

STARTERS

A Beginner's Guide to Creative
Writing
2nd Edition

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Irving, Texas

STARTERS:

A Beginner's Guide to Creative Writing, 2nd Edition

Written and published by Rufel F. Ramos

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Irving, Texas

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“Writing well means believing in your writing and believing in yourself, taking risks, daring to be different, pushing yourself to excel. You will write only as well as you make yourself write.”

-- William Zinsser (1922-2015)

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and to my son Daniel, who still tells the best stories.

Salamat po.

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INTRODUCTION

Do You Need This Book?

Honestly, you don't need this guidebook to learn how to do creative writing. Take me as an example.

I grew up in a non-reading and non-writing family. Still, I learned about the music of words, the flow of story and narrative, and the gritty details of time, place, and human psychology through favorite movies and TV shows -- which led me to read novel versions of those movies and TV shows, which all motivated me to write similar stuff for the sheer love of it.

I kept a diary at age eight to record my thoughts. I wrote my first poem at age ten. I wrote my first short story at age eleven and my first long piece of fiction (one-hundred pages of handwritten, penciled script in a spiral notebook) at age twelve.

I have neither that childhood diary, poem, short story, nor spiral notebook, and I don't remember what I wrote. I suspect they were pretty wretched pieces of writing, objectively speaking, but that rough beginning didn't keep me from seeking my favorite authors on my own, learning from them, and trying to become a better writer.

In other words, I was teaching myself how to be a creative writer, even before I stepped into my first "official" creative writing class, in a university Master's program.

So, if your reading, learning, and writing experiences are similar to mine, then you don't need this guidebook to learn how to do creative writing. You are not a beginner.

However – if those experiences are NOT similar and/or you neither have the time nor money to take the many creative writing classes out there, then this guidebook might be right for you.

What's in This Book?

I teach a college-credit writing class, and I teach by modeling behavior (that is, I model what I would do if I were assigned the work). So all of the creative writing examples in this guidebook are from my own published work.

- For **Creative Non-Fiction**, I have three selections from my dissertation, *“My Kind of Comedy”: An Exegetical Reading of Flannery O’Connor as Medieval Drama*; my blog, *I Am the Lizard Queen!*; and my memoir, *Scaffolds: A Childhood Memoir of Books*.
- Also, while many of my creative students had completed freshman-level Composition (academic essay writing) before enrolling in my sophomore-level creative writing class, I won’t presume that my readers have that same experience. Therefore, I’ve selected information from my Composition handbook, *Structures: The Reluctant Writer’s Guide to College Essays*, as prefacing material in the Creative Non-fiction chapter.
- For **Poetry**, I have selections from my poetry and short story collection, *Rownena’s World: Poems and Stories* and my aforementioned blog.
- For **Fiction**, I have selections from my aforementioned collection; my first novel, *Ye Watchers and Ye Holy Ones*; and my second novel, *The Miraculous Ones*.
- Finally, for **Drama**, I revised one Poetry chapter poem (a dramatic monologue) into a one-scene play to demonstrate the playwright process and script format.

But before diving in, you’ll need these basic tools of any writer.

The Basic Tools of Any Writer

1. A writer's journal

Whether it's a paper composition notebook, a document file on your computer, or a note-taking app on your mobile device, you need a dedicated place to jot down ideas, observations, and musings. Try to journal every day so that you'll have plenty of the messy stuff to become a storehouse of possible topics or stories.

2. A calendar planner

When working on a writing project, you can easily procrastinate when there isn't a deadline, so have a calendar planner to give yourself a writer's work schedule. Parse out the schedule with daily and/or weekly goals. Build in "non-work" days as either breaks or catch-up time if you didn't meet a writing goal. Every person is different, so personalize your goal so that it is do-able for you, including what time you can actually just WRITE – whether that's late at night, early morning, or some other chunk of time in the day.

After all, if you draft 200 words a day, you'll have 73,000 words at year's end (365 days late), and that's a BOOK.

3. A dedicated work space

While you may be able to journal and rough draft anywhere, you'll still need a dedicated work space when it comes to long, uninterrupted writing. Again every person is different, so pick the location that works best with your personality, your resources, and vagaries of your non-writing life. For instance, I'm currently writing this in my campus office (with music streaming in the background). However, in graduate school, I wrote most of my dissertation in an out-of-the-way coffee shop.

4. Cloud storage to safeguard your document files

While you may write your initial draft by hand, you'll eventually type up your draft as a document file. Because laptops and desktops can lock up and crash with no warning and tiny flash drives do get misplaced and lost, it's best to keep your

writing project files safe by saving them into an online cloud storage service, like Microsoft's OneDrive, Google's Google Drive, Apple's iCloud, or DropBox. **While not required**, why not check out these cloud storage services, especially since most of them are free (up to a set storage limit)?

Where You'll Be at the End of This Book, and Why It's Called *Starters*

The author Douglas Adams once said, "Writing comes easy. All you have to do is stare at a blank piece of paper until your forehead bleeds." In other words, writing can be maddening business if you let it. Between writer's block, procrastination, and frustration that what's in your head ISN'T WHAT'S ON THE PAGE, it's easy to feel overwhelmed and just give up.

Therefore, my goal in this guidebook is to make the process of creative writing less mysterious and do-able. The title of this book -- *Starters* -- is like the starters part of a menu: easy-to-handle, bite-sized versions of the vast buffet out there. By the end, you'll have a portfolio that's like a sampler plate from the creative writing buffet.

As you "taste test" creative non-fiction, poetry, fiction, and drama, you'll likely discover one or two forms that you prefer. With that discovery, move beyond this guidebook: keep writing in your preferred form, practice what you've discovered, read and hear your favorite authors in that form, and perhaps take a formal writing course or join a writing group -- to take your writing to the next level through an external support system.

One last point: getting blocked, procrastinating, and feeling frustrated as you write never goes away, but I hope this book will help lessen the duration of the bad so that you can get back to writing the good stuff.

Let's start.

CHAPTER 1: CREATIVE NON-FICTION

DEFINITION

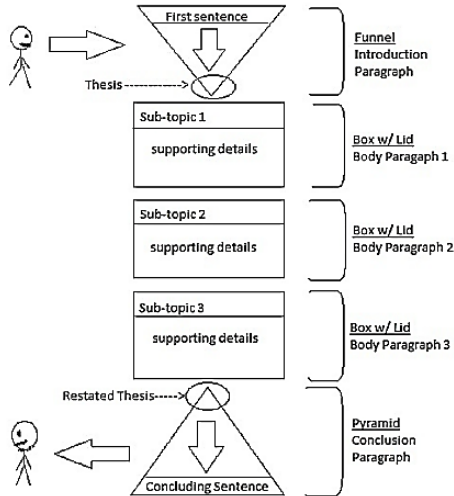
CREATIVE NON-FICTION is a form of prose-writing – that is, written in sentences and paragraphs – in which 1) all the details factually happened, 2) the writer is either a participant, a witness, or an expert of what happened, and 3) the organization of the details, as well as the word choice and tone of the writer’s voice, are freer than academic essay form.

So let’s review the academic essay form first and then segue to creative non-fiction.

THE ACADEMIC FIVE-PARAGRAPH ESSAY FORM

First, the **ARRANGEMENT** of the **ACADEMIC ESSAY** is strictly organized:

- The **Introduction** paragraph’s first sentence sucks the reader into the essay, the reader spirals down the next two to three connecting sentences, and ends with the Thesis Statement, which is the writer’s overall opinion of the topic at hand.
- The **Body** paragraphs have at least three sub-topics that elaborate on the Thesis Statement, with one sub-topic (that is, the topic sentence) per paragraph, with factual, non-fictional supporting details (in at least five sentences) for each sub-topic.
- The **Conclusion** paragraph restates the Thesis Statement, has two or three connecting sentences (usually reviewing key points), and ends with a strong concluding statement that spits the reader out of the essay.



Second, the main goal of an **ACADEMIC ESSAY** is to answer a question. Different questions (the essay’s **“PURPOSE”**) call for different answers, explained in the **Body** paragraphs, which result in different kinds of academic essays (also called **RHETORICAL MODES**):

1. **Narration** = “What happened?”
2. **Description** = “What does it look, sound, smell, feel, taste like?”
3. **Process** = “How is that done or made?”
4. **Division (Analysis)** = “What are its characteristics?”
5. **Comparison and/or Contrast** = “What are the similarities and/or the differences between these two related persons, places, things, or ideas?”
6. **Classification with Exemplification** = “What are the different kinds of that category of person, place, thing, or idea?”
7. **Cause and/or Effect** = “What causes that and/or are the consequences of that?”
8. **Argument** = “Why is this right and that wrong? What proof do I have to defend my belief?”

Also, the **language and word choice** of the **ACADEMIC ESSAY** are **formal**. For instance, the academic writer avoids the pronoun “you” and rarely use “I”, unless the topic is from the writer’s personal experience AND allowed by the writing occasion (for example, if a professor allows the use of “I”). The academic writer avoids slang, casual word choices, and often even contractions (for example, using “cannot” instead of “can’t”), as well as being error-free in grammar and mechanics (like punctuation and manuscript style).

Finally, if the writer included information that he or she researched (such as interviewing people or reading print or web sources), then the writer must document those sources in the essay itself (called “in-text citation” in MLA and APA style or a superscript number in CMS) and have a list of sources after the end of the essay (called “Works Cited” in MLA, “References” in APS, or “Bibliography” in CMS).

In contrast, the **CREATIVE NON-FICTION ESSAY** is different.

THE CREATIVE NON-FICTION ESSAY

In the **CREATIVE NON-FICTION ESSAY**, you do have a Thesis (your overall opinion of the topic at hand), **but that Thesis is often implied** -- that is, not obviously stated but hinted in the supporting details. In fact, many creative non-fiction pieces start “cold”: the essay starts right into the Body **without a formal “Introduction”** paragraph or section.

As for the **Body** paragraphs, there is no strict rule of having stated topic sentences nor having a set number of sentences for the supporting details. However, the Body paragraphs can get long, depending on how many essay types (that is, **RHETORICAL MODES**) you choose to elaborate in the topic. Most, if not all, creative non-fiction is **mixed-mode**: you may start in one mode (like **Narration** or **Description**), then switch to another mode (like **Comparison/Contrast** or **Process**), and end in yet another mode (like **Cause/Effect** or **Argument**). You switch modes because you decide to answer a

different question about the topic at hand, but often that “decision-making” isn’t a conscious decision but where your creative non-fiction piece seems to be going.

HUGE TIP: Being aware of these available eight modes will help you avoid or break through writer’s block. If you’re blocked writing in one mode, then try writing in another mode.

With the creative non-fiction essay’s **Conclusion**, you may finally state your **Thesis – or not**. Like with Introductions, the Conclusion section isn’t formal, without a set number of sentences. However, creative non-fiction essays have a clear indicator that we’ve reached “THE END” such as these, from which you can pick and choose:

- restatement of a discovery or important idea recounted in the essay
- call to action or a piece of advice
- prediction of the future
- epilogue of “where are they now”
- quote or piece of dialogue
- open-ended or rhetorical question
- mirroring of the beginning of the essay

Now, while you, as the creative non-fiction writer, should be as error-free in grammar and mechanics as possible (just like the academic essay writer), your **language and word choice** is as **informal and personal as the topic requires you to be**. We frequently find the use of “I,” “you,” slang terms, casual word choices, and contractions in creative non-fiction, depending on the topic, the expected audience, and where the audience will find the creative non-fiction work (whether it’s an online personal journal, a magazine, a newspaper, or a book). That’s why, if you’re interested in the creative non-fiction form, you should read the various published creative non-fiction available.

TIP: a quick search for creative non-fiction essays on Amazon.com can yield some suggestions for anthologies. Also, if you search under “memoir,” you’ll get book-length true-life stories of an author, like David Sedaris and Mary Karr.

Finally, if you do some research for your creative non-fiction essay and include your research in your writing, then just give the full name of the person and the name of the website, book, TV show, and so on (if applicable) in your essay as in-text attribution.

THE WRITING PROCESS

Now that we know what **creative non-fiction** is, here's how to write a short work of creative non-fiction.

STAGE I: INVENTION & PREWRITING

INVENTION is coming up with your ideas for your writing. In most creative non-fiction essays that are personal, those ideas come out of your own brain. In writing that needs more information than you have in you, then some of those ideas come out of places that aren't your own brain: interviews, radio, TV, movies, magazines, books, websites, and even music albums, for examples. (Technically, you're doing research.) Either way, in **INVENTION** you go to the place or places where ideas come from; those places of ideas are called "sources."

Remember, **YOU** are your most important source, even with research, and **ANYTHING** you've experienced, observed, or even just piqued your curiosity can be a topic in creative nonfiction. The most common topics are a person's life story (either yours or someone you know), places you've been, and areas of human actions you're interested in (like science, technology, jobs, sports, movies, TV, books, music, fashion, religion/spirituality, human-nature interaction, food, home improvement, education, relationships, and so on.)

PREWRITING is grabbing those ideas and slapping them down on a sheet of paper (or typed quickly on a screen). You can slap them down on a sheet of paper in several ways. I'll mention three forms of Prewriting that you've probably heard of before (at least the concepts, if not the names). From least

organized to most organized, they are **Freewriting**, **Cluster/Idea Mapping**, and **Brainstorm**.

THREE PREWRITING METHODS

1. **Freewriting: The Natural but Messy Prewriting**

Now, I know that some of you write like this: You stare at a sheet of blank paper or a blank screen for an agonizing amount of time, wondering how to begin that damnable first paragraph. Then, in a flurry of fits and starts, you churn out what you believe are sentences and paragraphs until you run out of ideas. If you don't make the assigned essay length, you stare some more, try to write more, and repeat yourself somewhere. Then you stop, sick of the whole thing, and declare that you wrote a rough draft (or even the ONLY draft) of your essay.

Well, you didn't write a draft. What you just did was a form of **Prewriting** called **Freewriting**. **Freewriting is writing down, as quickly as possible, your ideas, filling up the page.** Grammar? Fuggedaboutit. Spelling? Punctuation? Who needs it? It's not even in English? ¡No problema! In Freewriting, you're free from the rules of correct English. Write EXACTLY what's in your head, as much as you can, as fast as you can. Turn off your mental critic! Be free! Here's a short example of Freewriting, on the topic of "ice cream" that I've come up with:

Ice cream, ice cream, ice cream, yumyumyum. Like ice cream, gives me a brain freeze, though. Probably need a better toothpaste for sensitive teeth. But – what was I trying to say? Right, ice cream. Makes me fat but tastes so good, like on a summer day, but it melts too fast, wonder if there's such thing as non-melty ice cream? YUCK! Probably would have all sorts of bleahy chemicals in it so that it wouldn't melt YUCK YUCK YUCK! Anyways – what was I saying? Right, ice cream. Vanilla's always a good standby, but kinda boring, ya think? Same with chocolate, though my chocolate addict friends would probably kill me for saying that. Oh well. What I REALLY like is pistachio

ice cream with real whole pistachios in them. MMM – good. Hrm... I'm hungry. Think I'll buy ice cream now....

You've probably noticed that my Freewriting has very few spelling and punctuation mistakes, but most folks' Freewriting likely don't look this nice. An omigosh-this-is-illegible-messyonly-I-can-understand-it Freewriting is normal and okay. As an English teacher, I've internalized a lot of spelling and grammar stuff (after all, it's part of my job). So I don't make many grammar mistakes these days, and, actually, this is how I think and talk in real life. As a result, my Freewriting will reflect my current communications skill. Similarly, your Freewriting will reflect your current communications skill.

Freewriting is like talking – you're free to express what's on your mind. You do it when you email and write casual letters to your friends and family. You ramble. That's okay because you're free.

UNFORTUNATELY, since you're free, you have a lot of work, trying to organize these thoughts into something that looks like an essay. What you end up is a Freewriting with circles, cross-outs, arrows, added sentences or chunks of paragraphs here and there, which make your Freewriting look as if a football play-book just exploded. Fixing a super-messy Freewriting can get time-consuming, which isn't good when you have a looming deadline or you are in the middle of a timed essay exam. So you might want to use a more organized form of Prewriting than Freewriting. Or you might want to use Freewriting in addition to a more organized form of Prewriting.

2. Cluster: More Organized than Freewriting

In **Cluster (also known as Idea Mapping)**, you draw a big circle in the center of your paper and label it with your topic. Then, jot down your ideas that branch out of that big circle. When you run out of ideas on one branch, go back to the big circle, look at the topic again, and make a new branch of ideas. Do this at least one more time (to have at least three branches of ideas), but you can make more branches. Each branch becomes

an idea map of where your ideas are going and how they are connected to the Big Picture, that is, the Topic. Here’s an example I’ve come up with, using the “ice cream” topic again.



With a **Cluster**, you can easily prune away parts of the branches (or even whole branches that don’t seem to fit what you want to say) much more easily than Freewriting, since there aren’t sentence parts in the way to wade through. You can easily see when you don’t have enough branches, reminding you to come up with more ideas to slap down. Notice that I used words, phrases, and even little drawings (the happy and sad faces). Whatever you need to get those ideas out is all good; just get them out -- fast.

SUPER BIG TIP: You probably realize by now that a “cleaned up” Freewriting, with all those cross-outs, circles, and arrows, is just a Freewriting with a Cluster done to it. Unless you’re in love with Freewriting as a Prewriting tool, why don’t you save yourself some time and just skip to a Cluster?

3. Listing

In **Listing**, you make a top-to-bottom sequential **list** of ideas that come to mind when you think about the topic. Like Freewriting and Cluster, don’t censor yourself; whatever pops into your head, list it as quickly as you can. The longer the list,

the more ideas you can work with. Here's an example, using the "ice cream" topic again:

ICE CREAM!!!!!!!

yummy

sweet cold, but if too cold, can't get scoop

through soft-serve invented 'cause of this?

don't like soft-serve, prefer REAL ice cream

frozen yogurt – bleah!

feel sorry for lactose-intolerant soy

substitute invented because of it?

is there goat-milk ice cream?

☹ bleah! ☹ ☹ ☹

think I'll stop now

TIME OUT: Finding Your Thesis

Whatever you chose as your **Prewriting** method, you can use **Freewriting**, **Cluster**, or **Brainstorm** to explore your beliefs and opinions as a way of finding your overall opinion, your thesis, if you don't have one already. Remember: a **thesis** is simply **your topic plus your opinion of the topic**. To keep your details focused on your overall opinion, you should be able to make your thesis into a sentence ending with a period. For instance, out of one topic "ice cream," I can create three different theses:

Ice cream is unhealthy.

Ice cream has a weird history.

Ice cream has great flavors.

Each of these theses alone would produce a different essay from each other because the details supporting one thesis does not support the thesis of another. **HOWEVER**: you can join those three theses into one, to create a **mixed-mode creative nonfiction essay**:

Even though too much ice cream is unhealthy, I love it because it has a weird history, with fantastic flavors.

It's really that simple, which is good since you can't leave the Invention & Prewriting stage **until you have a clearly specific**

Thesis. But remember: You **don't** have to state explicitly that Thesis to your readers; the Thesis is for you so that you know what ideas and details to **arrange** in your draft.

STAGE II: ARRANGEMENT

In **Arrangement**, you organize your ideas into a plan that you use as a roadmap for your **Drafting**. This stage is an important bridge between **Prewriting** and **Drafting**. The most common method of arrangement is the **Outline**, and I will provide the Outline of each kind of **mode** as a **building block** for a mixed mode creative non-fiction essay. Just choose the Outline “block” that best fits your Prewriting (or even parts of an outline block) and put them together like building blocks.

Time-saving Tip: You can use each **Outline** as an empty but organized form that you fill out, just like a job application form. You slap your ideas down on a sheet of paper (**Prewriting**) AND organize those ideas (**Arrangement**), all on one tool, which cuts down on time in the pre-drafting stages of the Writing Process.

NARRATION: explains the story of the topic

- I. **Body or Section 1: Exposition** = Overview of settings (time and location) and characters (the key people in story); **Early Rising Action** = the start of conflict between characters, nature, society, or even the self.
- II. **Body or Section 2: Increasing Rising Action** (conflict getting much worse) that leads to the **Climax** = where the story “peaks,” either the best or worst thing that happened; usually some sort of discovery, revelation, or decision.
- III. **Body or Section 3: Falling Action to Denouement** = what happened after the climactic moment, a resolution of everybody involved. Can be a happy, sad, or mixed ending.

PROCESS: explains how the topic does something or is done

- I. **Body or Section 1:** Stage 1 – getting ready, gathering materials, beginning steps.
- II. **Body or Section 2:** Stage 2 – continuing the steps; the hardest, busiest, or most tedious steps.
- III. **Body or Section 3:** Stage 3 – finishing up and the end result.

**DIVISION (ANALYSIS):
explains the topic's key characteristics**

- I. **Body or Section 1: Characteristic 1** – illustrate with one or more descriptive examples
- II. **Body or Section 2: Characteristic 2** – illustrate with one or more descriptive examples
- III. **Body or Section 3: Characteristic 3** – illustrate with one or more descriptive examples

COMPARISON/CONTRAST: explains how the topic (Subject A) is similar or different from another (Subject B)

Point-By-Point Method

- I. **Body or Section 1: Point 1** – compare and/or contrast Subjects A & B on this Point, with detailed, descriptive examples.
- II. **Body or Section 2: Point 2** -- compare and/or contrast Subjects A & B on this Point, with detailed, descriptive examples.
- III. **Body or Section 3: Point 3** -- compare and/or contrast Subjects A & B on this Point, with detailed, descriptive examples.

Subject-by-Subject Method

- I. **Body or Section 1: Subject A** – explain this Subject regarding Points 1, 2 & 3, with detailed examples.

II. **Body or Section 2: Subject B** – explain this Subject regarding Points 1, 2 & 3, with detailed examples.

CLASSIFICATION:

explains the diversity of the topic by its different types

- I. **Body or Section 1: Type 1** – illustrate with one or more descriptive examples
- II. **Body or Section 2: Type 2** – illustrate with one or more descriptive examples
- III. **Body or Section 3: Type 3** – illustrate with one or more descriptive examples

CAUSE/EFFECT: four methods, depending on what part of the topic's timeline you are analyzing

Classification/Division Method of Causes: Different Kinds of Causes

- I. **Body or Section 1: Past Cause 1** – with detailed examples
- II. **Body or Section 2: Past Cause 2** – with detailed examples
- III. **Body or Section 3: Past Cause 3** – with detailed examples

Classification/Division Method of Effects: Different Kinds of Effects

- I. **Body or Section 2: Current/Future Effect 1** – with detailed examples
- II. **Body or Section 3: Current/Future Effect 2** – with detailed examples
- III. **Body or Section 4: Current/Future Effect 3** – with detailed examples

Causal Chain Method (The Domino Effect Method)

- I. **Body or Section 1: Root Cause A causes Effect B** – with detailed examples

- II. **Body or Section 2:** Effect B causes Effect C – with detailed examples
- III. **Body or Section 3:** Effect C causes Final Effect D, which is the event being analyzed – with detailed examples

Backwards Causal Chain Method (The Detective Method)

- I. **Body or Section 1:** Event or Phenomenon caused by Immediate Cause C – with detailed examples
- II. **Body or Section 2:** Immediate Cause C caused by Cause B – with detailed examples
- III. **Body or Section 3:** Cause B caused by Root Cause A -- with detailed examples

ARGUMENT: why your opinion of a debatable topic is correct and other opinions are incorrect – four methods

CLASSIC (DEFINITION) METHOD

INTRODUCTION: Introduce and give background of the issue; state your **CLAIM** (your opinion of a debatable topic)

- I. **Body or Section 1: Your REASON:** Explain why you believe your Claim is true, using common-sense opinion/reasoning, based on a definition that you have
- II. **Body or Section 2: Your EVIDENCE:** Give concrete, specific examples (that is, EVIDENCE) to prove your

Reason exists in the real world

- III. **Body or Section 3: Your OPPOSITION:** Summarize the opposition's viewpoint and respond to it

TOULMIN (“TOP 3 REASONS WHY”) METHOD

INTRODUCTION: Introduce and give background of the issue; state your **CLAIM** (your opinion of a debatable topic)

- I. **Body or Section 1: Your First REASON:** Explain reason + **EVIDENCE** as proof
- II. **Body or Section 2: Your Second REASON:** Explain reason + **EVIDENCE** as proof

III. **Body or Section 3: Your Third REASON:** Explain reason + **EVIDENCE** as proof

IV. **Body or Section 4: Your OPPOSITION:** Summarize the opposition's viewpoint and respond to it

REBUTTAL (DEBATE) METHOD

INTRODUCTION: Introduce and give background of the issue; state your **CLAIM**

- I. **Body or Section 1:** Summarize **OPPOSITION'S First Reason**; rebut that reason with your counter-**REASON** and your counter-**EVIDENCE**
- II. **Body or Section 2:** Summarize **OPPOSITION'S Second Reason**; rebut that reason with your counter-**REASON** and your counter-**EVIDENCE**
- III. **Body or Section 3:** Summarize **OPPOSITION'S Third Reason**; rebut that reason with your counter-**REASON** your counter-**EVIDENCE**

ROGERIAN (COMPROMISE) METHOD

INTRODUCTION: Give the background of the problem to the present-day, pointing out how both you and the opposition are negatively affected (**COMMON GROUND**); state your **CLAIM**.

I. Body or Section 1: Opposition's COUNTERCLAIMS -- State your opposition's positions and calmly explain the contexts (circumstances and conditions) in which they may be valid; provide **EVIDENCE** and/or logical reasoning.

II. Body or Section 2: Your CLAIM -- State your position and calmly explain the context (circumstances and conditions) in which it is valid and works better than other positions; provide **EVIDENCE** and/or logical reasoning.

III. Body or Section 3: BENEFITS -- Explain how your position **benefits the opposition** – provide **EVIDENCE** and/or logical reasoning. Offer possible compromises (**CONCESSIONS**) that benefit both you and the

opposition – provide **EVIDENCE** and/or logical reasoning.

STAGE III: DRAFTING

Now that you have your ideas roughly organized into your chosen **Arrangement**, use it as a checklist to write your **Rough Draft** of your creative non-fiction work, which is the end-product of the **Drafting** stage of the Writing Process. In the **Drafting** stage, you turn your **Arrangement** into **sentences and paragraphs**. **IMPORANT NOTE:** At this stage, don't worry about grammar yet; that's a later step. Still -- "How the heck do I start my draft?" you ask.

Here are possible **first sentences (also called "the hook")** that could begin a creative non-fiction essay (in these examples, about ice cream)

1. **Historical Background:** Give a brief history of the topic.
Example: According to some historians, ice cream was once only eaten by the very rich in eighteenth century France.
2. **Anecdote/Personal Story:** Give a brief personal story.
Example: I was four years old when I had my first taste of ice cream.
3. **Question:** Ask a question.
Example: Why is ice cream so popular?
4. **Quotation:** Quote somebody.
Example: My mother always said, "Ice cream will make you fat."
5. **Definition:** Define an important word.
Example: Ice cream is just frozen cream, milk, and sugar.
6. **Contradiction:** State the opposite of your thesis.
Example: Some people think ice cream is bad for you.

7. **Fact/Statistic:** Give an important fact about the topic.
Example: Some ice cream prices range from \$2.00 to \$8.00 a pint.
8. **Surprising Trivia:** Give a piece of trivia.
Example: Ice cream can be any flavor, like jalapeño pepper and yam.

Now, follow your Arrangement's outline blocks and supply your **SUPPORTING DETAILS:**

For Narration, you need to “flesh out” the story's events, characters, and setting. That's where **Description** comes in. Relying on your five senses (sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste), explain the physical characteristics of the people, places, and things in your story. (Most people rely on sight and hearing the most in description.)

While a journalist or scientist uses **Objective Description** to describe these things as **logically** (that is, **objectively**) as possible, a personal creative non-fiction essayist uses **Subjective Description** to describe those same things as **emotionally** (that is, **subjectively**) as possible. In a personal essay, those descriptions with emotional pull connect the reader to you, show the movie that is in your head, and therefore create a rich and specific story that stays even when the reader has finished your essay.

For Process, each detail is a chronological stage of the process, with each stage having several steps. In a **Process**, always remember to keep your readers' needs in mind. What do you know that newbies most likely don't know? Don't leave ANYTHING out.

For Division, Comparison/Contrast, and Classification, your descriptive examples can be personal experiences, facts, statistics, or quotes from participants, witnesses, and experts. Whatever your examples are, make sure that they are 1) specific, 2) concrete, and 3) relevant.

For Cause and Effect: since it is always based on **Narration**, you can't answer **why** something happened unless you clearly know **what** happened. In analyzing an event's narrative timeline, you accurately identify causes that may be **remote** in time but are also **main** (or **root**) **causes** of the event or phenomenon. While **immediate** (that is, **recent**) **causes** are easy to identify, they are often only **contributory** (**secondary**) **causes**. So it is best for you to analyze all causes before settling for the top three or more causes.

Also, don't confuse **chronology** (A happened before B) with **causality** (A caused B). Just because A preceded B doesn't necessarily mean A caused B. It may just be coincidence unless there is plenty of evidence to link the two by causality. Mistaking chronology for causality is called a "**post hoc fallacy**," a common error in reasoning.

Finally, your descriptive examples can be personal experiences, facts, statistics, or quotes from participants, witnesses, and experts. Whatever your examples are, make sure that they are 1) specific, 2) concrete, and 3) relevant.

For Argument, in addition to **evidence** and **logical chains of reasoning**, if you researched outside sources and include them in your Argument section, here's a quick explanation of how to embed (that is, incorporate) outside sources into your Argument section:

1. Your Topic Sentence.
2. Your explanation of what that topic sentence means (optional)
3. Beginning identifying label of person's name and/or title of the source + the example pulled from a source, either "Quoted," paraphrased, or summarized.
4. If you have more than one example, have transitions between examples – Also, In addition, Next, Or, However, On the other hand

Note: This method also applies to the non-Argument blocks in your creative non-fiction essay if you did research in those areas.

Regarding Dialogue

If your topic includes people talking, then you'll need to have dialogue. If you're not sure about the punctuation of dialogue, then here's a quick review from Purdue University's *Online Writing Lab* web article, "Quotation Marks with Fiction, Poetry, and Titles":

Write each person's spoken words, however brief, as a separate paragraph. Use commas to set off dialogue tags such as "she said" or "he explained." If one person's speech goes on for more than one paragraph, use quotation marks to open the dialogue at the beginning of each paragraph. However, do not use closing quotation marks until the end of the final paragraph where that character is speaking.

For example:

"Did you read all these, Pa?" I asked as I marveled at his collection.

"Yes," he replied, "at least twice. Sometimes more."

"Really?" I couldn't help sounding surprised. "Why?"

Use a Word Processor

You can draft with pen and paper or with keyboard and word processing software. But for those who compose with pen and paper, type your completed draft into a word processor as soon as possible. Revision & Editing will be easier with an electronic version of your Rough Draft as opposed to a handwritten version.

Also, don't forget to save your file often and to make a printout of your word-processed Rough Draft just in case your word processor file gets lost, corrupted, or infected with an electronic virus. You wouldn't want to start your Rough Draft from scratch if something goes wrong with your file. Therein lie insanity and much anger.

A brief word about file formats: Microsoft Word automatically saves its files as .docx files. Apple Pages saves its files as .pages files. Google Docs save its files as .gdoc files.

Many schools and libraries still run older versions of Microsoft Word, which CANNOT read .pages or .gdoc files. So if you don't use MS Word, then make sure you "Save As" your Rough Draft as a .docx or .pdf file.

Also, save your file with an easily identifiable name and in an easy-to-find place so that you don't accidentally misplace your draft.

STAGE IV: REVISION & EDITING

With a completed, typed Rough Draft, you move to the fourth and last stage of the Writing Process: **REVISION & EDITING**.

In **REVISION**, check for three big things:

1. Look again to your **Arrangement** and then back to your **Rough Draft**, making sure that you followed the organization of your Arrangement and aren't missing any important parts.
2. If your piece is too short, **add any additional details** to the body paragraph or body paragraphs. You might even add whole, new body paragraphs, but be careful not to repeat yourself. Write down **any new sub-topics** to your Arrangement to remind yourself not to repeat sub-topics you've already gone over.
3. If you find **details that digress**, that is, get off the point of your thesis, then **delete** those details and **replace** them with details that do relate to your thesis.

In **EDITING**, do these three steps:

1. **Correct any stylistic and grammatical errors**, like confused words, misspelled words, bad punctuation, sentence errors (like fragments and run-ons), and deficient transition words. Consult your personal grammar source, whether it's a

book or a grammar website like *The Purdue Online Writing Lab*, as needed. Also, run the spell-checker and grammar-checker of your word processor, but don't do this blindly. YOU need to check the electronic checkers to make sure that you agree with their suggestions or not. After all, anyone who has ever dealt with bad autocorrect while texting can see that these electronic checkers are not perfect.

2. **Correct any errors in the manuscript style per your instructor's or editor's requirements.** For instance, in **MLA style**, make sure you have

- A. a centered title,
- B. proper paragraph breaks (0.5" first line indenting the first sentence of each paragraph, with no additional spaces between the paragraphs),
- C. one-inch margins all around,
- D. a book-type font style like Times New Roman, Cambria, or Calibri,
- E. font size no larger than 12, and
- F. a name header or cover page, according to your instructor's or editor's requirement
- G. EVERYTHING double-spaced.

3. **Have another person** (a classmate, tutor, or knowledgeable friend) **read your EDITED Rough Draft** so that he or she can spot errors or problems that you may have overlooked. This "second opinion" is called **Peer Review**, and all experienced writers do this. **DO NOT SKIP THIS STEP.**

Creative Non-Fiction Manuscript Example

Rufel F. Ramos
Street Address
City, State ZIP CODE
Phone Number
Email Address

680 words

“Afterword” in *“My Kind of Comedy”: An Exegetical Reading of Flannery O’Connor as*

Medieval Drama

By Rufel F. Ramos

In the summer of 2006, my Flannery O’Connor dissertation was already written, accepted, and defended when, hard-earned PhD in hand, I made my maiden pilgrimage to the mecca of all O’Connor scholars and admirers: Milledgeville, Georgia.

Since my research was essentially done, seeing the O’Connor collection at Georgia College and State University was an exercise in thoroughness. (It was there, however, that I realized just how much work still needed to be done, work that was beyond the scope of my thesis but, perhaps, my thesis could open the way for others. But I am getting ahead of myself.)

Walking around O’Connor’s hometown, the antebellum capital of Georgia, wasn’t as breathtaking as seeing her bedroom at Andalusia, her family farm. The room was actually the

parlor, but because of O'Connor's difficulty in climbing the stairs to the second story, the parlor was turned into her bedroom. Through her bedroom, one could see the world; and she wrote of that world from her writing table, just within arm's reach of her narrow bed. So when I saw her gravesite, next to her mother, who was next to her father, I was both saddened to see how quickly that family line ended and appreciative to know what O'Connor left behind.

Leaving Milledgeville well before sunrise, I saw the fog rising along Lake Sinclair, twisting among the kudzu-laden trees standing sentinel along the lonely highway. There, I could see the Misfit shooting the Grandmother. There, I could see young Tarwater waking up from his rape. There, I could see Tom Shiftlet racing away from his wife. There, on that lonely road, I could feel the presence of God – spooky yet comforting, at the same time.

I did not know then, but that summer of 2006 was when I ceased to be an O'Connor scholar but just an O'Connor admirer. I made a donation to the Flannery O'Connor/ Andalusia Foundation, returned home to Texas, and began my post-PhD career as a community college professor, teaching mostly freshman rhetoric and composition to non-traditional students. Sometimes I taught an O'Connor short story here and there in my classes, but mostly it was my dissertation itself that I often referred to, as an example of what a research project looked like, of all things.

But then I was inspired to write a novel in 2011 – and I would not have been able to write it, if I had not already written a dissertation.

As I mentioned in an article on my blog, written 1 January 2012, a dissertation is as *not a novel* as a written work can possibly be. But the process of planning, researching, and writing the whole thing was an excellent apprenticeship to planning out a novel. I knew what my main thesis

was in my dissertation — that is, I knew what the ending was before I even started writing. So the whole dissertation planning was “simply” explaining how to get there.

Once I saw that I could write something that was unified and was longer than thirty pages — my dissertation final draft ended up being 271 pages long, with fourteen pages of bibliography — I had actually broken through a psychological obstacle in my fiction-writer mind. For, up to that point, I actually believed I could not write fiction any longer than the short story form.

It was then when I realized that what I learned most about Flannery O’Connor was not the literary scholarship, not the theological underpinnings of her literary creation, not even the “medieval-ness” of her Christian comedy. No, what O’Connor most taught me was how to be a writer — how to get the fiction written, how to get it done. Thanks to her, my not-religious-but-it-has-angels novel, *Ye Watchers and Ye Holy Ones*, was born. For that, I am indescribably grateful.

It has been seven years since that pilgrimage to Milledgeville. Life has taken me very far from O’Connor’s world. Yet I only have to close my eyes, and I can see those simple grave markers, her spare parlor bedroom, and that country road, the fog enveloping everything in silent theophany.

-- END --

Save your file again, in the correct file format and in more than one place. It is now a polished draft. If you submit it to your teacher or editor (either by print-out or electronically), then this draft is called the **Final Draft**. The **Final Draft** is the end product of the Writing Process. You’re done with your creative non-fiction essay!

LET'S START

Read **“Chapter 2: Creative Non-Fiction Examples”** to serve as models for you. Then write **two creative non-fiction essays** based on your personal experiences over any topic, using **AT LEAST** the Narration mode and one other mode: 600-1000 words and then 1000-1300 words.

CHAPTER 2: CREATIVE NON-FICTION EXAMPLES

“Afterword” from *“My Kind of Comedy”: An Exegetical Reading of Flannery O’Connor as Medieval Drama* dissertation

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(680 words)

#

“Angry Young Black Man” and “AYBM: A Resolution” from *I Am the Lizard Queen!* blog

October 22, 2008

In one of my classes this semester sits an Angry Young Black Male (AYBM). Having taught at an Historically Black College/University (HBCU) and also, at the HBCU, confronting a would-be rapist, I felt no threat coming from my current AYBM. Yes, he listens to gangsta rap just before class (but turns it off when class starts), often has AYBM opinions during class discussions — but, hey, I'm teaching Argumentation, so it's not horribly inappropriate — and sometimes steps out of the classroom for reasons unknown. And, yes, I did make him angry enough earlier this semester that he left the classroom and was gone for a week, but then he came by my office and we talked things through.

But I wasn't expecting, on my way to class this afternoon, to be called into an office by two campus police officers and seeing one of my other students, a Non-Angry Young Black Male, and a counselor, talking about the AYBM who verbally intimidated my other student just because he asked that the gangsta rap music be turned down.

So that got dealt with. But I'm at a quandary of how to handle my AYBM, who now doesn't want to come back to the class anymore. “I can't have a run-in with the police, Miss. I can't have that, on top of everything else I gotta deal with,” he said to me after class.

I'm at a quandary because AYBM has a good brain in his head, writes well, and has a heart, even though, just listening to him, it's been beat, battered, and scarred all over due to whatever he's keeping within himself. And I'm not forcing him to tell me. God knows I can respect a man trying to deal with his own demons.

But I want him to do well because I can see the potential for him to do good things. But he is so ANGRY. And I fear that his anger has built a wall around him so thick and so high that nothing — and I mean nothing — will reach him unless someone reaches in there with compassion and understanding. I can't extend that unless he comes to class.

I guess what I'm saying is that today, I'm feeling just how little a teacher can do for a fellow human being.

I ain't happy about that.

December 5, 2008

Back in October, I wrote about the Angry Young Black Man who felt so alienated from his fellow classmates in his Comp II class that he considered never coming back.

Fortunately, he did come back to class, although he never formed any connection whatsoever with his classmates. He sat in a corner workstation (the class was taught in a computer lab classroom), avoided eye-contact, and pretty much kept a low-profile.

Even with all that, I refused to overlook him in class. During lab days (when the class individually worked on their papers and other students didn't need my assistance), I worked one-on-one with him to get him to care about his research paper topic, "Don't Blame Gangsta Rap." He wrote it. During the Analyzing Literature unit, I listened to him — and therefore, the class also listened to him — as he responded to the assigned poems, especially Hardy's poem, "The Man He Killed," over which he eventually wrote his literary analysis.

I refused to give up on him this semester, and, thus, forced him not to give up on himself. And because of that, happily, he completed Composition II... and passed.

“Thank you for puttin’ up with me this semester,” he said, as he swung by my office earlier this week to check on his papers. He had this expression that, from the nose up, was all knitted-brow-wary suspicion and, from the nose-down was tentative-grimace-like smile.

“No problem. You’re good at this.” I pointed at his papers.

“Nah, nah –” he started, with a dismissive headshake, as if wondering if I was bs-ing him.

I cut him off. “No. Really. You’re good.”

And, for the first time this semester, I saw a real smile. Then he left my office.

Maybe — just maybe — he believed me when I treated him like there was a place for him in college. Maybe — just maybe — he now believes in himself, that he really does belong in college, that he’s better than the violence-filled side of town that he grew up in and currently lives.

Maybe. Just maybe.

Now back to grading for me.

(743 words)

#

Excerpt from “5: When the Reader Wrote” in *Scaffolds: A Childhood Memoir of Books*

In the summer of 1982, my family’s last day on Guam was spent at a hotel, with friends having one last party – a good-bye party – at the hotel pool. We kids swam until it got dark, and then the party ended. All of our friends, our little village of people who were like family, went home, and my family headed back up, to our hotel room. We were leaving in early June, when school just ended, in order to have a month visiting family, first in the Philippines and then California, before making the long drive from San Diego to Grand Prairie, Texas.

My siblings, tired out, went to bed early, but I couldn’t get to sleep. I was too excited, too anxious. I stayed up, watching two

cable-provided movies on the hotel TV with Mom and Pa, and somewhere at the end of the movie was when Mom and Pa broke the news.

Pa said. "You'll have to stay a few more days on Guam, with Auntie Tess and Uncle Carl."

I stared at both of them, the second movie muted in the background. "Why?"

"Eh, your papers weren't in order yet – it will take just three more days, and it will be all right."

"But," I asked, "why weren't my papers in order yet?" I had no idea what "my papers" meant – I just knew that it sounded bad.

"*Ay naku,*" Mom sighed. "Your passport needed to be updated because you're adopted." Then, for the first time, she showed me my passport.

It was green. It was a Taiwanese passport, with a black and white toddler picture in it. My name was printed as "WANG, SU-FONG, ALSO KNOWN AS RUSEL RAMOS." Since only Pa was an American citizen at the time, and I was born to a single, Taiwanese national, my citizenship was still mish-mashed with Taiwan.

I couldn't think of anything to say.

"We adopted you when you were a baby," Mom said, sounding guilty, "but you will always be our daughter."

"I will always be your Pa, and your Mom will always be your Mom," Pa added.

"We will always love you," Mom said.

"But," Pa declared with reluctance, "not everyone in the Philippines knows you were adopted."

"Just keep this quiet, okay?" Mom said.

I just stared at them, that movie finishing in the background. "Okay, Mom. Okay, Pa."

"You're a good girl," Mom said, turning off the TV.

"You'll be okay," Pa said. "One of your uncles will be your official guardian on the airplane ride to the Philippines. See, here's the affidavit." Pa showed me a signed and notarized letter as proof.

“We’ll pick you up at the airport,” Mom said. “You’re lucky. You’ll be flying on a nice Pan Am airplane while we go by military transport plane.”

“Okay, Mom.”

Then we all got ready for bed, and then Mom and Pa went to sleep.

I didn’t.

Oh, and the two movies that were playing that night? The first one was *Chariots of Fire*.

The second was *Mommy Dearest*.

I truly wish that I was making that up.

To say that my ten-year-old self had abandonment issues would be an understatement.

Thanks to the *Childcraft* book *Guide to Parents*, I was familiar with adoption, so I knew that my biological parents gave me up, left me behind. As my family – “Are they my family?” I thought back then – went to the airport, leaving me behind, I went with Auntie and Uncle to spend two nights and three days at their house.

Absolutely speaking, Auntie and Uncle (who were actually not related to Mom and Pa but were their close friends) were as familiar and warm to me as my own family, their two daughters were fun and friendly playmates, and their house was large, airy, and open to me. During the day, around them, I smiled, I played, and I thanked their kind company. During the night, when they were asleep, I fought with the double demons of fear and grief. After the second day, when I woke up to the third morning after a fitful night of not-sleeping, I was ready to leave.

The entire family came with me to the airport, and they made sure my legal guardian – a man whom Pa said I should consider as “Uncle” even though he was a complete stranger to me – met me at the departure gate. This was before the days of 9/11, so Auntie, Uncle, and their daughters accompanied me through security, all the way to my departure gate. I only had a carry-on, as my other luggage was with Mom and Pa at the Philippines.

After saying my goodbyes, realizing that I would likely never see them again, I followed my guardian onto the jetway and then onto the plane. The white and blue of Pan American World Airways were everywhere in the cabin, and I sat in a window seat, my carry-on tucked in front of me. My guardian sat next to me, in an aisle seat. Try as I might, I cannot recall what my guardian looked like – not even his ethnicity. My insomnia, fear, and grief knocked out my ability to retain the image of this man who had full legal responsibility for me during the time I was in his care.

As the plane lifted off for the long, three-hour flight to Manila International Airport, I stared out the window, seeing the Earth fall below me. From above I could see the funny, crooked shape of what had been my little island home and felt keenly the loss of that idyllic childhood on Guam. Staring at the vast, blue ocean stretch before me, I felt the loss of my family. I felt the loss of my friends. But, most of all, I felt the loss of my innocence.

For the first time in my life, I felt totally alone. I wanted to cry, but I couldn't – not on a plane with a bunch of strangers, including the one sitting next to me. Instead, I looked at the seat pocket in front of me and, behind a safety brochure and a barf bag, was a slim magazine. Pulling it out, I saw that it was a copy of *Cricket*, an illustrated literary magazine for older kids. I absent-mindedly flipped through the pages until I stopped at a little black and white illustration of a faun and a little pig-tailed girl, walking together under the same umbrella. I read "Lucy felt a little frightened, but she felt very inquisitive and excited as well."

Those were the first words of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, from *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, that I ever read.

I barely remember the three days I spent before that flight, I don't remember my guardian at all, and I don't remember what happened when I arrived – safe and sound – at Manila International Airport, when my family and extended family met me with open arms. Instead, I remember meeting Lucy Pevensie and Mr. Tumnus for the first time, through the pages of *Cricket* magazine, on an airplane several thousands of feet above the deep, dark Pacific Ocean. Lucy's meeting with Mr. Tumnus

made me forget my own troubles, and that was when I realized the power of story and the power of the author behind the story, C. S. Lewis. After reading the book excerpt (which ended with “And so Lucy found herself walking through the wood arm in arm with this strange creature as if they had known one another all their lives”), I found myself again, for Lewis reminded me of one unshakeable truth about who I was.

I was a reader.

And for the next two years, I would often feel like Lucy, having stumbled into a strange, new world and figuring out how to adapt and fit in while she’s there.

(1316 words)

CHAPTER 3: POETRY WITH EXAMPLES

DEFINITION

POETRY is a literary form, in which 1) the content can be factual (the details factually happened) or fictional (the writer created the details from his/her imagination) and 2) is written in verse; basically, it is **a song using words alone**. Unlike song lyrics, which partner with a melodic tune to give the full meaning of the lyrics, poetry must depend on the words alone for its full meaning. Therefore, the words you choose and arrange must do all the work.

Let's pick apart my story poem "Patchwork" to see how the words work through the elements of poetry:

Once upon a full-moon night,
A patchwork man came by to sing
Of rags and buttons, silver bright,
Of lace and ribbons made of string.

He broke her wooden gate's stone latch,
He trampled pansies to the root,
He trod upon her daisy patch,
And sung off-key with leaky lute.

"Away! Begone!" she yelled above,
Upon her gilded balcony.
She trusted not a patchwork love
Which came at night and came for free.

"I gave you silken scarves in parts,
My handkerchiefs, my bits of quilt.
That is no claim upon my heart,

And so – Begone! I feel no guilt.”

She saw the patchwork man below,
His hat slung back, his coat too thin,
With mismatched buttons in a row,
His trousers held with safety pins.

He gently set the lute aside
And gently start his search and sift.
He pulled – what is it? – from his side
And threw the object as a gift.

It fell before her small, bare feet,
A package wrapped with cloth and tape.
She picked it up, unwrapped the sheet,
While sensing tingles in her nape.

A patchwork heart sewn timid tight
With silken scarves and quilted strings,
With cotton kerchiefs, buttons bright,
Embroidered lace and ribbon rings.

“You gave me silken scarves in parts,
Your handkerchiefs, your quilt. ‘Tis true
I have no claim upon your heart,
But mine I offer you to choose.”

A patchwork love thrown in the dark –
Oh, what a crazy, silly match –
She felt the patchwork make its mark,
But first, “Get off my flower patch!”

#

ELEMENTS OF POETRY

1. **LINES:** Instead of sentences, a poem is written in lines, where often a sentence is broken between two lines. For instance, “Patchwork” has forty lines.
2. **STANZAS:** Instead of paragraphs, a poem can be divided into stanzas – separated groups of lines. For instance, “Patchwork” has ten stanzas, with four lines per stanza.
3. **RHYME:** While a poem doesn’t have to rhyme (such poems are called “free verse”), “Patchwork” is a rhyming poem. But let’s go over basic rhyming terminology first.

Couplet: two lines, back-to-back, rhyme at the end of their lines (“end rhyme”), AA. *Example:*

And so I grab my meds, my Benadryl
And slather anti-itch cream to my fill.

Tercet: three lines, back-to-back, in which the first and third lines end rhyme, ABA. *Example:*

Red sea strew the sand
Airy children play and hide
Bound the foot and hand

Quatrain: four lines, back-to-back, in which the end rhyme scheme alternates from line to line, either ABBA or ABAB:

ABBA Example:

I killed him with a ruddy, tightened fist
Because I didn’t have the words to say
Of every hurt that rushed all in that day,
A million jabs and bruises, much to list.

ABAB Example:

Once upon a full-moon night,
A patchwork man came by to sing

Of rags and buttons, silver bright,
Of lace and ribbons made of string.

Now we know that “Patchwork” is a series of ten quatrains.

4. RHYTHM & METER:

Every word has a rhythm, of stressed and unstressed syllables, when we pronounce a word. For example, we pronounce the two-syllable word “upon” like this: uh-PON. The first syllable is “unstressed” while the second syllable is “stressed”. If we were to write stressed/unstressed marks on the word “upon,” it would look like this:

ǔpón

In a poem, any polysyllabic word (or two or more monosyllabic words strung together) that follows a particular rhythm is a **metrical foot**. Every metrical foot has a special name (in order of common usage):

Iamb = unstress+STRESS	<i>Example:</i> upon
Anapest = unstress+unstress+STRESS	<i>Example:</i> intervene
Trochee = STRESS+unstress	<i>Example:</i> wander
Dactyl = STRESS+unstress+unstress	<i>Example:</i> thunderous
Spondee = STRESS+STRESS	<i>Example:</i> cold steel

For the musically trained, the metrical foot sound like the beats of eighth and quarter notes, like this:

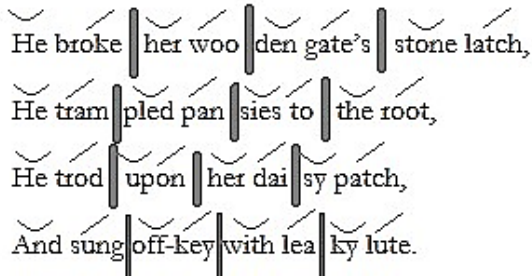
Iambic foot = | ¼ ½ |
Anapestic foot = | ¼ ¼ ½ |
Trochaic foot = | ½ ¼ |
Dactylic foot = | ¼ ¼ ½ |
Spondaic foot = | ½ ½ |

Just like a sheet of music has a set series of musical beats called a measure, a poem has a set series of metrical feet called a meter.

Each meter has a special name, based on the number of metrical feet:

Monometer	= one metrical foot
Dimeter	= two metrical feet
Trimeter	= three metrical feet
Tetrameter	= four metrical feet
Pentameter	= five metrical feet
Hexameter	= six metrical feet
Heptameter	= seven metrical feet
Octameter	= eight metrical feet

If we “scan” our first poem – that is, sound out the rhythm and meter of “Patchwork” – we will see that each line is primarily written in **iambic tetrameter**:



5. DICTION, IMAGERY & TONE:

DICTION is your word choice. Just like using Description for Narration to “flesh out” the story’s events, characters, and setting in prose writing, in poetry you use **Subjective Description** to describe persons, places, things, and actions as **emotionally important** as possible. Those **descriptive and specific** word choices make the emotional impression concrete and real to your reader.

Besides having words that your reader can sense – see, hear (**especially hear – with the repetition of vowels, consonants, and even whole words and phrases**), smell, touch, taste – your word choice should also match the **tone** of the poem.

TONE is the attitude (think of the phrase “**tone of voice**”) of the **SPEAKER** in the poem. The **speaker** can either be your own self or a character speaking in the first person in the poem (“I, our, we”) or an all-knowing speaker who is narrating what is happening in the poem and refers to the characters in the poem in the third person (“he, she, it, they, his, hers, its, theirs”).

Since the content of a poem can be factual or fictional, you are free to choose what kind of person the speaker is in your poem. Whatever you choose, the speaker’s tone will be the main driver of the emotional impression in your poem, based on the speech pattern of the speaker.

For instance, the speaker may use **ENJAMBMENT**. **Enjambment** means that the sentence of one line wraps around and continues to the next line without any obvious pause at the end of the previous line. **Enjambment** occurs in both free and rhymed verse and gives the poem a more natural-sounding and contemporary speech pattern. *Example:*

Blood once flowed with tears
 On this hard, green ground
 I now walk with my son.

The cumulative effect of diction and tone is the poem’s **IMAGERY**, which is the sum total of your word-pictures that guide your reader to the poem’s emotional impression.

In “Patchwork” we have no enjambment; instead, we see clearly defined end-rhymes and word choices like “Once upon a full-moon night,” “leaky lute,” and “Begone” – all of which gives **a fairy-tale imagery** to the poem, as told in third person by an unnamed narrator. With the **image** of a raggedy musician wooing a seemingly hostile woman standing above him in her balcony, the fairy-tale imagery continues, and we’re rooting for the clumsy but sweet patchwork man to finally win the high-class woman’s heart.

RESULT: EMOTIONAL IMPRESSION OF POETRY

The words have done its work in this poem. The simple lines of sing-song iambic tetrameter, with easy-to-follow stanzas in regular, rhyming quatrains, and the fairy-tale imagery in diction and tone, reinforces that **EMOTIONAL IMPRESSION** of the poem: a sweet and simple love story of a once-upon-a-time age, with a happy ending of any romantic comedy.

A poem's **emotional impression** (also called a poem's **THEME**) is equivalent to a creative non-fiction essay's implied **Thesis**, and the job of the poet is to make the elements of poetry do their work, to produce that emotional impression that feels natural and intuitive to the reader, instead of artificial and forced (like a bad greeting card).

INTERESTING NOTE: Some readers have interpreted the imagery in "Patchwork" as being metaphors for the absurdity of physical intimacy, which wasn't **my intention**. Similarly, different readers may get a different emotional impression from **your intended impression**, but if that emotional impression feels **real and true** to your reader, then your poem has done its work.

THE WRITING PROCESS

Now that we know what **poetry** is, here's how to write one.

STAGE I: INVENTION & PREWRITING

Keep a **poetry journal** (where you jot down words, phrases, and even preliminary poems) as you work to find your emotional impression. Also, read the poetry of others, especially if you are deciding on a form of poetry (free verse, metrical rhymed verse, or even a traditional form like the sonnet), which will determine what form of poem best fits your intended emotional impression.

Because poetry is a literary form with **condensed meaning** (a lot of meaning in a very small space), the invention/prewriting stages easily flows into the other stages of writing. What makes this stage distinct, therefore, is writing your ideas so that it looks like you're drafting, but you're actually **freewriting** as you work

through the **elements of poetry** to determine your intended **emotional impression** of your poem.

STAGE II: ARRANGEMENT & DRAFTING

For the purposes of this short guidebook, we'll go over the three aforementioned forms of poetry: free verse, metrical rhymed verse, and the sonnet.

FREE VERSE allows you to write without the limitations of rhyme and formal metrical feet, while the other elements of poetry – lines, stanza, rhythm of the words and how they're related to each other, diction, tone, and imagery – become even more important to achieve your emotional impression.

Many free verse poems rely on the **rhetorical modes**, to provide structure to an otherwise random group of words. Here are two examples, the first one relying on the Narration mode, the other on Comparison/Contrast:

“Armistice Day” – 38 lines

Blood once flowed with tears
On this hard, green ground
I now walk with my son.
Past cries ring and touch me;
Wonder if my son can hear it
Too as he runs ahead of me?
But – no.

I don't know why I came back
Here, this deserted place.
I hated this site, this
Desolate hole, this hellish
Land, where blood and mud
Mingled, and I couldn't tell the
Difference.

Too far from home, across the Great Sea
Too far from Mother and Father and
My wife, heavy with child.

My son explores the land with
Excitement. He is still only a
Boy, like I was when I came
Here, among boys who were
Supposed to be men, doing their
Duty.

Duty is such an abstract thing
Until you come here,
Until you see the anxious
Faces mirror yours, until you
See their eyes close like children
In that eternal sleep.

Dear God, I miss them,
Those boys – my friends.
Their cries ring through me in
Waves that ache.

“Father!” my son calls out.
I look up. He stands like a boy-god
On top of a grey mountain.
“Father, is there where Troy
Once stood?”

#

“Chameleon” – 9 lines

She is a chameleon.

Against white, she is white.
Against red, she is red.
Against black, she is black.

Against brown, she is brown.

But hidden, underneath, she is grey,
Dark pools of grey, tinged with ‘thalo blue,
Wondering where her background is,
Telling her who she is.

#

METRICAL RHYMED VERSE gives a musical quality to a poem, which is why it’s the most common form in songwriting. (In fact, listening to songs and their lyrics can help train a beginner poet’s ear to poetic meter and rhyme and how both contribute to the songwriter’s emotional impression.)

We’ve already analyzed one of my metrical rhymed poems: “Patchwork.” Here’s another one as an example, but unlike the earlier poem, I use enjambment generously, as it fits my poem’s speaker, John Keats. While it’s primarily iambic pentameter, in 40 lines the enjambment often drops or adds a stressed syllable, as well as the end-rhymes being more “near rhymes” than perfect rhymes. All of these elements contribute to the desperate passion of Keats as he wishes to live to see his beloved one more time. **Note:** the introductory informative section is part of the poem.

“Bright Star, Siren” – 40 lines

Author’s Note: John Keats was born October 31, 1795, in London, England, and died at age 25 of tuberculosis on February 23, 1821, in Rome, Italy, where he is buried. In a letter dated November 1, 1820, while still on ship at the port of Naples, Keats writes of being let out of quarantine for the first time on his birthday, October 31. But what is noteworthy in this letter is his declaration that his imagination of his fiancée, Fanny Brawne, torments him. “My imagination is horribly vivid about her – I see her – I hear her.” There is no record of what Keats’ last birthday, ill and isolated (except for his friend, Joseph Severn) on a strange ship on a strange sea, was like.

Bright star, siren of my mind, no less my
Body, I see you shining through the veil,
This waking life, this death of earth and sky.
I call life death, for alive, death I hail,
Before he steals upon me in surprise.

Yet, steeled as I am, my thoughts still surmise,
While huddled in dark blankets, sweating heat,
And sought within the wine-dark seas demise
Of all my sins, this sweat and blood, this seat
Diseased and broken, harvested too soon,

I swear I must be mad, but not in swoon.
To glance upon the waters' swollen wave,
And see your image walk, a lifelong boon,
In radiance, all fair and cruelly grave,
I tear my hair out, strand by strand, and cry,

"This is too much, this is too much!" My cries
Are rattles, specked with blood, a fine mist spray,
Imagination made incarnadine.
You speak, with naked arms stretched towards my face,
"My dear, the marriage date is set, my gown –

I know it breaks tradition – bought in town
In nearby Rome. See, I await you there.
My voice will be my song for you, sweet sound
Echoed before the Spanish Steps. Beware
Of other-worldly hopes, for there is no

One but you and I." But, sweet siren, O!
Bright star of my body, no less my mind,
Feverish dreams are only sighs. I know
My dearest girl remains in England, kind
And fair and young, my true star incarnate.

She'll wear a dress of blue. Smiling, she'll sit

Before yon desk and wrest the rough embrace
Into a winging word, released. Here, lamp lit
Reverses dark sunset on a birthday
Ill-conceived. Dear Severn hands me letters

One of which is hers. Ah, perhaps better –
I look upon the seas, and you are gone.
Happy, shining gift! I look upon her
Word, and you are there. Passion, soul, all run,
Bright star! But body only stands and waits.

#

TRADITIONAL RHYMED METRICAL FORM: THE SONNET

In the last chapter of Madeleine L'Engle's 1962 young adult fantasy novel, *A Wrinkle in Time*, one of the main characters, an extraordinary creature named Mrs. Whatsit, says, "You're given the form, but you have to write the sonnet yourself. What you say is completely up to you."

Having to follow a form with pre-set rules may seem like a constraint to the poetic imagination, but the sonnet's strict form (like any traditional poetic form) is like **a mode for a poem**: an already fixed arrangement of line, stanza, rhyme, rhythm, and meter allows the poet to concentrate on the diction, tone, and imagery of the poem. The sonnet form can be a support system as the beginner poet practices with the elements of poetry.

What makes a sonnet a sonnet:

1. It's all in iambic pentameter, with ten syllables per line.
2. It's 14 lines long, with only one stanza.
3. The 14 lines are divided into two parts: the first part is the status quo, a problem, or a question; the second part is the change, the solution, or the answer.

4. Where the “turn” – the transition between the first part to the second part – occurs depends on whether the sonnet is Petrarchan or Shakespearean.
5. The end-rhyme scheme also differs between the Petrarchan and Shakespearean sonnet.

Petrarchan (Italian) Sonnet

1. The first part are lines 1-8 (called the “Octave”)
2. The rhyme scheme for the Octave is ABBA+ABBA.
3. The “turn” happens at the end of line 8 or the beginning of line 9.
4. The second part are lines 9-14 (called the “Sestet”).
5. The rhyme scheme for the Sestet can be CD+CD+CD or CDE+CDE.

Petrarchan sonnet example: “Sugar Cane Harvester”

In heat I reap with speckled blade in hand
Which cut the cane with whistle and with shwink,
But sun whips down and makes it tough to think
To clear the wooden harvest from this land.
Sweet sweat rolls down, and stinging I must stand
Like tortured Tant’lus, seeing waters sink
Before his stooped, doomed form can grasp the drink
And pulls his hair in anguish, strand by strand.
Yet I am not that prideful fool of old
But just a burnt-arm reaper, not the first,
Who swings the slick machete in strokes bold
And fells the cane with flurried, rhythmic burst,
So as to catch a sugar cane unrolled
And, unlike Tant’lus, slake my tropic thirst.

#

Shakespearean (English) Sonnet

1. The first part are lines 1-12.

2. The rhyme scheme for the first part creates **three quatrains**: ABAB+CD CD+EF EF
3. The quatrains elaborate more on the problem or situation that needs solving.
4. The “turn” or “twist” happens at the end of line 12 or the beginning of line 13.
5. The second part are lines 13-14, which are **rhyming couplets**, GG.

English sonnet example: “Allergies”

On Tuesday I had dinner with my spouse
Who sat across the table as I ate
And although it was nice to leave the house
I wonder now if it was chance or fate.
For shortly after dinner, when I left,
I felt a twinge of itch upon my arm,
Yet I ignored it, like a lip once cleft,
Since at the time I figured, "What's the harm?"
But soon it becomes clear how wrong my skin
Has acted upon facing IT again,
And although I can fake it with a grin,
I'm really sick of it, my allergen.
And so I grab my meds, my Benadryl
And slather anti-itch cream to my fill.

#

After reading examples of free verse, rhymed metrical verse, and the sonnet, determine **what form of poem best fits your intended poem’s emotional impression** and begin arranging and drafting your poem.

STAGE III: REVISION & EDITING

After you draft your poem, check that it is error-free in regards to grammar, punctuation, and confused words (like writing “there” when you meant “their”).

Next, check that your draft’s poetic elements build and support your intended emotional impression:

- Are there enough lines or too many?
- Are the line breaks at the best place?
- Should there be more stanzas?
- Do the rhymes sound right (if it has a rhyming scheme)?
- If there is a metrical rhythm, does it flow?
- If it doesn’t flow, should you fix it or leave it be because it adds to the poem’s meaning?
- Is the diction made of lean, strong words (like concrete, specific nouns and action verbs) that build word-pictures instead of vague, abstract ideas that sound like awkward, weak clichés?
- Does the speaker’s tone match the overall impression of the poem?
- In sum: read your poem out loud by yourself -- does the poem SOUND right?

Then read your poem out loud with your peers and ask for feedback regarding the poetic elements.

Revise and edit, and keep doing so until you can feel and hear that emotional impression loud and clear, free of any obstacle to getting the true meaning and feeling of your poem to your reader.

REMEMBER: poetry is a literary form with condensed meaning (a lot of meaning in a very small space). Thus, make sure that every word in your poem **WORKS**.

LET’S START

Write three poems:

STARTERS, 2ND EDITION

1. A free verse poem, using the Narration mode, of up to 65 lines
2. A metrical rhymed verse of up to 65 lines
3. A sonnet (either Petrarchan or Shakespearean)

CHAPTER 4: FICTION

DEFINITION

FICTION is a form of **prose writing** – that is, written in sentences and paragraphs – in which 1) all the details are made up from the imagination of the writer, about 2) a **problem** in the life of a major character (the **protagonist**) and 3) answers the question “What happened?” through the details of **Narration**, as the protagonist tries to solve that problem.

While **fiction** ranges anywhere from the short-short story (as low as 100 words – or less, like micro-literary Tweets) to the novel (as high as 110,000 words – or more, like the saga novels of George R.R. Martin) most fiction have these **SEVEN ELEMENTS OF FICTION**:

1. GENRE
2. SETTING
3. CHARACTERS
4. CONFLICT
5. STORY
6. PLOT
7. POINT-OF-VIEW

Let’s go over them, one-by-one.

1. **GENRE** in fiction is a **category of story type** that follows a **specific formula**.

If you go to any bookstore in person or online, you’ll notice that the booksellers sort the fiction into categories like **Science Fiction, Fantasy, Horror, Thriller, Action/Adventure,**

Mystery, Romance, Military, Historical Fiction, Literary, Christian, Young Adult Coming-of-Age – and so on. Every fiction genre has set rules for what's expected in its stories' setting, characters, and even storylines because readers of one type of genre expect to see them.

Of course, a fiction writer can cross genres, like Young Adult Horror Romance (for example, Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series). For any beginner fiction writer, reading many novels in the genre or genres that you want to write is how to become familiar with the specific formula of that genre.

2. SETTING is the **time and place** of a story.

The setting of a story determines **what resources are available** to the people (**CHARACTERS**) in the story. For instance, if the setting is 1980's America, then we won't have people looking up stuff on the Internet because the web wasn't readily available to everyone until the mid-1990s (an example of the historical fiction genre).

Speaking of genre: the story's **genre** also helps determine setting, such as a pre-Industrial high fantasy story having castles, rugged countryside with mountains, extreme cold seasons, and a Middle Ages-like technology that hasn't invented electrical generation and flushing toilets yet (like J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*).

Finally, the story's setting determines **how the characters in the story speak**. For instance, the characters in that aforementioned high fantasy story are unlikely to say, "Dude! This food is AWESOME!" Of course, they can, if two genres cross-over, like Realism plus Fantasy (such as Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* and most of Neil Gaiman's body of work.)

A NOTE ABOUT WORLD-BUILDING: As the absolute creator of your story's setting, you can create a setting that has little similarity with the actual world. However, once

you make a rule about that world, then you must be consistent with the rule you created.

For instance, let's say that you have high, cold mountains where cat-eagles make their homes. When you write that a cat-eagle finds herself on a beautiful low-land shoreline, where the purple waters gently lap against the beach, then you must make her feel miserable because the air's too warm and too thick for her mountain-adapted body. (An example of exceptional worldbuilding is Ursula K. Le Guin's *Earthsea* series.)

TIP: If you are unsure about creating your own setting through extensive research, then you can practice by adopting an existing published setting from your favorite authors; such work is called FAN FICTION.

3. CHARACTERS are the **people** who play **significant roles** in the story; at minimum, a story needs a **protagonist** and an **antagonist**; in a longer story, we also find the protagonist's **foil**.

A **PROTAGONIST** is the main character working through the problem in the story. While often called "**the hero**," that doesn't mean the protagonist is perfect. In fact, the more flawed the protagonist is (while still being likeable), the more the reader will be able to identify with the protagonist and, therefore, root more for his or her success. The most flawed version of the protagonist is the "**antihero**." This kind of protagonist often has the personality of a selfish jerk, as seen by polite society, yet works hard against the real evil character, "**the villain**."

An **ANTAGONIST** is the protagonist's main obstacle or active enemy, against which the protagonist struggles. While often called "**the villain**," that doesn't mean the antagonist has to be completely evil. In fact, the more complex the antagonist is (while still being repugnant), the more the reader will see the antagonist as real-to-life and, therefore, wonder how he or she became the story's villain instead of another antihero.

If the antagonist is NOT another person (like the forces of nature or the protagonist's own troubled psyche), then the protagonist often succeeds against this type of antagonist by making peace with it, according to the logic of the story.

The **FOIL** are the secondary characters who serve as contrasts to the protagonist and therefore make clear the important characteristics of the protagonist (in contrast to his or her foil, who display the opposite characteristics).

The foil can be **friendly** to the protagonist, such as a **sidekick**, a **colleague**, or even an **authority figure**; the foil can also be **hostile** to the protagonist, such as the **antagonist's minion** or an **ineffectual minor bully**.

4. **CONFLICT** is the clash of the protagonist against an antagonist and, secondarily, his or her foil.

CONFLICT is the driving force behind the story; without it, you may write narrative prose, but it will read more like an essay than a story. The four main types of conflict are these:

- a. **Protagonist against another person** (often called "Man vs. Man") *
- b. **Protagonist against hostile natural forces** in air, land, sea, weather, climate (often called "Man vs. Nature")*
- c. **Protagonist against stagnant, societal forces** (often called "Man vs. Society")*
- d. **Protagonist against his/her own troubled psyche** (often called Man vs. Self²)

*There are two variations to these three non-self conflicts: One is **Protagonist against the supernatural**, either in the form of a supernatural person (Man vs. Man) or a hostile supernatural force (Man vs. Nature). The other is **Protagonist against technology**, again either in the form of a machine person (Man vs. Man) or techno-societal forces (Man vs. Society).

The more complex the characters, then the more likely the story will have two or more concurrent conflicts. Even in a “stranded on a deserted island” story with only one person, we’ll have at least two conflicts: b) protagonist against the hostile natural forces of the island and d) protagonist against his/her own psyche troubled with fear, loneliness, and despair.

5. STORY is the timeline of everything the reader needs to know to make sense of what happened.

While the terms “**story**” and “**plot**” may seem the same, they are not, especially when a writer first thinks of a story in a journal. The story’s events, **as laid out in a timeline**, are in chronological order, with the beginning of the protagonist’s life starting the chain of events, leading to the most recent event in the timeline.

For example, the story of William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* would be Danish teenager Prince Hamlet, adored by Ophelia (the teenage daughter of his dad’s royal advisor, Polonius) and happy in his little family of his mom (Queen Gertrude) and his dad (King Hamlet Sr.) While Hamlet is away at college, his uncle Claudius (who is also Hamlet Sr.’s brother) poisons his dad and quickly marries his mom, therefore becoming king. Returning home, Hamlet sees his dad in ghost form, who tells him to avenge his death. And the rest anyone can look up online.

What’s notable in this brief explanation is that the actual play *Hamlet* does NOT start with the happy story of Hamlet’s life before his dad’s murder even though that part of Hamlet’s life is the earliest event in Hamlet’s personal story. Instead, Shakespeare decided to start the play with the one event that changed everything in Hamlet’s life – the ghost-dad revealing his own uncle murdered his dad AND Hamlet’s supposed to kill his own uncle as revenge. Shakespeare’s decision to start his play this way brings us to **PLOT**.

6. **PLOT** is the particular portion of the story that the writer chooses to present, with the series of events arranged to reveal the dramatic, thematic, and emotional significance of the story.

While a story's **plot** can start from the very beginning, in chronological order (following the story's personal timeline of the protagonist), often it starts "**in media res**" – "**in the middle of things**" – and the earlier parts of the story are revealed later, in dramatic snippets, as backstory or even a full-blown flashback.

Here is a common image of the **plot-line structure**. Due to the shape of the plot-line structure, plot is sometimes called a "**story arc**" or "**the shape of the story.**"



- I. **The Beginning (aka Exposition):** This is the "Normal" life. -- establishes setting, major characters, and the **significance** of the current situation.
- II. **Rising Action:** the situation starts getting more complicated, in a series of scenes of conflict
- III. **Climactic Moment:** the secret is revealed, the choice is made, the "Aha!" moment occurs, depending on what the protagonist already knew from Parts I and II
- IV. **Falling Action:** the consequences of the Climactic Moment,
- V. **and The End (aka Denouement):** some sort of resolution. This is the "new Normal."

In short: **plot** follows a sequence of events of rising conflict and then resolution, in a cause and effect fashion, with increasing complication of the protagonist's struggle against his or her antagonist.

7. **POINT-OF-VIEW** is who is narrating the story's plot. Similar to the speaker of a poem, the narrator can either speak in the first person, second person, or third person:

1. **First Person** = "I, we" – the narrator is giving a first person account that he/she actually experienced or he/she witnessed.
2. **Second Person** = "you" – the narrator is the reader (NOT COMMONLY USED)
3. **Third Person** = "he, she, it, they" *
 - **Omniscient** = God's eye view (all-seeing, all-knowing)
 - **Limited** = character's view (knows, thinks, feels only what the character knows)

* **IMPORTANT NOTE:** Many long-form writers who choose the third person do limited third person after switching from one major character to the next, with omniscient third person for the lengthy exposition and description.

THE WRITING PROCESS

Not coincidentally, I organized the Seven Elements of Fiction in the order of The Writing Process.

STAGE I: INVENTION & PREWRITING

Prewrite (freewrite, cluster, list) ideas in your writer's journal. If you're stuck on ideas, listen to songs with a storyline, watch movies and/or TV shows, and/or read short stories and novels; they will help unstick ideas. Then decide which **genre** seems to best fit your ideas.

Prewrite ideas for **setting** (time and place). Where and when? Seeing pictures of places and time periods (either online or in print sources) helps make real your setting if you are unclear of setting.

Then prewrite who your **protagonist** is. Write a character sketch, with appearance, personality traits, age, gender, and so on. Do the same for your **antagonist** and any **major foil** characters (if any).

Prewrite what feels to be **the major conflict type** in your story: protagonist name vs. _____ (fill in the blank). Then prewrite the **life story** of your protagonist – key words in list form is easiest – in strict chronological order. Your protagonist’s background should start the chronology. Childhood? Family? Neighborhood? Pay attention to where the **sign of the major conflict first appears** in that chronology. Keep adding events to that timeline until you’ve reached the end of your protagonist’s story, in some major life event (like a birth, marriage, or a death).

STAGE II: ARRANGEMENT

Using the story arc outline, **plot** your story, again in list (outline) form -- or you can use the story arc shape as a visual plot line. **TIP:** Where you start the plot will depend on where the plot ends, so you may want to have the ending of the plot first, and then work your way backwards to find the beginning of the plot.

STAGE III: DRAFTING

Decide the **point-of-view** of your narrator. Then, following your plot outline, start drafting. Don’t worry if your story starts to diverge from your initial plot outline. As long as you know where you’re going and your protagonist’s journey, as he/she works through the story’s conflict, feels real to you, then keep drafting. **TIP:** Revise your plot outline if what you’re drafting is significantly different from your initial plot outline.

As for **dialogue**, as explained in Purdue University's *Online Writing Lab* web article, "Quotation Marks with Fiction, Poetry, and Titles":

Write each person's spoken words, however brief, as a separate paragraph. Use commas to set off dialogue tags such as "she said" or "he explained." If one person's speech goes on for more than one paragraph, use quotation marks to open the dialogue at the beginning of each paragraph. However, do not use closing quotation marks until the end of the final paragraph where that character is speaking.

Read "**Chapter 5: Fiction Examples**" if you need examples of how dramatically to set up dialogue and format it correctly.

REMEMBER: Microsoft Word automatically saves its files as .docx files. Apple Pages saves its files as .pages files. Google Docs .gdoc files. Many schools and libraries still run older versions of Microsoft Word, which CANNOT read .pages nor gdoc files. So if you don't use MS Word, then make sure you "Save As" your Rough Draft as a .docx file.

Also, save your file with an easily identifiable name and in an easy-to-find place so that you don't accidentally misplace your draft.

STAGE IV: REVISION & EDITING

In **REVISION**, check for three big things:

1. Look again to your **plot outline** and then back to your **Rough Draft**; make sure that you followed the organization of your plot outline and aren't missing any important parts.
2. If your draft is too short, **add additional exposition or description**. You might even add new scenes of conflict, but be careful not to repeat the same type of scenes. Jot down **any new plot details** to your plot outline to remind yourself that you've added something new.

3. If you find details that **weaken the flow of the plot** and/or is **inconsistent** with your genre, setting, character, and story, then **delete** those details and **replace** them with details that keep the story going and is consistent, which make your work feel psychologically real.

In **EDITING**, do these three steps:

1. **Correct any stylistic and grammatical errors**, like confused words, misspelled words, bad punctuation, sentence errors (like fragments and run-ons), and deficient transition words. (I recommend *The Purdue Online Writing Lab* website to review grammar.)
Also, run the spell-checker and grammar-checker of your word processor, but don't do this blindly. YOU need to check the electronic checkers to make sure that you agree with their suggestions or not.
2. **Correct any errors in the manuscript style** per your instructor's or editor's requirements. For instance, in **MLA style**, make sure you have
 - A. a centered story title,
 - B. proper paragraph breaks (0.5" first line indenting the first sentence of each paragraph, with no additional spaces between the paragraphs),
 - C. one-inch margins all around,
 - D. a book-type font style like Times New Roman, Cambria, or Calibri,
 - E. font size no larger than 12, and
 - F. a name header or cover page, according to your instructor's or editor's requirement
 - G. EVERYTHING double-spaced.

Fiction Manuscript Example

RUFEL F. RAMOS

Rufel F. Ramos
Street Address
City, State ZIP CODE
Phone Number
Email Address

900 words

“Boogeyman”

By Rufel F. Ramos

The old woman sat on her porch, violently rocking in her chair. After a summer of drought where the sun hung high like a hangman’s noose, the cold, damp October hung on the old woman’s bones like a blood chigger.

The old woman’s name was Nellie Beth Sims. The house was her granddaddy’s, built by him before the blood brick buildings of Dallas were replaced by slick mirror skyscrapers. If anybody were to ask her, Mrs. Sims would speak with that old pride that her family had been in Dallas, Texas, even before the names Carpenter and Braniff and Jonsson were thought of. She knew all of the old street names before Martin Luther King and Malcolm X took over, and she even knew where Bonnie and Clyde buried their cat during their fun around Irving and Oak Cliff. Like the house outliving the old storefronts in Dallas, Mrs. Sims outlived her parents, her husband, and most of her children. Her remaining child, a bland man named Michael, moved up north in Chicago. He

sometimes sent her chocolates on her birthdays, cheap chocolate that turned ashen and waxy in the mail. Other than the chocolate, which she didn't trust and always threw away, she heard nothing from him, which was how she liked it.

Her porch was dark so that the bugs wouldn't get into her hair, which was short like coils of barb wire and smelled of permanent. Even with the light out, she saw the dark man stroll up her walkway with his satchel. Up close she saw that he was a young man in a cheap blue suit two sizes too big for him. He wore a hat that once was good-looking, but now the shape was all gone from it with the brim pulled down low, making it look fierce. Mrs. Sims rose with one hand grabbing the broomstick she always left on the porch when she sat out. With the other hand, she reached around the doorway and turned on the porch light, which shone weakly through a cataract of old bug bodies.

"If you're Jehovah's Witnesses, I ain't buying," Mrs. Sims said into the darkness.

The man stepped into the muddy yellow light. He had a face that reminded her of Michael's, bland and stupid. But he didn't squint, and his eyes shone like two owl's eyes. "S'pose I ain't. S'pose I'm just being neighborly."

"What's you selling, then?" Mrs. Sims didn't take to small talk. She liked the high lonesome part of her neighborhood and hated any human interruption.

Instead of answering, the man set down his satchel. His satchel was splotched leather with one heavy, tarnished buckle keeping the whole thing together. Then he took off his hat. His hair rose up in high, rat-colored tufts. He slicked down the cowlicks and looked around. "A good lady like you shouldn't be sitting out in the dark. The world ain't like it used to be. It's filled with rottenness and bile, black as tar. You're a good Christian woman, ain't you?"

Mrs. Sims sucked in air between the fake teeth of her upper plate. She hadn't been in a church since her husband's funeral a decade ago. If she hadn't been a lady, she would've yelled,

"Hallelujah!" to his grave because her man was one of those quiet, suffering men that infuriated her. She came from a good, old family, and she married a man who didn't take stock to a good name and one's pedigree. It didn't make sense, and she felt that his funeral, which lauded his accomplishments as a good Christian man, didn't make sense either. What was good in a spineless worm, an ignorant, a man with no initiative? If it weren't for Mrs. Sims' own family money and history, she was sure Mr. Sims would've led her and their five children right to the poor house. "Where you from? Nobody around here speaks preacher talk except in Sunday church."

He stuck the battered hat back on his head and tugged low on the brim. "I'm from 'round New Boston, not in New Boston, but 'round there. It's east of here, in the Piney Woods."

My God, he's even pointing the directions out! thought Mrs. Sims. A true, country man, just like her granddaddy. But that was a long time ago. "Son, why're you so far from home?"

"Cause I wanted to go where the sinners are, ma'am," the man replied. At that, he picked up his satchel. "I can't do what I do if there's no sinners."

"And what do you do?"

The young man answered so softly that Mrs. Sims had to let go of her broomstick and lean a little closer to him. "What?"

The young man swung his satchel, down and up, making a nice, solid connection with Mrs. Sims' neck, which was weak and thin with age. Looking at Mrs. Sims' body on the porch, he stepped over her and turned off the porch light. "I bring sinners to God, ma'am." He continued into the house and, without any trouble at all, found the money that all old people kept, stashed in their beds or behind old pictures of dead relatives. As he left, he glanced up over the ragged tree line to the glaring ball that rose into the sky. It winked at him like the all-seeing insect-eye of God. He winked back.

- 3. Have another person read your EDITED Rough Draft** so that he or she can spot errors or problems that you may have overlooked. See if your peer reviewer can answer these questions, based on your draft:

- 1) What is the **GENRE**: realistic, sci-fi, fantasy, mystery, romance, or something else?
- 2) What is the **SETTING**: time and place?
- 3) Who are the main **CHARACTERS**: protagonist, antagonist, foil (if any)?
- 4) What is the main **CONFLICT**?
- 5) What is the **STORY**?
- 6) What is the "shape" of the story (the **PLOT**) and what is the dramatic/ emotional/ thematic **SIGNIFICANCE** of the first opening scene?
- 7) What is the narrator's **POINT OF VIEW**?

Save your file again, in the correct file format and in more than one place. It is now a polished draft. If you submit it to your instructor or editor (either by print-out or electronically), then this draft is called the **Final Draft**. The **Final Draft** is the end product of the Writing Process. You're done with your fictional work!

LET'S START

Read the two **Chapter 5: Fiction Examples** to serve as models for you. Then write one short story, 900-1800 words.

CHAPTER 5: FICTION EXAMPLES

“Boogeyman” from *Rowena’s World: Poems and Stories, 2nd Edition*

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(900 words)

#

Excerpt from "Chapter 3: Floating Redundant" in *Ye Watchers and Ye Holy Ones* novel

Zoey's supervisor, dressed in the same button-up black polo shirt, khaki pants, black sneakers, and blue work apron, tapped her on the shoulder and said, "Zoey, you have a phone call in the back."

She looked up, harried, seeing the long line of customers returning merchandise. After Christmas was always horrible, as disgruntled people flocked back to the store with gifts either defective or unwanted. “Joe, I’m kinda busy here.”

Joe exhaled deeply, debating whether to speak in front of that long line of disgruntled customers, and then replied, “Zoey, it’s Parkland. Something’s happened to your mom.”

Zoey didn’t hear the sound of her scanning gun drop as she abandoned the cash register, leaving Joe to deal with duties that didn’t matter anymore.

“Hello?” she asked, trying not to yell at the phone.

“Is this Zoey Fitzpatrick?” a tired but professional-sounding voice responded.

“Yes.”

“Okay, this is Lisa Murphy, the charge nurse on your mom’s floor. Your mom and I work together.”

“Yes?”

“Zoey, there’s been an incident.”

“What?”

“There’s – oh, honey. Come to Parkland now. Your mom’s had a stroke, and it’s bad. ICU, room 42. Hurry.”

“Okay.” Zoey heard the buzzy sound of a dial tone as Nurse Murphy hung up. “Okay,” she whispered. She looked around, suddenly unsure of where she was, but then hit her head with the palm of her hand. “Gotta get a ride.”

She ran to her little storage locker, grabbed her bag, and rushed back to the returns counter. “Joe, I gotta go.”

“I know – you’re good here, just go.”

“But – I don’t have a car. My mom drops me off here on the way to work, then picks me up when she gets off. I don’t have a car, Joe!”

Joe, a middle-aged man with kids of his own, looked at the desperate, watering blue eyes of the eighteen year old girl in front of him. He fished out a small ring of keys from a khaki front pocket. “Take my truck.”

“Oh – Joe --”

“It’s the little white Ford Ranger, parked in front of Yard and Gardens. Blue rosary beads hanging from the rearview mirror, you can’t miss it.”

She took the keys, still warm from his pocket, and hugged him tightly.

“*Vaya con Dios, mija,*” he whispered.

Zoey tore away, running as fast as she could to Joe’s truck. Not caring whether she would be caught speeding or not, she raced to Parkland, normally a familiar place of her mom’s job, but now suddenly unfamiliar and frightening.

In ICU, room 42, she saw her mother’s little body, hooked up to machines that were breathing for her. She could tell, even at age eighteen, that her mother was already brain dead from a massive stroke. Next to the sterile hospital bed, Zoey held her mother’s listless hand. *Mom... Mom...* She looked up at the machines, at the lifeless body with wires and tubing connected to those machines. She bowed down, her forehead touching that well-worn, caring hand for the last time. *Good-bye, Mom.*

Jamie’s caregivers at his hospital didn’t want to let him go to the funeral service, but she stood her ground. “It’s our mother’s funeral, goddammit,” she said over and over again to their bureaucratic protests, until they eventually gave in, discharging him for that day only, hopped up on antipsychotics. Holding his hand as if he were a little boy instead of the tall, sixteen-year-old teen he was, she silently guided him along the small pathway to the church gravesite, where a priest gave his blessing to the cremated remains of Amanda Hernandez Fitzpatrick before the small, silent audience consisting of Zoey, Jamie, her mother’s coworkers, and Joe.

Once the last bit of dirt covered the urn containing their mother’s ashes, Zoey, who did not want a reception for the sake of her brother, endured well-meaning tears and hugs and watched the others walk away.

Jamie, still staring at their mother’s new grave, asked in a quiet voice, “What happens now?”

“Now? I take care of you.” Also staring at their mother’s grave, she felt the weight of her new responsibility – being the legal guardian of her little brother, as her mother had wished in her will.

After a long silence, Jamie softly declared, “Dad should be here.”

That old anger sparked up. “Jamie --”

“He should, Zoey.”

Trying not to clench her hands, Zoey replied, “Jamie, Dad’s been gone for six years. Why the hell would he even care?” Her eyes burned. “He doesn’t deserve to be here.”

Jamie, whose hand was still in Zoey’s, gave a small squeeze. “Zoey – don’t.”

She shook her head, never understanding why Jamie still believed that their father would ever come back -- in spite of their parents’ divorce, in spite of his broken promises to keep in touch, in spite of his obvious abandonment. “I’m sorry, Jamie.” Zoey, dry-eyed throughout the funeral, suddenly found herself crying, the tears silently spilling down and dropping onto the fresh-churned earth. With the palm of her free hand, she furiously wiped her face dry. “Let’s go home.”

After much fighting with the hospital bureaucracy, Zoey was able to secure Jamie’s discharge to her care as an outpatient in treatment since his condition was stable and he gave no outbursts that entire day of the funeral.

“But a caseworker will have to check on him since he is still a minor, Miss Fitzpatrick.”

“Okay.”

“He’s completed his GED, so he’s done with formal schooling. Do you have any plans for Jamie continuing his education?”

“Why are you asking me? He’s right here. He’s not stupid, by the way.”

Jamie coughed and then asked quietly, “Can we go now?”

His counselor squinted at Zoey and Jamie, leaned back in his chair, and answered, “Yes.”

In the parking lot, Zoey murmured, “Jesus, Jamie.”

“It’s all right, Zoey,” her brother said. “Let’s just go home.”

For Jamie, it was a return to his childhood room, in the same two-story townhome apartment that they all lived when they moved to Texas when he was ten. At first, Jamie was just happy to be home. While staying at home, he would see Zoey go to work at the big box store that had been her job since graduating from high school. Luckily, she didn’t have to work as many hours as she had done before, as their practical mother had made sure her death benefits and a small insurance policy took care of their financial needs for the time being.

Yet, Zoey had forgotten that Jamie could pick up on her worry – of how intrusive the caseworker would be in their lives, how long she could pay for his continuing treatment, how long she could pay for all of those expensive pills, which Jamie would need to take for the rest of his life. While she would always say, “It’s no problem, Jamie,” she had always been a terrible liar. Even if his ability to see her color was blunted by the powerful antipsychotics that kept him moored to the world around him, even as those drugs sedated him and made him feel like a lazy slug, she could see Jamie being bothered by his inability to take care of himself or even to help her out.

“It’s not fair,” seventeen-year-old Jamie once said in one of his more lucid, active moments. “It’s not fair, you being stuck with a crazy, jobless brother.”

“Hush, Jamie,” she had replied then. “You’re my little brother. It’s my job to take care of you.”

But even Zoey could see that her reassurance only made him feel worse.

Then one day, a year after their mother’s death, Zoey came home from work, only to find her brother outside, screaming at an unknown man as a young woman, whom Zoey recognized as one of her apartment complex neighbors, cowered behind him.

The man, obviously aware that Jamie was some kind of crazy person, only held up his hands, saying, “I don’t know you, man – I want no trouble.”

“Jamie!” Zoey yelled from her car, distracting Jamie enough for the man and woman to flee into the woman’s apartment.

Once she got her brother, who obviously was off his meds, back inside their apartment, she hissed, “Jamie – you could’ve gotten beat up or – Jesus – what if they’re calling the cops on you right now?”

“They won’t,” Jamie said, angrily, pacing the kitchen floor.

“How can you be so sure?”

“Because he’s a black-oozing criminal, that’s how,” Jamie said, wringing his hands and clutching the hair on his head. “God, if that woman doesn’t leave him, she’ll either be beaten up or dead, I can see it!”

Zoey sat down, feeling the weight of her responsibilities on her head. “Jamie, why didn’t you take your meds?” she asked calmly.

“Because I got fucking tired of being a lazy fucking zombie, that’s why!”

“Jamie --”

“This isn’t working, Zoey.”

“Jamie, please --”

“There’s no place for me in this world, Zoey. I see that now.” “What are you saying?”

Jamie stared into the ceiling, looking for an answer. “Never mind.” He angrily opened the kitchen cabinet, pulled out his five pill bottles, and shook out a capsule or tablet from each. With five little pills in his hand, he stuffed them in his mouth and choked them down dry.

“Jamie --”

He only shook his head. “I’m sorry for scaring you, Zoey. That was stupid. I promise – I won’t do that again.”

Zoey reached up, and her brother walked over and kneeled down, and they hugged in silence for what seemed like a very long time.

The very next day, after work, Zoey had come home to an empty apartment, with only a note in Jamie’s manic scrawl, left on the kitchen table: *I’m sorry. Good-bye.*

First her father, then her mother, and now her brother. Her fingernails dug hard into her palms, drawing little half-moon arcs

of blood, as she tried not to scream or cry so as not to bother the neighbors.

A year after that note, her neighbor's face and the face of her boyfriend showed up on the ten o'clock evening news, a local story of love gone bad, ending in the woman's murder and the man's suicide.

Zoey could only turn away from the TV in the break room, forcing herself not to scream or cry, because she was still at work.

"Are you okay?" asked Rania, her new supervisor, when Zoey walked out of the break room to return to her duties. Joe was long gone, promoted to a different store with better hours and more money.

"I'm fine," Zoey lied. "Just tired."

(1778 Words)

#

Excerpt from "Chapter 5: The Bride" in *The Miraculous Ones*
novel

"FOUND YOU!"

"Ahhhhh!" The little girl darted away from the large vase sitting in a building's courtyard, her two, long ponytails swishing behind her, barely escaping.

They ran through the center of their village during the third evening of the Autumn Festival. They weaved around plain clay-brick buildings adorned with bright, fluttery streamers made from cut cloth and paper. They ran under forged golden bells of delicate size and weight, which the villagers had strung across the streets and even above doorways. Paper lanterns illuminated their way with clear, yellow lights, as they heard musicians, well-rehearsed in traditional instruments, entertain the crowds that were enjoying the expansive public feasts of drink, meat, fruit, and bread.

The two ignored all of that as they continued their chase: the girl who was discovered from her hiding spot, the boy who was pursuing her.

“Dammit,” the boy said, trying not to wheeze, “this isn’t a game!”

She didn’t reply, her little legs a blur as she ducked and weaved around the surprised festival goers, trying to gain enough distance to find another hiding spot.

“Dammit, Cor – sorry! Excuse me!” he said, as he bumped against people, causing more than one person to spill their food and drink, who all looked at the two retreating figures in surprised recognition.

At one point, the girl looked behind her, to see how far away her pursuer was.

“Cora! WATCH OUT!”

Too late, she looked forward, only to run headfirst into the robed legs of a standing figure, who swayed more than a little. She bounced backwards, hard onto the ground, and looked up, stunned.

The fanfare of traditional drum, pipes, and voice abruptly stopped on the raised stage. The standing figure glared downward at Cora. It was the emissary from the farthest village-state of the region, taller than any person, male or female, that Cora had ever seen. His luminous skin was so pale that it seemed only two shades darker than the white, iridescent robes that he wore. Standing next to the emissary was a large man whose eyes were dark with anger. He looked past Cora, seeing the boy quickly catch up with the girl, pull her up onto her feet at a discrete distance from the two men, and bow low.

“My apologies, Lord Agem,” the boy said to the emissary. He continued to bow. “My apologies, Father.” He straightened up, standing at attention before his elders.

“Are you all right, sir?” the emissary’s bodyguard asked, caught off guard by the sudden intrusion of a little girl.

The emissary waved his hand dismissively as he recovered his decorum. He regarded the boy and then girl. He asked, “Are not these your children, Lord Machus?”

“Yes.” The man with the angry eyes gave a curt nod of his head. “My son Prospero and daughter Sycorax – who know not to run through the streets.”

Shamefaced, Cora stuttered, “F-Father --”

“Prospero, bring your sister back to the manor house,” Lord Machus interrupted.

“Yes, sir.” The boy grabbed his sister’s hand and pulled her aside, letting the emissary, his father, and their entourage continue with the tour of the festival. As they passed by, he heard the emissary murmur, “So young.”

The musicians resumed their performance before the crowd, who again moved about and murmured amongst themselves, as if released from a spell. The villagers warily gave a wide berth to Lord Machus’ children, whom they rarely saw outside of formal ceremonies, on the secured grounds of the manor house. Once everyone behind them was at a far enough distance, the boy hissed, “I TOLD YOU it wasn’t a game. Sneaking out of the house like that. What if you insulted Lord Agem enough that Father loses this alliance?” He angrily walked forward, pulling his sister behind him. “And, of course, you get me in trouble, too.”

“I’m sorry!” Cora said.

“You’re not a baby anymore, Cora. Use your brain for once.”

Cora, who was only six years old, looked despairingly at her sixteen-year-old brother. “I know that I’m stupid, Peri.” She started to cry.

“Oh, Gods, Cora,” he sighed. He looked up and around, noticing how dark the sky had gotten and how far away from the festival they had walked. “You’re not stupid. You just need to think before you do things.” He glanced at his sister, whose face was now a mess with tears and snot. He stopped, crouched down, and wiped her face with a napkin from his coat pocket. “I’m sorry I made you cry.”

“I just – I just wanted to see,” Cora said. “We never get to go.”

“I know.” Peri continued wiping his sister’s face clean, on that road between the active, working-class life of the village center and the walled, high-born solitude of the manor house. “But

Father's hosting the emissary at the house – we'll have festivities there.”

“It's not the same,” she said, “because --”

“Because there are no kids there your age. And you're lonely.”

Cora hiccupped, trying not to cry again.

Hearing running from the direction of the manor house, he saw two of the house guards, one of them saying, “Master Prospero! Is Mistress Sycorax all right?”

“Where was she?” the other asked. “Is she hurt?”

“She's fine,” Peri answered. “She just wanted to see the festival.”

“All by herself? But that isn't safe!”

Cora looked down, shamefaced again.

Peri regarded his sister. “Return back to the manor house. We'll be there shortly.”

“But Master Prospero --”

He waved them away, impatient. “We're almost there, and I don't think an assassin will attack us right now, what with you two being so loud.” He saw both house guards reluctantly assent and march back to the manor house. “It's probably really late for you. Do you want me to carry you home?”

In reply, Cora put her arms up. Still crouching, Peri turned around, and Cora climbed on his back, holding onto her brother as he stood up, his arms supporting her little brown legs.

As Cora was lulled by the swaying motion of being carried, she suddenly realized that her brother was more and more like their father every day, less child and more grown-up – the future heir. She felt the determined walking of Peri. All that time, when he was looking for her at the festival, he never slowed down, never stopped to enjoy the festivities around them. Even now, he was bringing her straight home, focused with obeying their father's command.

“Peri, stop,” she said.

“What?”

She wriggled free and dropped down. “I'll walk.”

“Cora?” He looked at her, puzzled.

She looked up at her brother. “I'm not a baby anymore.” She

started walking away, mimicking the determined pace of her brother. Then she slowed, stopped, and looked back, where her brother was still standing. “But... can we hold hands, Peri?”

He walked over to his sister. Without a word, he gently grasped her hand, and they continued their way to the manor house.

Cora looked up at her brother as they walked, and she noticed that he was frowning. She was used to their father being abrupt and dismissive of her, a distant, cold man, busy with his work. But if a grown-up Peri ever became so similar to their father that he became emotionally distant to her as well, Cora didn't know if she would ever be able to bear that pain. “Peri?” she asked.

“Yes?”

“Are you mad at me?”

“What?” He looked at her as they continued walking. “Why are you asking that?”

“You're frowning. You look mad.”

“Ah.” He opened his mouth, about to say something, but he stopped, reconsidered, and then grinned. “I'm just tired, too, Cora. You tired me out with chasing you all over the place today.”

She looked at him, unconvinced. “You're lying.”

“Cora --”

“Stop lying!” She yanked her hand away and stopped walking. “No one tells me anything! How can I stop being a baby if nobody tells me anything?”

Peri stared at his sister, still so young but getting older every day. “I'm sorry, Cora,” he said. “And you're right. I'm angry, but not at you.”

“Then who?” Cora asked.

He sighed, looking around. They were essentially alone, with the celebratory sound of the festival far behind them, the outer wall of the manor house compound just before them. The night watchman would be the only one there to greet them when they would finally arrive at the front gate. In a low voice, he answered, “Father.”

“Why?”

He shook his head. "I can't tell you now."
"Why?"
"I just can't. Not now."
"When then?"
"Later."
"When later? Like tomorrow later?"
"Like, when you're a little older later."
She frowned at that. "You promise you'll tell me later?"
He smiled at the innocence of Cora's question. "I promise."
Hand-in-hand, they started walking again.
"Well, Cora," her brother said, "you saw the Autumn Festival.
What do you think?"
"It was fun," she replied, "until we ran into Father."
"Hmmm."
"And the emissary – he was kind of scary, too, right?"
Cora felt Peri's hand tighten a little, but not painfully so.
"Yes," he said, in a small voice. "Yes, he is."

(1533 words)

CHAPTER 6: DRAMA, WITH EXAMPLE

DEFINITION

DRAMA is a unique literary form because – unlike creative nonfiction, fiction, and even poetry – it is also a **performance art**. In other words, it is meant to be seen and heard, not read, by a captive audience in one sitting.

The content in dramatic works (called **PLAYS**) can be **factual (based on a true story) or fictional**. The actors' dialogue (called **LINES**) can be presented in **prose** form or in **verse**. In fact, as seen in musicals, the actors can sing their lines. A play can even do all three (prose, verse, and song), depending on the story, the plot, the performance space, the producer's production budget, and the strengths of the playwright, actors, and director.

However, a written play (also called a **SCRIPT**) is essentially a tool for the production company, so the built-in stage directions make the look of a script of drama very different from the final draft of a work of creative non-fiction, fiction, or poetry.

TIME-OUT: Scripts for Screens, Comics, and Audio

Most of us become familiar with performed drama through television and movies; increasingly, we also see drama performed through online channels like *YouTube* and interactive (yet scripted) video gameplay. The script for these various screens is the **SCREENPLAY**, written by a **SCREENWRITER**. Similarly, comic book writers and radio /podcast writers create their own industry-standard scripts.

However, for this short Drama chapter, we will only work on the script for the stage – to become familiar with the basics of this literary form. But check out the “Final Note and Recommended Resources” chapter for more information about writing for screens, comics, and audio-only media.

So, let’s write a play for the stage.

THE WRITING PROCESS

STAGE I: INVENTION & PREWRITING

As mentioned above, the content of a play can be factual or fictional. So the invention and prewriting of a play are similar to the invention and prewriting of creative non-fiction (primarily using Narration mode), fiction, and poetry (also primarily using Narration mode).

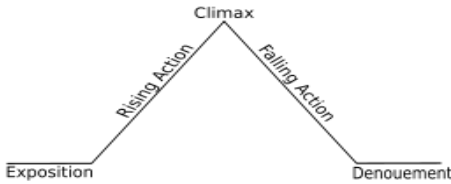
However, what limits your ideas from being too complicated and busy is this question: “How can this be put on the stage?” Remember: your eventual script is just the starting point, in a production company’s process to get the play on the stage. So any narrative exposition and description, any thoughts and unspoken feelings of the characters, must be **SEEN** (in body language, movement, lighting, and visual effects) and/or **HEARD** (in spoken dialogue, song, and sound effects).

So the elements of fiction discussed earlier – **genre, setting, characters, conflict, story, and plot** – while applicable in developing the play, must be **condensed and simplified** to meet the logistics of having an actual performance. (The element “point of view” is irrelevant because the characters all speak for themselves.) After all, the condensed and simplified nature of the play form is why a play (or even a movie) adaptation of a book always leaves out large chunks of the book.

If you’re stuck on ideas, read scripts of short plays, found free online or local libraries. Better yet, watch a performance, either online on *YouTube* or live at a local city theater or college campus, to get unstuck – and inspired.

STAGE II: ARRANGEMENT

Like fiction, the organization of a play is the **plot-line structure**, a sequence of events of rising conflict and then a resolution, in a cause-and-effect fashion, with increasing complication of the protagonist's struggle against his or her antagonist. (In fact, it's from the dramatic tradition that fiction has borrowed the plotline structure; drama, as a literary and performance art, is much older than the fiction form of written short stories and novels.) To recap:



Part I: The Beginning (aka Exposition): This is the “Normal” life. -- establishes setting, major characters, and the **significance** of the current situation.

Part II: Rising Action: the situation starts getting more complicated, in a series of scenes of conflict

Part III: Climactic Moment: the secret is revealed, the choice is made, the "Aha!" moment occurs, depending on what the protagonist already knew from Parts I and II

Part IV: Falling Action: the consequences of the Climactic Moment,

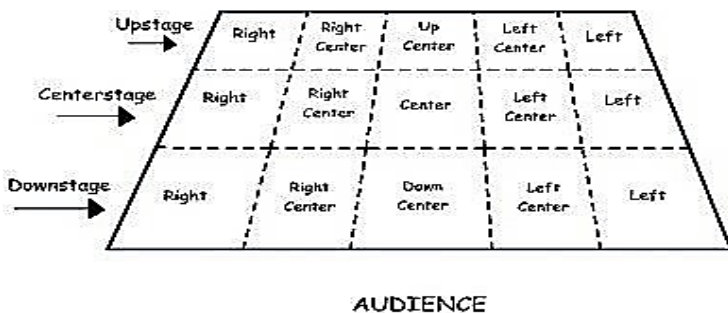
Part V: and The End (aka Denouement): some sort of resolution. This is the “new Normal.”

STAGE III: DRAFTING

For many beginner playwrights, drafting a play in correct script form can feel daunting because it is unfamiliar. Besides following industry standard guidelines of 1) cover page and 2) another page containing the cast of characters, the setting (in this case, the location), and the time, the playwright draft must also 3) interweave character lines with stage directions (where

the characters are and what they are doing on the stage) in a clear manner.

For those unfamiliar with the specific names for the areas of a stage, here's a diagram:



Notice that the stage areas aren't from the standpoint of the audience but from the **standpoint of the actors**, facing the audience.

By the end of drafting, your script will have much white space surrounding the words. This makes the script easier to read for the actors, who are learning their lines and stage directions, and the production team members, who are coordinating everything on the stage and behind the scenes. You should consider one page of script = one minute of performance. So a two-hour play would be 120 pages long, while a flash drama (the drama equivalent of fiction's short-short story) can be as brief as five minutes, with five pages of script.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Don't go overboard with TOO MUCH stage directions. After all, Shakespeare didn't, which allowed directors for over five hundred years the freedom to adapt his plays according to the directors' artistic vision and what production resources were available to them.

RUFEL F. RAMOS

Play Manuscript Example

BRIGHT STAR, SIREN

a poetic flash drama in one act, one scene

by Rufel F. Ramos

Copyright © 2014 by Rufel F. Ramos
Street Address
City, State ZIP CODE
Phone Number / Email Address

STARTERS, 2ND EDITION

BRIGHT STAR, SIREN

1

CHARACTERS

JOSEPH SEVERN: Male, 27 years old.

JOHN KEATS: Male, 25 years old.

FANNY BRAWNE: Female, 20 years old.

SETTING

Exterior: Top deck on the English sailing ship, the *Maria Crowther*, port of Naples, Italy.

TIME

31 October 1820, just after sunset.

BRIGHT STAR, SIREN

2

(Dark. Then spotlight on SEVERN, down center.)

SEVERN

Medical student turned poet John Keats was born October 31, 1795, in London, England, and died at age 25 of tuberculosis on February 23, 1821, in Rome, Italy, where he is buried. In a letter dated November 1, 1820, while still on ship at the port of Naples, Keats writes of being let out of quarantine for the first time on his birthday, October 31. But what is noteworthy in this letter is his declaration that his imagination of his fiancée, Fanny Brawne, torments him.

KEATS

(in the dark, center)

My imagination is horribly vivid about her – I see her – I hear her.

SEVERN

There is no record of what Keats' last birthday, ill and isolated --except for his friend, Joseph Severn –

(SEVERN touches his heart.)

on a strange ship on a strange sea, was like.

(Spotlight goes dark. SEVERN exits. Spotlight center stage on KEATS, sitting huddled in blankets on a deck chair on ship. Light expands to show more of the deck. A cabin with a door is behind him. He stares out to the audience.)

KEATS

Bright star, siren of my mind, no less my
Body, I see you shining through the veil,
This waking life, this death of earth and sky.
I call life death, for alive, death I hail,
Before he steals upon me in surprise.

Yet, steeled as I am, my thoughts still surmise,
While huddled in dark blankets, sweating heat,

BRIGHT STAR, SIREN

3

KEATS (cont.)

And sought within the wine-dark seas demise
Of all my sins, this sweat and blood, this seat
Diseased and broken, harvested too soon,

I swear I must be mad, but not in swoon.
To glance upon the waters' swollen wave,

(KEATS rises, stumbles forward to the ship's rail, and
grabs it, leaning forward.)

And see your image walk, a lifelong boon,
In radiance, all fair and cruelly grave,
I tear my hair out, strand by strand, and cry,

"This is too much, this is too much!" My cries

(KEATS has a coughing fit, coughing in a cloth
handkerchief. When it subsides, he sees the blood on
the cloth.)

Are rattles, specked with blood, a fine mist spray,
Imagination made incarnadine.

(KEATS drops the cloth from the side of the ship,
watching it float away to a dark stage right.)

You speak, with naked arms stretched towards my face,

BRAWNE

(in the dark, downstage right-center)

My dear, the marriage date is set, my gown –

I know it breaks tradition – bought in town
In nearby Rome. See, I await you there.
My voice will be my song for you, sweet sound
Echoed before the Spanish Steps. Beware
Of other-worldly hopes, for there is no

BRIGHT STAR, SIREN

4

BRAWNE (cont.)

One but you and I.

KEATS

(still staring to the dark spot, downstage right-center)

But, sweet siren, O!
Bright star of my body, no less my mind,
Feverish dreams are only sighs.

(KEATS returns to his chair and blankets.)

I know
My dearest girl remains in England,

(Spotlight downstage right-center on BRAWNE sitting at a writing desk in England. She writes furiously and then pauses. She looks up and then looks center stage, at KEATS. KEATS' and BRAWNE's eyes meet.)

kind
And fair and young, my true star incarnate.

She'll wear a dress of blue. Smiling, she'll sit
Before yon desk and wrest the rough embrace
Into a winging word, released.

(Cabin door opens. KEATS breaks eye contact with BRAWNE as SEVERN enters onto the deck with an oil lamp and letters. BRAWNE returns to her writing. SEVERN sets down the lamp next to KEATS, gives KEATS the letters. SEVERN and KEATS exchange inaudible words. SEVERN exits through the cabin door, closing the door behind him.)

Here, lamp lit
Reverses dark sunset on a birthday
Ill-conceived. Dear Severn hands me letters

BRIGHT STAR, SIREN

5

KEATS (cont.)

One of which is hers. Ah, perhaps better –
I look upon the seas,

(KEATS looks to BRAWNE as the spotlight on
BRAWNE goes dark. BRAWNE exits.)

and you are gone.
Happy, shining gift! I look upon her
Word,

(KEATS glances down at a letter.)

and you are there. Passion, soul, all run,
Bright star!

(KEATS struggles to stand up but does. He stares at
the spot where BRAWNE was and then looks into the
audience.)

But body only stands and waits.

CURTAIN

STAGE IV: REVISING & EDITING

As usual, edit for errors in grammar, punctuation, and confused words. Also edit for errors in script format.

Then do a “read-through” – that is, read out loud – your script, preferably with others if you have more than one character. Like poetry, listen for the rhythm of the words and pauses between the words; in addition, do “blocking” – that is, mime what the character does on the stage. **Revise for any awkwardness in dialogue and difficulty in blocking.**

Also, revise for any long, uninterrupted speech. Remember: this is a performance that an audience is watching. Nothing is as

boring as watching a person stay in one place, not interact with anything or anyone, and just talk talk talk. If the actor must give a long speech (think of Hamlet’s soliloquys like “To be or not to be”), then **break up the words with dramatic pauses and body movements.**

Ask your peer reviewer to help spot any of the above problems in your script, and especially ask him or her this: “Would you spend time and/or money to see this performed? Why or why not?”

LET’S START

1. Review my metrical rhymed poem “Bright Star, Siren” that you read in “Chapter 3: Poetry.”
2. Read “Bright Star, Siren: A Poetic Flash Drama in One Act, One Scene” (759 words, including lines and stage directions) on the following few pages as a model for you, especially the script format.
3. Note that I adapted the poem into a play. Similarly, instead of starting a play from nothing, adapt an existing work from your “Let’s Start” portfolio (a creative non-fiction essay with a heavy Narration mode component, a story poem, or a short story) into a short (ten minutes or less) one-act play.

You don’t have to adapt EVERYTHING from your original work: just the areas that can best be “dramatized” into a coherent, unified script with a beginning, middle, and end.

BRIGHT STAR, SIREN
a poetic flash drama in one act, one scene

CHARACTERS

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(SEVERN touches his heart.)

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(Spotlight goes dark. SEVERN exits. Spotlight center stage on KEATS, sitting huddled in blankets on a deck chair on ship. Light expands to show more of the deck. A cabin with a door is behind him. He stares out to the audience.)

KEATS

Bright star, siren of my mind, no less my
Body, I see you shining through the veil,
This waking life, this death of earth and sky.
I call life death, for alive, death I hail,
Before he steals upon me in surprise.

Yet, steeled as I am, my thoughts still surmise,
While huddled in dark blankets, sweating heat,
And sought within the wine-dark seas demise
Of all my sins, this sweat and blood, this seat
Diseased and broken, harvested too soon,

I swear I must be mad, but not in swoon.
To glance upon the waters' swollen wave,

(KEATS rises, stumbles forward
to the ship's rail, and grabs it,
leaning forward.)

And see your image walk, a lifelong boon,
In radiance, all fair and cruelly grave,
I tear my hair out, strand by strand, and cry,

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(KEATS has a coughing fit,
coughing in a cloth handkerchief.
When it subsides, he sees the
blood on the cloth.)

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made incarnadine.

(KEATS drops the cloth from
the side of the ship, watching it
float away* to a dark stage right.)

You speak, with naked arms stretched towards my face,

BRAWNE

(in the dark, downstage right-
center)

My dear, the marriage date is set, my gown –

I know it breaks tradition – bought in town
In nearby Rome. See, I await you there.
My voice will be my song for you, sweet sound
Echoed before the Spanish Steps. Beware
Of other-worldly hopes, for there is no
One but you and I.

KEATS

(still staring to the dark spot,
downstage right-center)

But, sweet siren, O!
Bright star of my body, no less my mind,
Feverish dreams are only sighs.

(KEATS returns to his chair
and blankets.)

I know
My dearest girl remains in England,

(Spotlight downstage right-
center on BRAWNE sitting at a
writing desk in England. She
writes furiously and then
pauses. She looks up and then
looks center stage, at KEATS.
KEATS' and BRAWNE's eyes
meet.)

kind
And fair and young, my true star incarnate.

She'll wear a dress of blue. Smiling, she'll sit
Before yon desk and wrest the rough embrace
Into a winging word, released.

(Cabin door opens. KEATS
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and letters. BRAWNE returns to
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KEATS the letters. SEVERN
and KEATS exchange inaudible
words. SEVERN exits through

the cabin door, closing the door
behind him.)

Here, lamp lit
Reverses dark sunset on a birthday
Ill-conceived. Dear Severn hands me letters
One of which is hers. Ah, perhaps better –
I look upon the seas,

(KEATS looks to BRAWNE as
the spotlight on BRAWNE goes
dark. BRAWNE exits.)

and you are gone.
Happy, shining gift! I look upon her
Word,

(KEATS glances down at a
letter.)

and you are there. Passion, soul, all run,
Bright star!

(KEATS struggles to stand up
but does. He stares at the spot
where BRAWNE was and then
looks into the audience.)

But body only stands and waits.

CURTAIN

FINAL NOTE & RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Well, here we are: the end of this book. With your “taste-test” of the basic creative writing buffet done and your “Let’s Start” portfolio completed, you have begun your journey to writing well. I hope this little guidebook has made the process of creative writing a little less mysterious and more do-able, and my parting gift to you are these recommended resources. May you continue your journey: take risks, keep writing, and fare thee well.

Creative Non-Fiction

Creative Nonfiction: True Stories, Told Well. Creative Nonfiction, www.creativenonfiction.org.
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Screenwriting.info, Active Interest Media,

<http://www.screenwriting.info/>

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The Purdue Online Writing Lab. Purdue U Writing Lab,

owl.purdue.edu.

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RUFEL F. RAMOS is an English professor at Dallas College (a multi-campus community college in Dallas County, Texas) and a published writer.

Her previous works include the novels *Ye Watchers and Ye Holy Ones: Retcon Edition*, *The Miraculous Ones*, and *The Last Beatrice* (Books 1, 2 & 3 of *The Celestial Engineers* series); *Structures: The Reluctant Writer's Guide to College Essays*; and *Scaffolds: A Childhood Memoir of Books*.

She is also a survivor of a rigorous liberal arts education, a single mother, an aunt, a big sister, the oldest child, an adopted kid, an Asian-American, a US Navy brat, a bemused Catholic, a sci-fi/fantasy geek, a mediocre Maker of stuff, and a once-and-future globe trotter.

She writes on any and all of those roles in her blog, *I Am the Lizard Queen!* (thelizardqueen.wordpress.com) and her author site, *Rowena's World* (rowenasworld.org).