly you see a strange town or strange country when you first enter it. The huge red buses careening through London, on the wrong side of the road to every American that ever saw them - soon they are as easy to dodge and ignore as the green buses of New York, and as little wonderful as the drugstore window that you pass on your way to work each day. The drugstore window, though, the streetcar that carries you to work, the crowded subway, can look as strange as Xanadu if you refuse to take them for granted. As get into your streetcar, or walk along a street, tell yourself that for fifteen minutes you will notice and tell yourself about every single thing that your eyes rest on. The streetcar: what color is it outside? Not just red or green here, but sage or olive green, scarlet, or maroon. Where is the entrance? Has it a conductor or a motorman, or both in one? What colors are on the inside? What colors on the walls, the floor, the seats, the advertising posters? How do the seats face? Who is sitting opposite you? How are your neighbors dressed, how do they stand or sit? What are they reading, or are they sound asleep? What sounds are you hearing? What smells are reaching you? How does the strap feel under your hand, or the stuff of the coat that brushes past you? After a few moments you can drop your intense awareness, but plan to resume it again when the scene changes.

Another time speculate on the person opposite you. Where did she come from, and where is she going? What can you guess about her from her face, her attitude, her clothes? What, do you imagine was her home life like? [see Virginia Woolf's story *An Unwritten Novel* from her book *Monday or Tuesday*]

Hint number four; If you notice what you watch in movies or on TV, something should occur in your stories. Never introduce something if you are not going to use it later on. Let's say you are writing a mystery or a play and one of the characters has a cat. Big deal right! But if an intruder is in a later scene or chapter, breaking into the house in the night, trips over the cat sleeping on the stairs and falls to his death or breaks a leg and is caught, then cause and effect are complete. Now keep a closer eye on those movies and watch for this. You may be surprised at how prevalent it is.

Finally, know where you are going with a story. What was the theme or purpose when you had started? Did it change or stay the same? A twist ending is usually good to grab the reader. Say something no one else has said before. The same applies for poetry. Write something that's gonna reach out and grab ya!