Higher Creative Short Story

HOME LEARNING BOOKLET

Over the last few weeks, we have asked you to try and write creatively by looking at a few images. We’d like to you to now focus on the construction of your creative folio piece.

Please use this booklet to help you develop your Folio piece this fortnight. Read through this booklet and attempt each task. Please send in any work that you have written to your teacher. You will be expected to hand in your first draft in August. When you start to write, use the planning booklet to help with structure.

(Booklet compiled collaboratively – Shawlands & Drumchapel)
Decision Number One

Are you going to write a poem?

Are you going to write a dramatic monologue?

Are you going to write a drama script?

Or are you going to write a short story?

Well, the chances are that you are one of the majority who choose the short story option.

If so, you’re in luck, because this booklet is about how to write a short story.

If you are looking for some examples of the short story form, then some texts to search for would be:

The Tell-tale Heart – Edgar Allan Poe
The Lottery – Shirley Jackson
Lamb to the Slaughter – Roald Dahl
The Sound of Thunder – Ray Bradbury
Click Clack the Rattle Bag – Neil Gaiman

Of course, many of these will have a higher word count than the limit of the folio, but they will give you a good sense of how to structure a narrative and build a theme.

“A short story is a love affair, a novel is a marriage. A short story is a photograph; a novel is a film.”
— Lorrie Moore
“A short story must have a single mood and every sentence must build towards it.”
— Edgar Allan Poe
“Write a short story every week. It's not possible to write 52 bad short stories in a row.”
— Ray Bradbury
“Short stories are tiny windows into other worlds and other minds and other dreams. They are journeys you can make to the far side of the universe and still be back in time for dinner.”
— Neil Gaiman

Decision Number Two

What is my short story to be about?
Well, that’s kind of up to you. The reason it is called Creative Writing is that you create something which wasn’t there before, about something that isn’t there at all.

If you’re writing about “The Role of the Weimar Republic in the rise of Nazi Power”, then you’re writing about something that actually happened and including facts and statistics and evidence to support an argument. However, a piece of narrative writing is about things which exist only in your imagination.

Except that’s not really true either. Most of us will include things we are interested in, or lean towards developing a theme we care about, and this inspiration is perfectly fine. So long as it is inspiration and not simply cold hard facts. So, having the rise of the Nazis as a backdrop to your story about a Jewish character struggling in Germany is okay – but your story should focus on the character and themes rather than getting in as much historical information as you can cram in.

Think – “Boy in the Striped Pyjamas” rather than historical documentary.
In her very helpful book "Monkeys with Typewriters: How to Write Fiction and Unlock the Secret Power of Stories" Scarlett Thomas writes that in order to write her novel "PopCo" she started with a list of all the things she was interested in at the time. Big or small. Significant and mundane. The list looked like this:

- Code-breaking
- Marketing
- Crosswords
- Toy companies
- Mathematics
- Pirates
- Cellular automata
- Having ideas
- Boats and sailing
- Animal rights
- Veganism
- The Voynich manuscript
- Cool grandparents
- Anti-capitalism
- Interactive elements (maybe a crossword in the book?)
- World War Two
- Being a teenage girl
- Cricket
Toy companies were on the list because she had read that they had a difficult time selling to teenage-girls and this became a big part of her story. She wrote about a woman who works for a toy company and is trying to come up with ideas for the teenage-girl market. However, alongside this she keeps receiving mysterious clues, written in code, from an unknown source. She then becomes involved in an underground society of rebels.

Look back at the list above, can you see where this concept came from? Now, I am not saying that putting a list together of Fortnite, football, food and any other ‘F’s you may enjoy is going to spark the greatest folio ever written. But, think about your interests: the things you enjoy watching on Netflix, the apps you use, your favourite films and try to think of what they have in common or how they could link together.

In your notes write down a list of at least 10 things which you are currently interested in.

Decision Number Three
What should my story not be about?

Although we’re not going to tell you what to write about (not yet, anyhow), we can give you some advice on the kind of things to avoid. Here are some:

1. The Mini-Novel: a cast of thousands, multiple locations, a long stretch of time.

As Bruce’s army crested the hill, Jock, Tam, Eddie, Mac, Jimmy, Phil and Cuthbert prepared for the greatest day of their lives. A few years later, a strange craft launched itself from the red sands of Mars...

2. The Concealed Discursive: all issue and no story

As she shivered in the doorway, away from the driving rain, Agnes thought bitterly about the injustice of homelessness. The Government’s current approach...

3. The Self-Consciously “Literary” Effort: all Thesaurus, no imagination.

The torpid disc blinked lethargically from the celestial vault as Pocahontes McCrossan meandered limply through the “slithy toves”...

4. The Big Issue: all issue, no character.
In the year 2009, atmospheric pollution on Earth finally reached crisis point. President Pat McDade looked blearily through the windows of the White House at the smog which engulfed the landscape...

5. The piece that doesn’t know when **enough is enough**.

Eventually, the aliens fled back to their own planet. “Fancy the game tonight?” grinned Bob to Fred. They walked off down the street.

The game itself was very tight. Pollock went one up in the tenth minute, but Hibs equalised soon after...

6. The piece which starts or finishes **at the wrong point**.

It had all begun that evening as he was preparing for bed...

And then Harry Potter woke up under the staircase in Privet Drive. It was all a dream!
Decision Number Four

What is my short story to be about? Which is pretty much back to where we started.

However, now that we have an idea of what not to do, we should be able to work out a bit better what to do.

We’re still not going to give you a subject, but whatever subject you choose for yourself, it should fit the following criteria:

It should have **two or three main characters** at most

It should have a **theme**: you should be able to say what it is about **without referring to the plot** e.g. racism, courage, grief.

It should have a conscious **structure** (see elements:1)

It should have a conscious **mood** which stirs specific emotions in the reader e.g. excitement, tension, terror.

It should be **implicit**: the theme or moral of your story should be left to the reader to deduce e.g. Do not begin with “John had always lacked courage, but now was his chance to challenge himself…”

it should be **selective**: you only need to mention what you need to mention.
Element 1: Narrative Structure

Classical narrative structure can be split into four elements:

Exposition---------development------------crisis -----------resolution

The exposition tells you what you need to know to understand the narrative:

WHO: the characters
WHEN: the setting in time
WHERE: the setting in place
WHAT: the general situation
WHY: the characters' motivation (which might come later).

The development introduces a problem, dilemma, or new idea etc, the “story” begins.

The crisis brings it all to the boil: your character is in danger, or finally must make a decision etc.

The resolution: harmony is restored, and sometimes the status quo i.e. back to normality.

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A fairy story is a very basic narrative (nowadays generally aimed at children) which lacks many of the elements which make reading narrative satisfying. However, we can use Red Riding Hood as a model for what we are trying to do.

Read the Outline of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ on the following page
Exposition: Who, what, where, when, why
One upon a time there was a little girl who lived with her parents in a cottage at the edge of a forest. Right in the middle of the forest was another cottage which belonged to the girl’s grandma. The little girl had a read cloak, made by her grandma, which she cherished and wore everywhere. Everybody began to call the girl Little Red Riding Hood.

Development: The story begins, harmony is disrupted, a new element is introduced.
One day the little girl’s grandma fell ill, so Little Red Riding Hood’s mum made the Grandma a cake in order to make her feel better. She told Little Red Riding Hood to take it to her grandma. So, Little Red Riding Hood picked up the basket, waved goodbye, and set off down the path to Grandma’s house.
She hadn’t gone very far when Little Red Riding Hood met a wolf, “Good morning Red Riding Hood, what have you got in your basket?”
“I have some cake for my grandma,” replied the little girl, “She is ill and needs some cheering up.”
“Why don’t we both go visit your Grandma?” asked the wolf, “I’ll race you there!”
The wolf ran away, and Little Red Riding hood continued along the path, picking up flowers and wild strawberries for her Grandma as she went.
The wolf reached Grandma’s cottage in no time and knocked on the door.
“Who is it?” shouted Grandma.
“Little Red Riding Hood,” whispered the wolf.

Crisis: The outcome hangs in the balance.
When Little Red Riding Hood saw the wolf, she said “Why, Grandma. What strong arms you have!”
“All the better to hug you with.” Said the wolf.
“Why Grandma, what big ears you have.”
“All the better to hear you with, my dear.”
“Why Grandma, what big eyes you have.”
“All the better to see you with.” grinned the wolf.
“Why, Grandma, what big teeth you have!”
“All the better to eat you with!” replied the wolf, and it jumped out of bed.
Little Red Riding Hood began to run, but the wolf was close behind her. Luckily, Little Red Riding Hood’s dad was working in the forest and heard her screams. He picked up his axe and rushed to the cottage. When he saw the wolf, he cut it in two with one mighty blow. Then he hugged his frightened daughter.

Resolution: harmony, the return to the norm.
When the girl turned around, she got an almighty surprise. Because her dad had cut the wolf in two, her Grandma had been able to escape unharmed. All three then settled in the cottage to eat cake and fresh wild strawberries.
Fairy Tales almost always follow the standard-beginning/middle/end-sequence of events, as this is the sequence most easily followed by children. However, a narrative does not need to “begin at the beginning”. It can begin in the middle of the narrative (in medias res) or near the end. In such cases, it should continue for a short time, then go back to the beginning and fill in the exposition through flashback.

Below are three ways in which the story might have been begun.

1. The sight of a small red cloak bobbing through the trees was enough to rouse the old wolf from his daydream...
   (Begins with Development)

2. Riding Hood hadn’t realised just how ill her grandmother really was until she saw her face above the blankets of her bed...
   (Begins with crisis)

3. The sound of terrified screams reached the ears of the resting woodcutter. There was no mistaking that voice...
   (Begins with end of crisis)

Task 2: Structure - Openings/Sequencing
Let’s look at the sequence of Cinderella (the key information only, if you are not familiar with the story then search it up online.)

**Exposition**
- Cinderella lives with her evil step-mother and her two ugly sisters.
- They treat her horribly, making her wear rags and work as the maid in their lavish household.

**Development**
- An invitation to the Prince’s ball arrives addressed to the household.
- The ugly step-sisters and the evil step-mother go to the ball and forbid Cinderella from going.
- Cinderella is sad and a fairy-godmother appears, magically providing her with a dress and transport that she has conjured from scraps and a pumpkin.
- Cinderella is told to make sure that she leaves the ball by midnight, as the magic will wear off.
- Cinderella arrives at the ball and is chosen to dance with the Prince.

**Crisis**
- The clock strikes midnight and Cinderella panics, running from the ball.
- The magic begins to wear off, her dress begins to fall apart and the carriage begins to transform back into a pumpkin.
- Cinderella leaves a shoe behind at the Ball.
- The Prince promises to search the whole land and marry whatever woman the shoe fits.
- The Prince searches all over to no avail and finally arrives at Cinderella’s house.
- Cinderella’s sisters fight over trying on the shoe.
- When the shoe doesn’t fit either of the sisters they lie and say that nobody else lives in the house.

**Resolution**
- The Prince discovers Cinderella and asks her to try on the shoe.
- The shoe fits.
- The Prince and Cinderella marry and live happily ever after.

*In your notes attempt four different openings, beginning at different stages of the story.*

*E.g. Begin with the crisis – Suddenly the bells of the clocktower began to chime in the distant village. Cinders grabbed the train of her dress and dashed as quickly as she could. Half-way down the stairs she tripped and fell. With no time to stop she ran bare footed into the dark night.*

**The Hook**
The advantages of beginning with the **Exposition** are (1) it is easier because you don’t have to jump about in time and (2) you’re not going to give away any of your secrets and the reader should feel curiosity or suspense. However, (2) only applies if the beginning is worthy of curiosity; if it is dull, the reader will feel little urge to continue.

Look at the following example:

*It was a cold winter’s day. John Smith got out of bed and went down to have his breakfast of boiled eggs and toast. Then he read his paper...*

This is unpromising for several reasons: the cliched weather, the irrelevant detail, and the lack of a **hook** (something to attract the reader's interest).

As early as you can in a narrative, you should introduce something to give the reader a reason to want to continue to read what you have written, this is the hook. Usually this is something unusual, or intriguing, or a threat of danger.

There are a variety of ways in which to establish this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hook Type</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Puzzler – raises questions which puzzle the reader.</td>
<td>I’m never really sure if it is a real memory, or simply something which became more solid over time, but my brother once tried to murder me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Salesperson – addresses the reader directly and tries to ‘sell’ them on how wonderful the main protagonist or story is.</td>
<td>So, you want to know all about my spectacular achievements? Well, stay right there and I’ll begin my enchanting tale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Historian – Gives background character information or summarises events which have taken place to set-up the scene.</td>
<td>600 years had passed since the end of the war, and yet, tensions in the city were as high as the day the war began.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hinter – drops subtle clues which the reader has to put together and which suggest what is going to follow.</td>
<td>It wasn’t as if we hated each other, far from it, but to any outsider the events which followed would probably suggest otherwise. But I don’t really think he knew what he was doing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Weatherman – sets the atmosphere in an intriguing way.</td>
<td>The sky was a shade of midnight, the pavements shone with drizzle and reflected lights from car headlights and streetlamps. The occasional splash of a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
puddle as a car drove by was the only sound. She walked on, oblivious to the time.

**The Painter** – Paints a visual image of the scene.

Crowds of people all swarmed around the giant structure which had been erected in the centre of the square. In every direction all you could see were the colours from flags and a sea of faces which blurred into each other. From lamppost to lamppost bunting had been strung with ceremony, leading people from the outskirts of the city in to the square.

**The Comedian** – takes a funny approach to gain the reader’s attention.

Being splashed by a car moving so quickly that you are soaked through to your underwear is incredibly funny. Unless it happens to you.

**The Interrupter** – brings you into the story during a conversation.

“I can’t believe he did that! What happened next?” Liz demanded.

**The Scientist** – uses an interesting fact or data to engage the reader.

Shock has been known to kill ten-year olds. It can cause their brains to explode and their hearts to stop dead still. These facts came to mind as I stood dumbfounded in front of my fourth-grade classmates. I wish I had stayed in bed.

1. GO TO TASK S 3+4
Task 3: Structure - The Hook (Identifying)

The following are the opening words of some famous pieces of literature. Try to identify the type of hook in each case and the particular words/phrase which suggests this (some may blend more than one type):

1. Mr Jones of the Manor Farm had locked the henhouses for the night, but was too drunk to remember to shut the popholes. With the ring of light from the lantern dancing from side to side, he lurched across the yard, kicked off his boots, drew himself a last glass of beer from the barrel in the scullery, and made his way up to bed, where Mrs Jones was already snoring. As soon as the lights in the farmhouse went out, there was a stirring and a fluttering throughout the farmyard...
   (George Orwell: *Animal Farm*)

2. It was a bright cold day in April and the clocks were striking thirteen...
   (George Orwell: 1984)

3. "When your mama was the geek, my dreamlets," Papa would say, "she made the nipping off of noggins such a crystal mystery that the hens themselves yearned toward her, waltzing around her, hypnotized with longing."
   (Katherine Dunn: *Geek Love*)

4. The story so far:
   In the beginning, the Universe was created.
   This has made a lot of people very angry and has been widely regarded as a bad move...
   (Douglas Adams: *Restaurant at the End of the Universe*)

5. Mother died today. Or, maybe, yesterday; I can’t be sure. The telegram from the home says: Your mother passed away. Funeral tomorrow. Deep sympathy. Which leaves the matter doubtful; it could have been yesterday.
   (Albert Camus: *L’Etranger*)
6. My first impression was that the stranger’s eyes were of an unusually light blue. They met mine for several blank seconds, vacant, unmistakably scared.  
(Christopher Isherwood: Mr Norris Changes Trains)

7. A squat grey building of only thirty-four storeys. Over the main entrance, the words, CENTRAL LONDON HATCHERY AND CONDITIONING CENTRE, and in a shield, the world state’s motto, COMMUNITY, IDENTITY, STABILITY.  
(Aldous Huxley: Brave New World)

8. As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his sleep into a gigantic insect.  
(Franz Kafka: Metamorphosis)

9. It was late in the evening when K. arrived. The village was deep in snow. The castle hill was hidden, veiled in mist and darkness, nor was there even a glimmer of light to show that a castle was there. On the wooden bridge leading from the main road to the village K. stood for a long time gazing into the illusory emptiness above him.  
(Franz Kafka: The Castle)

10. The stranger came early in February, one wintry day, through a biting wind and a driving snow, the last snowfall of the year, over the down, walking as it seemed from Bramblehurst railway station, and carrying a little black portmanteau in his thickly gloved hand.  
(H. G. Wells: The Invisible Man)

11. Lyra and her daemon moved through the darkening hall, taking care to keep to one side, out of sight of the kitchen. The three great tables that ran the length of the hall were laid already, the silver and the glass catching what little light there was, and the long benches were pulled out ready for the guests. Portraits of former Masters hung high up in the gloom along the walls. Lyra reached the dais and looked back at the open kitchen door, and, seeing no one, stepped up beside the high table. The places here were laid with gold, not silver, and the fourteen seats were not oak benches but mahogany chairs with velvet cushions.  
(Philip Pullman: The Northern Lights)
12. You don’t know about me, without you have read a book by the name of ‘The Adventures of Tom Sawyer’, but that aint no matter. That book was made by a Mr Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. (Mark Twain: The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn)

13. Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show. To begin my life with the beginning of my life, I record that I was born (as I have been informed and believe) on a Friday, at twelve o’clock at night. It was remarked that the clock began to strike, and I began to cry, simultaneously. (Charles Dickens: David Copperfield)

14. If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you’ll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don’t feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth. (J. D. Salinger: The Catcher in the Rye)

15. If you are going to read this, don’t bother. (Chuck Palahniuk: Choke)

16. When he was nearly thirteen, my brother Jem got his arm badly broken at the elbow. (Harper Lee: To Kill a Mockingbird)

Task 4: Structure - The Hook (creation)
Now you are going to attempt to write your own versions of each of the types of hook. Go back to the outline of Cinderella and the openings you have already come up with. Rewrite these covering at least three different types of hook.

e.g.

**Historian**

Ella had lived a happy, contented life as a small child. She had a loving mother and father, a giant mansion to play in, and all the wonders she could ever have hoped for.

This changed when her mother died, and her father married a deeply unpleasant woman.

After her father’s death, Ella had been told she could either leave the family home, penniless, or that she could stay on, and help as a maid.

This is how Ella found herself sweeping out the chimney in the grand hall while her step-sisters cackled ‘Cinder-ella’ at her, mocking her.

**Puzzler**

Only metres out of view of the castle Cinderella suddenly found herself sitting in the hollowed-out insides of a pumpkin, seeds in her hair, torn rags draped upon her, one fluffy rodent attached to her right foot and mild swelling on her bare left foot (which was beginning to turn an unusual purple colour).

**Salesman**

If somebody had found Cinderella as she awoke that very morning - curled under the stairs in the deep, dank, cellar – and told her that she would fall in love that very day (and to a Prince no less!) she would have pinched herself all day and refused to believe she was not still dreaming. But she wasn’t dreaming, this was a miraculous day.
The ending is the least important part of your narrative because most readers will have made up their minds about your story well before they reach the end. If it is not very good, they may never reach the end at all!

However, it is nice to round off a good story with a good ending.

1. **What kind of ending?**

   a. **The status quo**

   This is the ending that Red Riding Hood has where everything is back to what it was at the start.

   b. **Harmony is restored but things have changed.**

   Some other versions of RRH go “…and Red Riding Hood decided never to walk in the forest by herself again…” so things are not quite the same as something has been realised, and RRH learns stranger danger.

   c. **The open ending.**

   There is more to come which is left to the reader’s imagination: “As RRH wandered back to her house, a pair of yellow eyes, blazing with loss and hatred, watched from behind a tree.”

2. **Endings to avoid.**

   a. The **unconvincing ending** which is devised to fit the needs of the narrative rather than emerging naturally from it.

   Why, if the wolf is cut in two, does Gran emerge unscathed, in one piece? Because it would spoil the happy ending for her to be dismembered.

   b. The **Painted into a Corner Ending**: there is no way out but to wake up!
c. The ending that tells you what to think or feel: “So they all lived happily after, except, of course, the wolf, who was killed, and his family, who were completely devastated, especially his teenage sons, who became juvenile delinquents, much to the dismay of local farmers. If RRH had only thought before going into the woods that day...”

d. The ending that comes too soon- or not soon enough.
Task 5: Structure - Ending

a) Write the ending of Cinderella following the three recommended endings, using the Little Red Riding Hood examples to help.

b) Pick a film that you enjoy and rewrite the ending following the three ending types. If you are struggling to think then find a few plot summaries on Wikipedia and use these.

e.g.

Toy Story

The Status Quo

On Christmas morning the toys all wait in anticipation for new arrivals, hoping that Andy has asked for another friend to join their group. All is well.

Harmony is restored but something has changed

There is wrapping paper strewn around the floor, and yet no Toys have been prised from their plastic cells. Andy’s mum says there is one last present. The toys hear barks in the distance and Rex begins to panic. From the kitchen trots a boisterous puppy. Woody walks over and reassures Rex, “Hey buddy, we’ve dealt with worse. At least we’re all here.”

The Open Ending

The toys have been preparing for this. Christmas is always a big deal: new toys arrive and Andy’s mum makes him clear out some of his old ones for charity shops in order to make room for his shiny new ones. The gang wait in anticipation. Suddenly, in the distance, they hear a bark.

Elements 2: Narrative point-of-view.
Most fairy tales have a **third-person narrator**: the person telling the story is not in the story.

Usually, the narrator is **omniscient** (all-knowing): he or she can go anywhere and can tell you what all the characters are thinking.

Sometimes, the narrator is what is called a **demonstrator**: you are told what the characters say and do, and you have to work out what they are thinking for yourself, usually from various clues the author has provided.

The final type of third person narrator is the **limited** narrator. With this, you tend to follow one character and be told what they are thinking; you have to figure out the other characters yourself.

The other type of narrative used in prose fiction is the **first-person narrative**: the person telling the story is in the story, so you know everything that the narrator thinks, and have to guess (along with the narrator) what others are thinking.

**Second person** narrative is usually kept for adverts and directly addressing the audience to tell them what they want. Why? It is a bit weird to tell the reader what they’re doing.

**Remember:**

1. **1st person narrative** - uses the pronouns: I, we, me, us
2. **2nd person narrative** - uses the pronouns: you, your, yours
3. **3rd person narrative** - uses the pronouns: he, she, it, they

Sometimes the first-person narrator is an **unreliable narrator**: that is, it is clear to the reader that what the narrator thinks is not actually the truth.

A narrator can be unreliable in many ways; a narrator who is characterized by exaggeration and bragging; a narrator who is either experiencing mental defence mechanisms, such as PTSD or severe mental illness, such as schizophrenia or paranoia; a narrator who does not take narrations seriously and consciously plays with truth, and the reader’s expectations; a narrator whose perception is childlike, immature or limited through their fixed point of view/perception; a
mature narrator of sound mind who deliberately misrepresents themselves, often to cover-up something about themselves.

**Examples of unreliable narrators in literature/tv/film:**
Diary of a Wimpy Kid
Gone Girl
You
American Psycho
Fight Club
The Great Gatsby
Shutter Island
Joker
Filth

**Things which could cause your narrator to be unreliable:**
They are a child and so don’t fully understand what is happening.
They are an alcoholic who experiences blackouts but is trying to cover this up.
They have an incredibly inflated ego and a habit of exaggerating their own accomplishments.
They have PTSD from war or domestic abuse.
They are hell-bent on revenge and all their judgement is clouded by this goal.
etc.

**Task 6:**

**GO TO TASK 6**

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**First Person**

I am writing a novel.

**Unreliable**

It is going extremely well.
Narrative point of view

a) Rewrite the following examples in the narrative voice given.
e.g.

1. **First Person:** John walked along the street, shuffling as he went.
   rewritten as: **As I shuffled along the street.**

2. **First Person:** The Scarecrow found a tree full of nuts and filled Dorothy’s basket with them, so that she would not be hungry for a long time. **(The Wizard of Oz: L Frank Baum)**

3. **Third Person:** It was very early. I could tell by the pale pinkish-white light and the cool in the air. I got dressed and put the knife into the pocket of my shorts. I could hear you moving and creaking around the house. **(Stolen: Lucy Christopher)**

4. **First Person:** The next morning Mr. Sir marched the boys to another section of the lake, and each boy dug his own hole, five feet deep and five feet wide. **(Holes: Louis Sachar)**

5. **Third Person:** In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since. **(The Great Gatsby: F Scott Fitzgerald)**

b) Write a short account of the development stage of ‘Cinderella’ in first person narrative.

c) Pick one of the unreliable narrators below and one of the scenarios. Using first person write 200 words of a monologue detailing their thought process as the scenario unfolds. Try to give **subtle** clues that they are unreliable and cannot quite be trusted to be giving us all the details as they are.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrator</th>
<th>Scenario</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcoholic with a fuzzy memory on the night before</td>
<td>They’re in a supermarket doing their weekly shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small child playing a fantasy game</td>
<td>They are having an argument with a loved one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dementia patient</td>
<td>They are being interviewed for a job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrogant banker</td>
<td>They witness a car accident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soldier with PTSD</td>
<td>They are waiting in an airport</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Elements 3: Characterisation
Once you’ve decided what your story is about, what the sequence of events is, and who is telling the story, you have two further decisions to make:

who are your characters?

what are they like?

Remember:

Keep the number of characters low and motivate them properly (they are meant to be human).

One problem with fairy tales is that they are plot driven: characters do things for the sake of the story, not because it’s psychologically convincing.

For instance:

Why have Little Red Riding Hood’s parents never told her about speaking to strangers (especially strange talking carnivores)?

Why does the wolf not eat Red Riding Hood on the spot and then go to eat her Grandmother?

Why can Red Riding Hood not tell the difference between her beloved grandparent and a large wolf?

Why did her father not take the cake and butter himself, given that he appears to be working near the grandmother’s cottage?

The answer to all these questions is—just because!
CHARACTERISATION

It is important, whether you are writing fictional narrative or a personal piece, to give your characters (real or imaginary) some life, to make them individuals, so that the reader wants to know what is going to happen to them. If they are merely names, or shadowy figures, then this desire does not develop.

Characters may be created in the following ways, or combinations thereof:

1. Action

A writer can show a character performing some action(s) in a way that is typical (characteristic) of him/her, or which gives an indication of the type of character we are reading about. Read the following from Charles Dickens’ Great Expectations.

My sister had a trenchant way of cutting our bread and butter for us that never varied. First, with her left hand she jammed the loaf hard and fast against her bib—where it sometimes got a pin in it and sometimes a needle, which we afterwards got in our mouths. Then she took some butter (not too much) on a knife and spread it on the loaf, in an apothecary kind of way, as if she were making a plaster—using both sides of the knife with a slapping dexterity, and trimming and moulding the butter off round the crust. Then she gave the knife a final smart wipe on the edge of the plaster, and then sawed a very thick round off the edge of the loaf; which she finally, before separating from the loaf, hewed into two halves, of which Joe got one and I got the other.

The words in bold are quite forceful and harsh, which suggest this character is quite a hard, matter-of-fact person. There is not a lot of softness or nurturing about her, even in this caring act of feeding them.

Task 7: Characterisation - Action
a) Re-write the Dickens’ extract making the sister seem comforting and nurturing through her actions.

My sister had a ___________ way of cutting our bread and butter for us that never varied. First, with her left hand she ___________ the loaf ______ and _________ against her bib-wh ere it sometimes got a pin in it and sometimes a needle, which we afterwards got in our mouths. Then she took some butter (not too much) on a knife and spread it on the loaf, in a/n ___________ kind of way, as if she were ___________, using both sides of the knife with a ___________ dexterity, and _________ and __________ the butter off round the crust. Then she gave the knife a final ___________ wipe on the edge of ___________, and then __________ a very thick round off the edge of the loaf; which she finally, before separating from the loaf, __________ into two halves, of which Joe got one and I got the other.

b) Pick an option from each of the columns below and write a brief description (200-300 words) to give the impression of the character’s trait through their actions.

You can decide the name/age/gender/occupation of the character if you think it is important.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angry</td>
<td>Making dinner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient</td>
<td>Planting seeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selfish</td>
<td>Cleaning a car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messy</td>
<td>Getting dressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shy</td>
<td>Waiting for a bus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clumsy</td>
<td>Eating at a restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energetic</td>
<td>Trying to sleep</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

e.g. Angry and Eating at a restaurant

Drew beat his fingers on the table with an increasing forceful frustration. His date sat across from him smiling. He could see she was talking about something, but he disregarded her: he was too fixated on monitoring the movements of the waitresses. Each dish they paraded past his table made his blood boil and he stalked them with his eyes, shooting daggers at each gracious customer as they tucked into their dinner. He began to huff big gusts of breath more audible than his date’s words. As a waitressed passed he grabbed the hem of her apron and thundered, “Where is our food?”

2. Speech
Another way of indicating character is through speech, not only what is said, but also how it is said. Read the following conservation between the Jimmy and Crake in ‘Orxy and Crake’ by Margaret Atwood.

“Let’s suppose for the sake of argument,” said Crake one evening, “that civilization as we know it gets destroyed. Want some popcorn?”

“Is that real butter?” said Jimmy.

“Nothing but the best at Watson-Crick,” said Crake. “Once it’s flattened, it could never be rebuilt.”

“Because why? Got any salt?”

“Because all the available surface metals have already been mined,” said Crake. “Without which, no iron age, no bronze age, no age of steel, and all the rest of it. There’s metals farther down, but the advanced technology we need for extracting those would have been obliterated.”

“It could be put back together,” said Jimmy, chewing. It was so long since he had tasted popcorn this good. “They’d still have the instructions.”

“Actually not,” said Crake. “It’s not like the wheel, it’s too complex now. Suppose the instructions survived, suppose there were any people left with the knowledge to read them. Those people would be few and far between, and they wouldn’t have the tools. Remember, no electricity. Then once those people died, that would be it. They’d have no apprentices, they’d have no successors. Want a beer?”

“Is it cold?”

Look at the differences between the topics prioritised by each character: Jimmy is far more interested in the food and drink that the ideas of Crake while Crake is focused on the notion of some kind of apocalypse and goes into thinking about this in some depth. The difference suggests that Crake is more intelligent than Jimmy is (at least in the field that they are discussing). Jimmy’s lack of participation and minimal comments such as ‘it could be put back together’ suggest that he is used to Crake’s long-winded ideas, and he knows that he doesn’t really have anything to offer(that Crake will continue talking even if he doesn’t respond. Crake’s ability to discuss such an apocalypse at the same time as offering popcorn and beer suggests that he is detached from the idea, and not particularly worried about such an event happening. Rather, he seems to be considering the notion as mundane as deciding upon snacks.

Task 8: Characterisation
a) Looking at the details of the two characters given below, try to create a discussion between them which highlights their different strengths, points of view, and character traits:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Character One</th>
<th>Character Two</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Character trait</td>
<td>Not really bothered</td>
<td>Angry about an injustice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of topic</td>
<td>Protective</td>
<td>Timid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>To great depth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>Analysing details</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

e.g.

“Look I understand, I see why this has you upset. But you need to tell me more if you want me to help you.” said Sarah.

“I don’t want your help, I’m just venting. I want it to go away.” whispered Jane into the cuff of her sleeve, before wiping away a tear with said same sleeve.

“No, not a chance. I can’t say I would feel the same as you, but you’re hurt, and I’ll be damned if I’m letting them get away with this!”

“Honestly, Jane, it took me a while to put it all together but now that it has clicked I just cannot fathom how they could do such a thing.”

b) Carry out the task from above using the two new characters in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Character One</th>
<th>Character Two</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Character trait</td>
<td>Is ‘for’ an idea</td>
<td>Is ‘against’ an idea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of topic</td>
<td>Stubborn</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reasonable</td>
<td>Detailed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>Explanation</td>
<td>Listening</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. By Direct Statement

It is possible to tell the reader openly what a character is like instead of showing. This is probably the most common way used in narrative
writing (if any way is used at all), but it is difficult to bring the character to life like this. You must ensure that the character subsequently behaves and speaks in a way consistent with the type of person you have described.

However, it is generally better to let the character’s words and actions speak for themselves, and let the reader make their own judgement on the character.

4. Comparison and Association

You can suggest what a character is like by comparing them or associating them with something that conjures up an image in our mind. Here is a description of Miss Murdstone from Dickens’ David Copperfield.

It was Miss Murdstone who was arrived, and a gloomy looking lady she was; dark, like her brother, whom she greatly resembled in face and voice; and with very heavy eyebrows, nearly meeting over her large nose, as if, being disabled by the wrongs of her sex from wearing whiskers, she had carried them to that account. She had brought with her two uncompromising hard black boxes, with her initials on the lid in hard black nails. When she paid the coachman she took the money from a hard steel purse, and she kept the purse in a very jail of a bag which hung upon her arm by a heavy chain, and shut up like a bite. I had never, at that time, seen such a metallic lady altogether as Miss Murdstone was.

Miss Murdstone is presented as a very harsh character through her comparison to metal and hard/dark characteristics. Without having heard her speak, or even really getting a sense of her appearance these comparisons manage to tell us a lot about the cruel, difficult nature of her.
a) Rewrite the description of Miss Murdstone creating a character who seems open and friendly. Choose an appropriate association in contrast to metal e.g. flowers, cats, sweets.

It was Miss Murdstone who was arrived, and a ______ looking lady she was; _____, like her brother, whom she greatly resembled in face and voice; and with very ______ eyebrows, nearly meeting over her ______ nose, as if, being ________ by the wrongs of her sex from__________, she had carried them to that account. She had brought with her two uncompromising ________ boxes, with her initials on the lid in__________. When she paid the coachman she took the money from a __________ purse, and she kept the purse in a very ______ of a bag which hung upon her arm by a ______ chain, and shut up like a _______. I had never, at that time, seen such a _______ lady altogether as Miss Murdstone was.

b) Write a short description of a character (100-200 words) choosing one of the following associations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>rat</th>
<th>snake</th>
<th>fox</th>
<th>shark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>wood</td>
<td>rope</td>
<td>cotton</td>
<td>silk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chillies</td>
<td>cake</td>
<td>soup</td>
<td>bread</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

e.g.

He was a small ratty-faced man with grey teeth. His eyes were dark and quick and clever, like rat’s eyes, and his ears were slightly pointed at the top. He had a cloth cap on his head and he was wearing a greyish coloured jacket with enormous pockets. The grey jacket, together with the quick eyes and the pointed ears, made him look more than anything like some sort of huge human rat.

from ‘The Hitchhiker’ by Roald Dahl

c) Pick a character from a novel, TV show or film you like/are familiar with. Write a description of this character using a suitable association.

e.g.

Katniss from the Hunger Games – Fire/Steel

Moana – Waves/Trees

5. Associating the Character with a **Point-of View** or **Action** by which they can be easily identified.
Uriah Heep from *David Copperfield* was “ever so ‘umble” (his words)- and had a characteristic action: what impression do we get from his catchphrase and gestures?

*It was no fancy of mine, I observed; for he frequently ground the palms against each other as if to squeeze them dry and warm, besides often wiping them, in a stealthy way, on his pocket handkerchief.*

6. Picking out a **feature** or **detail** that brings a character to mind in a vivid way.

This method is often used to give individuality to **very minor** characters. Here are some examples from *A Cackhanded War* by Edmund Blishen.

*He was a tiny fellow, with a leathery white face under black hair, and tied to the case he’d brought were a pair of enormous gumboots.*

*Mrs Goss was a widow, a neat little woman of over seventy; and witchlike.*

*He was a tall silent dark man, very gentle, who would tut over his machine as if it were some moody woman.*

*On the haystack was a boy: a short stout boy with a very runny nose.*
ASPECTS OF STYLE

1. Sentence structure

The length and structure of sentences can affect the impression given by a piece of writing. You should normally aim for a clear, simple, straightforward, correct prose style. Striving for special effects should be severely restricted; but, if so restricted, can be creative and engaging.

Short Sentences

Short sentences or, sometimes, non-sentences, are often used to achieve effects of tension or horror. The numerous pauses between sentences seems to create the appropriate feeling, just as at the climax of a horror film you are subjected to numerous jump cuts.

He waited. From deep below came an indescribable sound. A slithering. A deep throaty gurgling. A shuffling, as the nameless thing mounted the stairs. Closer it came. She backed against the wall, shivering. Closer still. A rank stench met her nostrils. “You don’t have a clean pair of socks I could borrow?” said Fred.

(This is an example of bathos where the build-up in tension is undercut by something mundane)

This sentence has five words. Here are five more words. Five-word sentences are fine. But several together become monotonous. Listen to what is happening. The writing is getting boring. The sound of it drones. It’s like a stuck record. The ear demands some variety.

Now listen. I vary the sentence length, and I create music. Music. The writing sings. It has a pleasant rhythm, a lilt, a harmony. I use short sentences. And I use sentences of medium length. And sometimes when I am certain the reader is rested, I will engage him with a sentence of considerable length, a sentence that burns with energy and builds with all the impetus of a crescendo, the roll of the drums, the crash of the cymbals—sounds that say listen to this, it is important.

GARY PROVOST (100 Ways to Improve Your Writing, 1985)
**Long Sentences**

Conversely, in narrative, long meandering sentences can be used to denote lack of urgency, casualness, light heartedness or humour:

*It is an observable fact, if one witnesses the behaviour of school pupils in their natural habitat, the classroom, that the desire to gain a particular qualification, as expressed, is in direct proportion to the ability to do so, this constituting a de facto recognition of the realities of the situation, if not acceptance of same.*

**“Listing” Sentences**

Sentences which give lists of clauses of a similar nature, or verbs, or nouns, and which are not, of course, just giving lists in the sense of shopping lists, are often used to describe scenes where a large number of things are happening at once: scenes of great activity and excitement. Such sentences should be used very sparingly.

*People rolled on the ground, jumped up and down, waved fists in the air, kicked the turf, tore their hair, gouged their eyes; voices filled the air, screams, pleas, imprecations, sobs, curses.*

*“I don’t care,” said the ref, “it’s still a penalty!”*

**Repetition**

Do not, if you can help it, repeat yourself in the sense of using the same content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives) again and again. However, to emphasise a particular aspect of something you are describing it can be useful to use a repetitive sentence structure within limits. This usually means beginning sentences with the same group of words.

*It was astonishing! It was incredible! It was a thing of wonder! It was- a miracle! It was- a Celtic victory!*  
*What a swine he is! What bad manners he has! What pride, what hubris, what arrogance!*

*I remember her that day. I remember her golden hair. I remember her clear blue eyes, shining with love for me. I remember her large...  

2. Imagery*
When you **write** a narrative, you begin, not with words, but with a picture, either clear or vague, which you then try to put into words. When you **read** a narrative, what passes through your head is not a list of words, but a succession of pictures (or that is the aim, anyway).

The technical term for these pictures is **images**. The process of forming these pictures is called **imagination**. The language that a writer uses to help you form pictures is called **imagery**.

This is where it usually breaks down.

Let us suppose that you are writing a narrative. You have a mental image of a scene where an old man walks down a road and so you write:

> The old man walked down the road.

Someone reads your narrative. They read the words above. They form an image in their head. What are the chances that their image will look like the one you began with? Not great. Why not? Because there’s nothing to go on!

> What kind of old man?
> How did he walk?
> What kind of road?

Now we don’t want to get too bogged down:

*The old man, who had one eyebrow slightly higher than the other and whistled when he spoke because of a tooth he had lost in a fight outside The Mally Arms in 1986, all because of a disagreement over Sultry Senga the Queen of Tradeston...*
At this rate we’ll never get finished. However, it is nonetheless a good idea to give the reader a help when it comes to imagining. And, of course, the best way to do this is to use metaphors and similes which are a shorthand way of saying a great deal.

Here’s a tip, though. It is better to invent your own image, no matter how bad, than to use one you’ve heard before, such as

- a shiver ran up her spine
- her fingers felt like icicles
- my heart sank
- tears ran down my face in streams
- I wolfed the pie down...

or anything else along these lines. These become clichés and are boring to read.

Instead go for more unusual/specific comparisons:

- The smell turned to burning, like forgotten pizza in an oven
- The sun shone like the light from a birthday candle

These should also fit the tone or mood of your writing, a birthday candle is not a bright light, but it does have positive connotations so it would not create an eerie atmosphere.

Just like a prayer, your voice can take me there
Just like a muse to me, you are a mystery...
3. Tone

You should, by now, know what tone is, from your work on reading. However, let’s assume you have “forgotten”.
When you speak to someone, you always use a particular tone of voice: it might be formal or informal; friendly or hostile; humorous or serious; happy or sad.

The same applies to writing. This might seem apparent with first person narrative, where there is a “real” person “talking” to the reader...

I’ll never forget that time when my sister came home with her new boyfriend. I’m telling you, he was the ugliest thing you could imagine—cross-eyed, sticky-out ears, thin as a rake. You know the type I mean.

... here the narrator is confiding in the reader, talking almost as a friend. It’s informal and friendly.

The same can be done with third-person narrative, though. Think of your narrative voice as a “person” as well. How do you want the reader to think of your narrator?

4. Mood

Mood is a function of tone. That’s helpful, isn’t it?
Seriously, though, when you read something, you feel something, you respond to it. When the tone is relaxed and friendly, you feel relaxed and friendly in return.

However, the mood of a piece of writing can be created a bit more subtly than that and in other ways.

In films, mood is often created by the use of coloured filters. Film which is black or blue can create a mood of fear, hostility, loneliness. Browns or reds seem friendly and safe. Greens are used for natural and pure.

The same can be done in writing:
The dark shadows gradually lengthened in the forest.

The fire in Gran’s cottage sparkled in the grate.

Weather is another good creator of mood:

The leaden clouds hung just above the horizon.

The sun sparkled through the branches.

Look at the example from Philip Pullman’s Northern Lights below:

The dark quadrangle was still full of the chill night air. Overhead the last stars were still visible, but the light from the east was gradually soaking into the sky above the Hall. Lyra ran into the Library Garden, and stood for a moment in the immense hush, looking up at the stone pinnacles of the Chapel, the pearl-green cupola* of the Sheldon Building, the white-painted lantern of the Library. Now she was going to leave these sights, she wondered how much she’d miss them. Something stirred in the study window and a glow of light shone out for a moment. She remembered what she had to do and tapped on the glass door. It opened almost at once.

* cupola = roof/dome

As you will note, the word choice here goes a long way towards establishing the mood and the atmosphere of the setting. ‘Soaking’, ‘hush’ and ‘glow’ are quite soft, gentle words with reasonably positive connotations. These help to create a sleepy familiarity between the character and the setting. The use of ‘pearl-green’ and ‘white’ give us a sense of innocence, and are light, comforting colours. We only get a little sense of danger when we see the word ‘stirred’. While still quite a soft movement (like a cat waking from sleep perhaps), there are other connotations which give a sense of something being disrupted.
a) Rewrite the passage from ‘Northern Lights’ below, creating a tense/hostile mood and atmosphere.

The ______ quadrangle was still full of the ______ night air. Overhead the last stars were still ________, but the light from the east was gradually ________ into the sky above the Hall. Lyra ______ into the Library Garden, and stood for a moment in the immense_______, looking up at the stone pinnacles of the Chapel, the ________ cupola of the Sheldon Building, the ________ lantern of the Library. Now she was going to leave these sights, she wondered how much she’d miss them. Something ________ in the study window and a ________ of light shone out for a moment. She remembered what she had to do and ________ on the glass door. It opened almost at once.

b) Create three examples of imagery for each given setting, making sure they fit the mood/atmosphere given.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Forest</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Bakery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Eerie</td>
<td>Idyllic</td>
<td>Adventurous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Boring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Stressful</td>
<td>Enjoyable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Claustraphobic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Time and Motion

As the ball sailed through the air I held my breath like scuba diver who’s just realised his tank has run out of oxygen.
The passage of time often causes great difficulty to young narrative writers, who adopt all sorts of clumsy devices to indicate how this has taken place.

There are two types of passing time: the time **during** an event or experience and the time **between** events or experiences. You should try to use the correct expressions, although they are not completely mutually exclusive.

**During an event (the situation described is sustained)**

- Five minutes passed...
- During the next five minutes...
- For the next five minutes...
- The next five minutes seemed endless...
- After five minutes...
- Five minutes came and went...
- Within five minutes

**Between events (something [at least slightly] new is to happen)**

- A day later...
- The next day...
- That night...
- The following Monday... and so on.

**Motion**

In short, never describe how someone travelled from point A to point B unless you have cause to do so. Just say

- we left
- we drove
- we went
- we arrived

**6. Tenses**
Some narrative can be written in the present tense, and this can be very effective, giving immediacy and urgency.

The diary form is written in the past tense, but has elements of the present tense: there is no hindsight.

Most narratives are written in the past tense, however: the narrator is describing something that is finished. If you wish to mention something that happened before the start of your narrative, you should use the Past Perfect tense to show this:

*It was (past tense) very cold that day, although it had been (past perfect) a good summer.*

It is best to choose a tense for your story and stick to it the whole way through. This is a really common error and, aside from being incredibly annoying to mark (please, spare us poor teachers!), it really detracts from the narrative structure and ultimately the quality of your story.

I run into the park, chasing after my dog. He was on the scent of some animal or other and so he has dashed away from me. I saw a couple children at the other end of the field and I am worried he might give them a scare.

This is all a jumble. If you stick to past tense this should read:

I ran into the park, chasing after my dog. He was on the scent of some animal or other and so had dashed away from me. I saw a couple children at the other end of the park and I was worried he might give them a scare.