

CREATIVE WRITING LIKE A PRO:

Short Stories & Narratives



CUT ALONG DASHED GUIDELINE

GENERAL STATEMENT:

If there are ANY vocabulary words you don't understand,

OR

If there are any concepts/steps that you don't know how to complete in this booklet, talk to your teacher! 😊

The Basics

Main Character	
Other Character(s)	
Setting (Year & Location)	
How Much Time will Pass in the Story?*	<input type="checkbox"/> One day or less <input type="checkbox"/> One week or less <input type="checkbox"/> Longer than one week
Conflict(s) that will Happen:	<input type="checkbox"/> Man vs. Self (internal struggle) <input type="checkbox"/> Man vs. Man <input type="checkbox"/> Man vs. Society <input type="checkbox"/> Man vs. Nature <input type="checkbox"/> Other:
Narrator Type	<input type="checkbox"/> First person <input type="checkbox"/> Third Person Limited <input type="checkbox"/> Third Person Omniscient <input type="checkbox"/> Unreliable Narrator <input type="checkbox"/> Other:

*Pro Tip: the shorter it is, the easier it is to write and describe well!

Expert Level

1. How could you **RAISE THE STAKES**? (Can you intensify the conflict, villain, character motivation, or amount of time?)
2. How could you make your story more **unique**?
3. Is your main character a dynamic character, or a static one? How will he/she **grow** or **change** by the end of the story? (Or, what **lesson** will he/she/it learn?)
4. How are you going to **SHOW** that growth, change, or lesson (either during or at the end of the story)?

NEXT: In the blank flap above, **write your PLOT SUMMARY**.
Pro Tip: If you need help, do an online search with terms like plot structure, plot diagram, or story structure.

PLANNING



CUT ALONG DASHED GUIDELINE

The Basics

Here are a few common ways to start a piece of fiction

Option	Example
Dramatic Statement: Narration and/or thoughts	"I am an invisible man." (<i>Invisible Man</i>)
Immediate action (<i>in medias res</i>): Skip description & start plot!	"Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice." (<i>100 Years of Solitude</i>)
Dramatic Dialogue: Jump right into action or characterization	"Where's Papa going with that axe?" said Fern to her mother as they were setting the table for breakfast. (<i>Charlotte's Web</i>)
Description: Beautiful writing to establish setting, character, or scenario	"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness..." (<i>A Tale of Two Cities</i>)
Attention-Grabber: Makes us think or become curious	"It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen." (<i>1984</i>)
Foreshadowing: Hint about the theme, character, etc.	"In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since." (<i>The Great Gatsby</i>)
General Statement: Sets context for the situation	"It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife." (<i>Pride & Prejudice</i>)

Expert Level

Does your opening...

- ☐ Hook the reader?
- ☐ Preview the character, theme, conflict, or something else?
- ☐ Flow naturally into whatever is going to happen next?

Please DO:

- ☐ Try several of these styles until you find the right one. (Don't give up!)
- ☐ Ask yourself if you started in the right "place" in the plot; should it begin sooner? Later? In another setting? Same scenario, but a different approach?

Please do NOT:

- ☐ Start by waking up and/or a dream
- ☐ Take too long to show your first action and/or dialogue... too much description too soon can bore the reader!

NEXT: On the blank flap above, try at least 2-3 of the styles on the left. Then, show it to a reader (like your teacher or a friend) and see how he/she reacts!

THE BEGINNING



CUT ALONG DASHED GUIDELINE

The Basics

Step 1: Do you have any dialogue? Do you have “enough?” Should you add some? (Or, is there “too much?”)

Step 2: Is your dialogue punctuated correctly? Do you have any variety with your formatting? (Below)

Options for dialogue formatting	
One speaker	“I want a puppy.”
One speaker with dialogue tag at end	“I want a puppy,” he said.
Dialogue tag in other places	“Mom,” he said, “I want a puppy.” He replied, “I want a puppy.”
Multiple sentences, same speaker	“I want a puppy,” he said. “I promise to take care of it.” “I want a puppy. I promise to take care of it,” he said.
New speaker >> Gets a new line AND is indented	“I want a puppy,” he said. “I promise to take good care of it.” “A dog is a lot of work,” Mom replied.

Reminder: Thinking usually gets *italics*, NOT quotation marks! But the dialogue tags work the same.

Example: *I want a puppy*, he thought.

Expert Level

- ☐ Is all of your dialogue CLEAR? Can we always understand who is talking at each moment?
 - ☐ *Pro Tip: Have a reader check your dialogue to make sure it is clear to someone else.*
- ☐ Is the BALANCE of your dialogue, action, thinking, and description appropriate for the story? (What should you add more of? Did you use too much of anything?)
- ☐ Should your characters speak with slang, dialects, and/or age-appropriate vocabulary? (For example, if a child is talking, does it “sound” like a child?)
- ☐ Do they “sound” the same, or unique from each other? (Can you recognize them just by how they talk?)
- ☐ Do you overuse the verb “said” in your dialogue? Could you replace it with more specific action verbs?
 - ☐ *Examples:* whispered, yelled, breathed, sighed, gasped, shrieked, exhaled, laughed, cried, etc.
 - ☐ *Pro Tip:* Do a CTRL+F search for the word “said” in your typed document. See if you overused the word and if synonyms would be better!

NEXT: In the blank flap above, **write at least one dramatic piece of dialogue** that your main character might say. Make sure it “sounds” like him/her, and format it correctly!

DIALOGUE



CUT ALONG DASHED GUIDELINE

The Basics

Reminder: “Figurative Language” is a general umbrella term for all kinds of non-literal words, phrases, and expressions that take writing to a deeper level.

Simile: comparison using “like” or “as”	“In the eastern sky there was a yellow patch like a rug laid for the feet of the coming sun...” (<i>The Red Badge of Courage</i>)
Metaphor: comparison NOT using “like” or “as”	“All the world’s a stage/ And all the men and women merely players.” (<i>As You Like It</i>)
Hyperbole: exaggeration	“I had to wait in the station for ten days – an eternity.” (<i>Heart of Darkness</i>)
Idioms: expressions that don’t make sense	“...and if I do not leave you all as dead as a doornail...” (<i>Henry VI</i>)
Personification: Giving human qualities to a non-human place/thing	“Have you got a brook in your little heart/ Where bashful flowers blow...” (Emily Dickinson)
Onomatopoeia: Words that sound like what is being described	“...he heard the clack on stone and the leaping, dropping clicks of a small rock falling.” (<i>For Whom the Bell Tolls</i>)
Allusion: a reference to another literary, art, or historical work	“Olympus is but the outside of the earth everywhere.” (<i>Walden</i>)
Alliteration: several words in a row have the same letter	“From forth the fatal loins of these two foes;/ A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life.” (<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>)

Expert Level

- ☐ Check your draft; see if you have any figurative language already, and if not, see if you could add some. (Ideally, try to add a variety, and not just one kind.)
- ☐ **Pro Tip: The easiest place to add figurative language is in your description or narration.**
 - ☐ **Example:** Can you create a simile or metaphor by comparing a place, person, or thing to something else?
- ☐ **Other places to add figurative language:**
 - ☐ Is there any dialogue that could use hyperbole, idioms, or allusion?
 - ☐ Can you add some alliteration into a beautiful, descriptive moment?
 - ☐ Personification is also great in description!
- ☐ Add figurative language that **makes sense for the narrator and/or character.**
 - ☐ **Example:** An astronaut is more likely to compare the girl he loves to being “as beautiful as the stars”.
- ☐ Add figurative language into dialogue **only if it “works”**. Most people can’t come up with fancy language on the spot during a conversation, so if a character says one in dialogue, it should probably be pretty basic (unless your character is smart!)
- ☐ Need more examples, definitions, or ideas for figurative language? Google them for more inspiration, or reread a few pages of a book you like to see if you can spot any.

NEXT: In the blank flap above, **write at least one piece of figurative language that describes a PERSON, and at least one piece that describes a place or object.** Consider adding them to your story.

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE



CUT ALONG DASHED GUIDELINE

The Basics

Reminder:

- Sensory details include some or all of the five senses (sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste)
- You don't need to have all five senses engaged at all times, but use at least one of them in as many moments as possible!

Examples of Sensory Details in Fiction

Sight	"...appalling mounds of raw food: a slimy rock cod... tofu, which looked like stacked wedges of rubbery white sponges... a plate of squid, their backs crisscrossed with knife markings so they resembled bicycle tires." (<i>"Fish Cheeks"</i>)
Sounds	"After the yelling and slamming of doors... I could always count on hearing the whirring of the blender in the kitchen..." (<i>Someone Like You</i>)
Smells	"...both of whom complained about the tangy smell of metal and grease that came from Cinder's booth, even though it was usually disguised by the aroma of honey buns from the bakery across the square." (<i>Cinder</i>)
Touch	"Sometimes I can feel my bones straining under the weight of all the lives I'm not living." (<i>Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close</i>)
Taste	"Yesterday my mouth tasted like mud. Now it tastes like sand. I never thought I would miss the taste of mud so much." (<i>Avatar: The Last Airbender, Book 2: Earth</i>)

NEXT: In the blank flap above, **write at least three sentences** that use different senses. Add them to your story.

Expert Level

- ☐ Do all five types of sensory detail appear in your story at least one time apiece? If not, add the missing ones!
- ☐ Make sure you have at least one sensory detail describing:
 - ☐ The setting
 - ☐ The main character
 - ☐ One other character
 - ☐ An item or object of your choice
- ☐ Reminder: Make sure you have enough sensory detail if you're describing:
 - ☐ Food, drinks, etc.
 - ☐ A new location/setting
 - ☐ A major character, especially a new one
 - ☐ The things your character touches: surfaces/ furniture, fabrics, skin/hair, etc.
 - ☐ The things your character picks up or holds (including its weight, texture, etc.)
- ☐ Other fun details worth describing include:
 - ☐ Temperature, weather, etc.
 - ☐ Feelings: physical (hunger) and abstract (sadness)
 - ☐ Mental state and emotions
- ☐ Find a boring moment of description. Add sensory details to make that moment more engaging. (Repeat as needed!)
- ☐ Ask readers if they can "see" your story in their head like a movie. If they can't, then you need to go back and describe more, especially with visual and sensory details!
- ☐ Did you know that some writers like to "cross" the senses? (Ex: saying the color blue "sounds" like rain?) Try it!
- ☐ If you're having a hard time describing something, turn it into a simile or metaphor. (Look at the "Fish Cheeks" example to the left!)

SENSORY DETAILS



CUT ALONG DASHED GUIDELINE

The Basics

Reminder: “Characterization” is a pretty broad term. It includes anything you do that directly tells or indirectly shows a character, including his/her thoughts, actions, feelings, appearance, personality, beliefs, and more.

Ever heard the expression “**show, don’t tell**” in creative writing? They **really** mean “use indirect characterization the same or more than direct.”

Direct (or “explicit”) characterization: When the writer bluntly states or tells about a character.

Examples of Figurative Language in Fiction	
Direct Characterization (Narration)	“Harry had always been small and skinny for his age.” (<i>Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone</i>)
Direct Characterization (Dialogue)	“You’re a big game hunter, not a philosopher.” (“The Most Dangerous Game”)

Indirect (or “implicit”) characterization: When the character is revealed through subtle hints, his/her actions, or another way that is not just bluntly stated.

Examples of Figurative Language in Fiction	
Indirect characterization (Narration)	“If people were rain, I was a drizzle and she was a hurricane.” (<i>Looking for Alaska</i>) <<Note that not all indirect characterization is metaphors!
Indirect characterization (Dialogue)	“You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.” (<i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i>) << This moment reveals Atticus’ worldview/ personality

Expert Level

Controversy alert: Indirect vs. Direct Characterization is actually a bit controversial. Though many writers believe that indirect characterization creates beautiful, deeper, more interesting writing, there are some who also think that shorter and simpler is better.

The tips given below are meant to help you decide when to use each characterization type, depending on who you are as a writer AND what is best for THIS story:

- ☐ **What do your characters need?** Don’t under-describe them! Some teachers like the acronym STEAL (speech, thought, effect on others, actions, looks) to specify what description you need for your characters.
- ☐ **Who is your narrator?** Is it a first-person child who should narrate in short, direct sentences? Or is it an older, wiser figure who would be more likely to talk in a more flowy, advanced way?
- ☐ **What kind of tone and mood are you trying to go for** in this story? Is it a creepy, suspenseful story that would benefit from short, direct sentences? Is it a very descriptive historical fiction story that would need more variety?
- ☐ **What is your style as a writer?** Do you believe in complicated writing like F. Scott Fitzgerald, short sentences like Ernest Hemingway, or a mix of these like JK Rowling?
- ☐ **Are you being stubborn?** Are you avoiding indirect characterization because you don’t feel like putting in the effort? (Be honest.) If so, that’s not a good reason to avoid it.
- ☐ **Do you need help understanding** this concept, and/or are you struggling to “convert” sentences to indirect? No problem – just ask a teacher or friend for clarification! 😊

NEXT: In the blank flap above, **write a sentence that’s direct, AND write its indirect equivalent. Which one is better? Why do you think so?**

INDIRECT VS. DIRECT CHARACTERIZATION



CUT ALONG DASHED GUIDELINE

The Basics

Ways to End a Story:

- ☐ **Falling Action & Conclusion:** All problems and questions are resolved; character learns lesson or changes
- ☐ **Plot Twist:** Something unexpected (but still logical) that happens in the ending
- ☐ **Cliffhanger:** Little or no resolution to the plot, conflict, or questions. (Use with caution)
- ☐ **Deus ex Machina:** a super-random ending that is like a plot twist, but is illogical or unlikely. (Not recommended)

Here are a few common styles for the last line(s) of the story:

Option	Example
Dramatic Statement: Narrator and/or character's thoughts	"But wherever they go, and whatever happens to them on the way, in that enchanted place on the top of the Forest a little boy and his bear will always be playing." (<i>The House at Pooh Corner</i>)
Dramatic Dialogue:	"Now what in the hell do you suppose is eatin' them two guys?" (<i>Of Mice and Men</i>)
Description: Beautiful writing to give a final depiction of setting, character, or scenario	"Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch our arms further . . . And one fine morning— So we beat on, boats against the current, borne ceaselessly into the past." (<i>The Great Gatsby</i>)
Circular ending: The ending is literally the exact same, or connects back to the beginning in some way.	"When I stepped out into the bright sunlight from the darkness of the movie house, I had only two things on my mind: Paul Newman and a ride home." (<i>The Outsiders</i>)
Foreshadowing: Hint about what might happen after the story ends	"I'm going to have a lot of fun wit Dudley this summer..." (<i>Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone</i>)
Partial Cliffhanger: Story ends, but leaves room for a sequel	"I clutch Tobias' hand, and there is a moment of silence like a withheld breath. Then the shouting begins." (<i>Insurgent</i>)
Full Cliffhanger: Story does not have resolution, does not solve problems/ answer questions, and ends abruptly.	"The knife came down, missing him by inches, and he took off." (<i>Catch-22</i>).

Expert Level

Make sure that your ending...

- ☐ Conveys an emotion: sadness, joy, satisfaction, anger, suspense, etc.
- ☐ Resolves all inner and outer conflicts (unless you're doing a cliffhanger on purpose)

Please do NOT...

- ☐ Have the character wake up and find out that "it was all a dream"
- ☐ Write an ending that is random or doesn't fit the story.
- ☐ End too abruptly, unless you have a reason. Not having a full conclusion can upset the reader.

NEXT: In the blank flap above, **write a general description of how the story will end, AND write your closing line(s).**
Try using several styles from the table above until you find the right one for you.

Pro Tip: If you want more examples, pick up a book that you like and reread the last chapter!

THE ENDING



CUT ALONG DASHED GUIDELINE

The Basics

Editing

Tips to find and fix your spelling/ grammar errors:

- ☐ Read your entire story draft OUT LOUD. Do you notice any issues with punctuation, spelling, or flow?
- ☐ Let someone else read it out loud TO you.
 - ☐ If they stumble anywhere while reading, it's possibly a sign that you should edit that moment.
 - ☐ If you don't like the way it sounds, then that might also be a sign that it's time to edit.
- ☐ If you typed it, use the CTRL+F command (search) to look for...
 - ☐ Words you tend to misspell
 - ☐ All quotation marks (to check that they are correct)
 - ☐ All commas (to check for run-ons)
 - ☐ Commonly overused words, like "I", "you", & "said"
- ☐ If you typed it, PRINT IT and proofread it with a pen in your hand. Circle any spots that you KNOW are wrong, or want to CHECK with a teacher.
- ☐ If you handwrote it, then proofread with a pen in hand. Circle any spots that you KNOW are wrong, or want to CHECK with a teacher.

Revising

Tips to revise the CONTENT by adding, deleting, finding synonyms, or rewriting:

- ☐ Read your entire story draft OUT LOUD (or let someone else read it to you). Are there any word choices or small changes you need to make?
- ☐ Are any places under-described? Can you consistently "see" the story in your head?
- ☐ Check the original directions and/or rubric for this writing assignment. Have you done everything that you were supposed to? Does anything need to be changed or added to meet your teacher's expectations?
- ☐ Let a friend, classmate, teacher, or family member read the whole thing. Ask them to tell you if any places were...
 - ☐ Unclear or confusing
 - ☐ Boring (or just lost their attention)
 - ☐ Problematic for another reason
 - ☐ Not school appropriate

Expert Level

Editing

- ☐ Hand your rough draft to a teacher; ask him or her if they see any patterns in your errors or things that you should look for while editing.
- ☐ Think about the errors you TEND to make. Take a "lap" through your draft looking for that in particular.
- ☐ **EXCEPTION:** Sometimes, certain errors are acceptable in dialogue, especially if you *want* a character to talk that way.

Revising

- ☐ Ask yourself (or ask a reader) if your story has a **theme**, message, or moral to it. If there isn't one (or if it's not obvious enough yet), consider revising.
- ☐ Ask yourself (or a reader) what **emotion(s)** you feel at the end of the story. Is that the emotion that you want a reader to feel? If not, consider revising.
- ☐ **Pro Tip:** Most published authors can STILL look back on their books or stories and think of things they'd like to change. "Good" writing is never "done", but you should feel proud of your work. Is this really your **best** draft?

Next: Complete at least 5-8 of the tips on this page, and check the ones you did.

EDITING & REVISING

REVIEW

Glossary

Here's some of the big vocabulary words or phrases from this booklet, in order of appearance. Can you define all of these?

1. Man vs man
2. Man vs self
3. Man vs society
4. Man vs nature
5. First person
6. Third person limited
7. Third person omniscient
8. Unreliable narrator
9. "Raise the stakes"
10. Dynamic character
11. Static character
12. In medias res
13. Dialogue tag
14. Figurative language
15. Simile
16. Metaphor
17. Hyperbole
18. Idioms
19. Personification
20. Onomatopoeia
21. Allusion
22. Alliteration
23. Sensory details
24. Direct characterization
25. Indirect characterization
26. Deus ex machina
27. Circular ending
28. Editing
29. Revising
30. Theme

Self-Assessment

1. What are the top five things you have learned from this booklet?
2. How have you grown or changed as a writer?
3. What changes have you made to your writing since the first draft? (How has the quality of your story improved?)
4. Is there anything that you still don't understand, OR that you need help with in your writing?
5. Is there anything else you want me to know about you, this experience, or your current draft of writing?