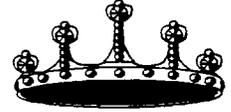


Fictional Narrative [SHORT STORY]

Fiction is constructed from the following 6 components

- **Characters** - Main characters, minor characters, & character development
- **Dialogue**- Reveals character; advances plot
- **Setting** - time, place, mood, & atmosphere
- **Plot** - six basic plots with a central **conflict**; plot motivation; setbacks
- **Point of View** - First person, third person
- **Beginnings, Transitions, and Endings**



Characters

The main character is also known as the **hero** or **heroine**, or the **protagonist**. In stories with good guys and bad guys, the **villain**, or **antagonist**, can be a main character (Ex.: Wolf in *Three Little Pigs*).

Minor characters are the others in the story who interact with or help the main characters. They are used to enhance and help reveal the main characters' personae, often by contrast. Sometimes they are referred to as **foils** (Ex.: Cinderella's stepsisters).

Writers reveal their characters through five means:

1. what they **say**
2. what they **think** (a book's advantage over film or stage)
3. what they **do**
4. direct **description**
5. **what the other characters say or think** about them

Dialogue

Dialogue can:

1. reveal character traits and show the action
2. advance the plot.
3. contain a speaker tag that names the speaker
4. contain *stage directions* that help show (not tell) the action

Ex.: **Schoolyard bully**: "Give me your lunch money, or I'll punch you out!" shouted the angry boy, moving closer and closer until his face was only an inch from John's.

Nervous plane pilot: "Check the landing gear! We're about to crash," yelled the pilot to his copilot as he anxiously adjusted the throttle of the plane.

Irate coach: "You lily-livered babies better pull yourselves together for this next half or I'll have you running so many laps you'll be tripping over your tongues!" muttered the red-faced coach as he slammed his clipboard to the bench.

Setting

Setting involves **time**, **place**, **weather**, and **surroundings**, all helping to create a specific **mood** or **atmosphere**. To reveal these elements, writers depend on **descriptive writing**, calling on all the senses to convey an image to the reader. Good description will involve as many of the 5 senses as possible.

The elements chosen by a writer to reveal the **historical time setting** may include:

manner of speech	tools
jargon	names
slang	customs
clothing	manners
vehicles	food and drink
money	etc..

Mood, or **atmosphere**, can be indicated through the author's choice of **verbs**, as well as **nouns** and **adjectives**. Strong verbs are always best. **Weather** can also be used to indicate the atmosphere in a story.

Ex.: The cat went across the lawn. [Weak mood]
The skinny black cat slunk across the dark, rain-soaked lawn.
[Stronger mood]

Plot

There are **6 basic plots** for most of all fiction that have been used by all writers and may be used by beginning writers without fear of plagiarism. These may be used alone or in combination and form the basis of nearly all story conflicts, for books, plays, movies, television programs, etc.

1. **Lost and Found** - Person or object is lost and recovered
Ex.: *The Incredible Journey* or *Home Alone*
2. **Character vs. Nature** - Character survives a natural calamity
Ex.: *Jaws* or *Volcano*
3. **Character with a personal problem or goal** - character solves it, reaches goal or changes attitude or feelings
Ex.: *Freckle Juice* or *Rudy* or *Rocky*
4. **Good Guys vs. Bad Guys** - good guys usually win
Ex.: *The Three Little Pigs* or most westerns
5. **Crime and Punishment** or **Mystery and Solution** - Character solves a mystery or crime and the culprit is caught or punished
Ex.: *Matlock* or *Murder She Wrote*
6. **Boy meets Girl** - Problems or misunderstandings arise; Characters resolve differences or clear up misunderstandings
Ex.: *Romeo and Juliet* or *Snow White* or *Cinderella*

Complications of Plot: Building Suspense

The **conflict, goal, problem, or what the main character wants** should be set up in the first sentence, paragraph, page, or chapter, depending upon a story's length. If not **stated outright**, it should at least be **hinted at** very strongly,

Writers need to create tension in order to keep their readers interested. Writers *want* their readers to wonder, "What happens next?"

Writers do this in several ways:

1. **Time pressure** - The character has a limited amount of time in which to accomplish a goal or solve a problem.

Ex.: Rumpelstiltskin, *Hansel and Gretel*

Other time pressures include:

Forces of nature - tide coming in, impending storm, etc.

Deadline dates - preparations, contest entry deadlines, athletic training for a specific contest, mortgage payment, bomb set to go off, harvest before the rain/frost, onset of winter, etc.

Arrival of holiday - birthday of Christmas gifts to make, etc.

2. **Setbacks** - The *most important part of the plot* is the series of setbacks the main character faces in trying to resolve the conflict or attain the goal. In well-developed fiction, there are often 3 or more of them. The **series of setbacks** make up the middle of the story. The main character overcomes each successively more difficult setback - the last one in a grand way to a satisfactory close.

Events or setbacks that might temporarily prevent the characters from solving their problems are:

- **injuries**
 - **weather**
 - **losses**
 - **mistakes**
 - **misunderstandings**
 - **mishaps or accidents**
3. **Reader Is In On a Secret the Character Doesn't Know** - Tension rises when the reader learns something through the narration that the character doesn't know. The reader becomes anxious for the character.
Ex. The saddle girth is frayed and about to break.
A villain is hiding in the house. A trap has been laid.
 4. **Anticipation of a Major Scene** - Characters set up the tension through their dialogue about the Big Event or their warnings. They anticipate another character's arrival or action(s).

Point of View

Point of view refers to **how the author of a story speaks to a reader, through whose eyes the events are viewed** or reported. Beginning writers should concentrate on one of 2 basic points of view:

1. **Third Person Point of View** - (most common) The **author acts as a narrator. NOT a character** in the story, who knows everything and tells the reader what the main characters are thinking and doing. The author uses the third-person pronouns such as *he*, *she*, and *they*, as well as the characters' names to tell the story.
2. **First Person Point of View**- The author tells the story from the main character's point of view. The author uses the first-person pronouns such as *I* and *me* to tell the story. First person can make a story more believable. To overcome the problem of having to have the main character present in every scene in order to relate the events, writers sometimes have minor characters simply tell the main character about events he or she missed.

Beginnings, Transitions, and Endings

Beginnings

Beginning writers can learn to "hook" their readers in the first sentence. This can be done with any of the following techniques:

- The **author introduces the main character** by name.
- The **main character, named, is thinking** of something.
- The author **describes the setting (place)**.
- The author **tells the setting (time)**.
- The author **sets up the conflict in the first sentence**.
- The **character is talking** (dialogue).
- **An event is in progress**.
- **Combinations** of any of the above.
- A **letter or note** is read.
- A **prologue** (background information) tells of events from the past that set up the story

Transitions

Narrative fiction is characterized by the passage of time. A writer helps the reader follow the story's events, in time and place, by using transitions that show changes in time, place, characters, or action. Transitions can be one word, a phrase, or a whole sentence to show these changes clearly for a reader.

See your text for a chart or list of appropriate narrative transition types

Ex.: *The following morning . . .* or *A hundred years passed . . .* (shows change of time)

Meanwhile, back at the ranch . . . (shows change in place)

While Cinderella worked hard to finish all of her chores, her wicked stepsisters were busy plotting against her. (shows change in characters)

Endings

The conclusion of a fictional narrative **must reveal the end of the conflict** and/or the lesson learned or insight gained by the characters from the experience. If you have trouble, go back and identify which of the 6 basic plots that you have chosen to use in your story, and make sure that you have an ending that fits the type.

- End with a **universal word**.
- End with **Finally, Eventually . . .**,
The last thing I need is another broken heart.
Eventually, the scar and the pain will fade, and I will go on.
- End with a **quotation from one of the characters**.
Like my grandma always says, "If life hands you lemons, make lemonade!"
- End with the **main character's feelings about the event**.
I knew then that I had succeeded. I was overjoyed to have finally found my happily-ever-after.
- End with a **prediction or advice**.
The next time he came across a strange-looking little man, he walked right on by.
- End with a **summary statement**.
No matter how you look at it, laughter is good medicine

Writers who can't seem to find the right ending may need to review the basic plot types and their corresponding resolutions. They might also try writing several endings and see which one works best.

