



# Narrative Writing Foundations & Character Development

Welcome! Unlock the secrets of compelling storytelling. Today, you'll master narrative structure, characterisation, and techniques to craft authentic stories.

# The Core of Narrative Structure

Learn the four vital elements of narrative:

## Orientation

Setting the scene, introducing characters and establishing setting

## Complication

Introducing problems and obstacles for characters to overcome

## Climax

The turning point with highest tension and decisive moment

## Resolution

Tying it all together, showing character change and outcomes

 Exemplars:

### "The Hobbit" by J.R.R. Tolkien

**Orientation:** Bilbo's comfortable life in peaceful The Shire

**Complication:** Journey with dwarves, encounters with trolls, goblins, and Smaug the dragon

**Climax:** The Battle of Five Armies and defeat of Smaug

**Resolution:** Bilbo returns home changed, with new perspective and treasure

### "Harry Potter" by J.K. Rowling

**Orientation:** Harry's life at Privet Drive with the Dursleys

**Complication:** Magical challenges and threats throughout the school year

**Climax:** Confrontation with Voldemort or his followers

**Resolution:** Returning to normal life at end of school year, wiser from experiences

# Common Plot Structures & Their Power

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Explore classic structures:

## Linear

Chronological progression from beginning to end

## Non-linear

Flashbacks, time shifts, multiple timelines

## Circular

Ending mirrors or returns to the beginning

Exemplars:

### "The Lion King"

**Structure:** Linear

Follows Simba's journey chronologically from cub to king

### "The Book Thief"

**Structure:** Non-linear

Narrated by Death, jumps through time and perspectives

### "Of Mice and Men"

**Structure:** Circular

Begins and ends in the same location by the river



## Fun Fact

J.K. Rowling plotted all seven Harry Potter books before writing the first chapter. Planning matters!

# Orientation: Anchoring Your Reader

The opening must hook your reader and define time, place, and main characters. Effective orientation:

**Vivid description** that immediately establishes setting and atmosphere

**Immediate conflict or voice** to create intrigue or connection

**Subtle hints of theme** through allegory, foreshadowing

## Practice Point:

Draft two different orientations for a fantasy and a mystery story. Focus on establishing distinct tone and atmosphere for each genre.

## Vivid Description Examples:

### "1984" by George Orwell

*"It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen."*

Immediately signals dystopian setting through the unusual time and creates intrigue

### "The Hobbit" by J.R.R. Tolkien

*"In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit. Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole... it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort."*

Establishes setting while revealing character values through direct voice

### "Rebecca" by Daphne du Maurier

*"Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again..."*

Foreshadows importance of place while creating haunting, nostalgic atmosphere



A man with a serious, intense expression, wearing a brown trench coat over a light-colored shirt and a dark tie. He is looking directly at the camera. The background is dark and moody, with some light reflecting off his face and coat.

# Shaping Beginnings

*(Orientation in Narratives)*

Orientations draw readers into the story world. Notice how visual contrast attracts attention  
—like a bold character in a mysterious crowd.

# Complication & Climax: Raising Stakes

## Complication

Introduce conflict or obstacles that challenge the main character.

- Creates tension and raises stakes
- Tests character's strengths and weaknesses
- Drives character growth and development

## Climax

The decisive, most intense moment of the story.

- Highest point of emotional intensity
- Moment when protagonist faces greatest challenge
- Often reveals character's true nature

Exemplars:

### "Charlotte's Web" by E.B. White

**Complication:** Fern must save Wilbur from being slaughtered as he's a runt.

**Further complications:** Even after being saved once, Wilbur learns he's destined for Christmas dinner.

**Climax:** Wilbur's competition at the county fair where Charlotte's web messages must convince the judges to spare him.

### "The Hunger Games" by Suzanne Collins

**Complication:** Games begin and Katniss must survive against other tributes.

**Escalating stakes:** Rule changes, alliances formed and broken, injuries sustained.

**Climax:** Katniss defies the Capitol with the nightlock berries, threatening a double suicide rather than killing Peeta.

# Resolution & Meaningful Endings

## Strong resolutions:

### Reflect change or growth

Show how characters have evolved through their journey

### Answer central questions

Provide satisfying conclusions to main story questions

### Tie up subplots

Resolve secondary storylines (but some ambiguity can be powerful)

## Exemplars:

### "Matilda"

Grows into herself, finds a new family.

Matilda's resolution shows complete transformation—from unwanted child to finding belonging with Miss Honey, demonstrating emotional growth and found family.

### "The Giver"

Ambiguous hope at the end.

The deliberately ambiguous ending—Jonas and Gabriel possibly finding Elsewhere—leaves readers to contemplate what truly happened, creating lasting impact through uncertainty.



### Joke

My story's resolution? I finally finished my homework... until tomorrow's assignment appeared!

# Foreshadowing & Allegory: Layering Your Narrative

**Foreshadowing:** Plant clues early for later events.

**Allegory:** A story with a hidden, broader message.

## Practice:

Underline any hints/clues in your favourite story's first five pages.

*Notice how early details often connect to major plot points later.*

## Examples:

### "Animal Farm" as a political allegory

Animals represent different social classes and historical figures

The farm rebellion mirrors the Russian Revolution

Napoleon (the pig) represents Stalin

The entire narrative functions as commentary on totalitarianism

### In "The Great Gatsby", foreshadowing examples:

The green light foreshadows Gatsby's ambitions and eventual failure

The valley of ashes predicts the characters' moral decay

The eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg foreshadow the revelation of truth

Weather patterns signal emotional shifts before they occur





# Hidden Depths

*(Literary Devices in Action)*

Like visuals, narrative devices add layers and insight—inviting readers to look deeper.

# Creating Believable Characters: Traits & Motivation

Memorable characters are:

## Distinct

Clear personality traits that set them apart:

- Unique habits or mannerisms
- Specific strengths and weaknesses
- Consistent speech patterns

## Motivated

Desires drive choices and actions:

- Clear goals or objectives
- Internal conflicts that create tension
- Backstory that explains their motivations

## Developed

Grow or change over time:

- Learn from experiences and mistakes
- Face challenges that test their character
- End in a different place than they began

Exemplars:

### Hermione Granger (Harry Potter series)

**Distinct traits:** Intelligent, loyal, sometimes bossy, values rules and knowledge

**Motivation:** Prove herself in the wizarding world despite being Muggle-born

**Development:** Learns that some rules can be broken for greater good, forms deeper friendships, gains confidence in her own identity

### Auggie Pullman (Wonder by R.J. Palacio)

**Distinct traits:** Kind, self-aware, resilient, witty despite circumstances

**Motivation:** Desire for normalcy and acceptance despite facial differences

**Development:** Grows from fearing public attention to finding confidence and helping others see beyond appearances

# Methods of Characterisation

Show character traits through:

## Dialogue

What they say and how they say it

## Action

What they do, especially under pressure

## Thoughts

Internal monologue and reflections

## Reactions of others

How other characters respond to them

Examples:

### Sherlock Holmes

Sharp observations revealed via dialogue and action.

His intelligence is shown through his deductions (dialogue), while his fastidious nature is demonstrated by his actions and habits.

### Katniss Everdeen

Protective nature shown in her sacrifices, not just internal monologue.

Volunteering for her sister reveals more about her character than pages of internal thoughts could.

## Fun Fact



Roald Dahl used real-life teacher traits to create Miss Trunchbull and Miss Honey. His childhood school experiences directly inspired these opposing characters in "Matilda".

# Unreliable Narrators: Playing with Perspective

Some stories use narrators who aren't always truthful or accurate, making the reader question reality.

## Why use unreliable narrators?

- Creates mystery and suspense
- Challenges readers to think critically
- Reveals character psychology
- Adds complexity to seemingly simple stories

## Signs of unreliability:

- Contradictions in narrative
- Gaps in memory or information
- Other characters contradicting the narrator
- Emotional instability or bias

## Examples:

### "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time"

Christopher has autism and perceives the world differently. His literal interpretations and misunderstandings create a unique unreliable perspective.

*"I see everything. That is why I don't like new places."*

### "Holes" by Louis Sachar

Uses multiple perspectives across different time periods. Each narrator has limited information, creating a puzzle for readers to solve.

## Practice:

Write a short event from both a reliable and unreliable narrator's view.

### Event suggestion:

A student finds a valuable item in the school corridor.

Reliable: Honest account of finding and returning it

Unreliable: Exaggerated, self-serving, or confused version





# Transformative Characters

Vivid characters leap off the page and into readers' minds.



# Literary Devices: Alliteration, Onomatopoeia, Personification

Add style and mood to your writing:

## Alliteration

Repetition of the same sound at the beginning of nearby words.

*'whispering winds', 'Peter Piper picked a peck', 'slithering, slimy snake'*

## Onomatopoeia

Words that imitate the sound they represent.

*'crash', 'sizzle', 'hiss', 'buzz', 'splash'*

## Personification

Giving human qualities to non-human things.

*'The angry storm battered the city.', 'The wind whispered secrets.'*

## Literary Examples:

**Alliteration:** "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past." — *The Great Gatsby*

**Onomatopoeia:** "The silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain..." — Poe's *The Raven*

**Personification:** "The sun smiled down on the children playing in the park."  
— Common in descriptive writing

## Impact on Writing:

### Alliteration

Creates rhythm and emphasis

### Onomatopoeia

Brings sounds to life

### Personification

Creates emotional connection

## Practice:

Craft one sentence using each device to describe a setting:

1. Describe a forest using **alliteration**
2. Describe a rainstorm using **onomatopoeia**
3. Describe a mountain using **personification**

*Remember: These devices should enhance your writing naturally, not distract from your narrative.*

# Exam Strategies: Time, Endurance, and Focus

## Top challenges:

### Managing time limits

Allocate planning time (5-10%)

Drafting time (80-85%)

Checking time (5-10%)

### Maintaining focus

Take mini mental breaks

Deep breathing between sections

Change posture or stretch briefly

### Stress management

Positive self-talk ("I can do this")

Visualisation techniques

Focus on one question at a time

## Quick Writing Endurance Tips:



Hand exercises: Flex fingers between paragraphs to avoid cramping



Stay hydrated: Bring water if permitted



### Joke

The only thing longer than my story? The exam itself! Don't run out of steam before the end.

# Putting It All Together: Crafting Engaging Voice

## Tips for writing with voice:

### Use varied sentence lengths

Short sentences add punch. They create impact. But longer, more elaborate sentences with carefully chosen words and thoughtful phrasing can draw readers into a more complex emotional or intellectual experience.

### Balance description, dialogue & action

Mix these elements to maintain pacing and reader interest. Too much description slows pace; too much dialogue can feel disconnected without context.

### Let the character's perspective shine

Filter descriptions and observations through your character's unique lens, vocabulary, and biases.

## Voice Examples:

### Same scene, different voices:

#### Nervous teenager:

*"Oh my god, is that—? No way. She's actually coming over here. Act natural! What do I do with my hands? They're suddenly so... hand-like. Why is my mouth so dry?"*

#### Detective:

*"Subject approaching from the east entrance. Female, approximately 30, carrying a black leather briefcase. Posture indicates confidence, but the slight tremor in her left hand suggests anxiety. Interesting."*

#### Fantasy wizard:

*"Ah, the Envoy approaches. One can sense the ancient magic that flows through her veins—subtle, yet unmistakable to those with the wisdom to perceive such things. Perhaps she brings word from the Council at last."*

### Practice:

Rewrite this bland passage to sound like a specific character (nervous, witty, or wise):

*"The weather was bad. She walked to the store. She bought some food and went home."*

Focus on word choice, sentence structure, and perspective to transform this basic passage into one with distinctive voice.

# Model Exemplar: Narrative Extract & Analysis

"As the first rays pierced the fog, Mira tugged her tattered satchel closer. Her heart pounded—today, the lottery would change everything. Foreshadowed unease haunted the village square; even the old bell, silent for years, seemed to tremble.

'Ready, Mira?' Tom's voice cracked like thunder. She forced a brave smile, betraying nothing—except the way her hands twisted nervously.

The villagers gathered, their footsteps whispering secrets across cobblestones. Autumn leaves danced freely around their ankles—unlike the people bound by tradition. The crowd murmured agreement to the Mayor's speech, sheep following without question.

The ancient box sat center stage, black as midnight and seemingly alive—hungry to consume another life. Shadows crossed faces as clouds obscured the sun.

When Tom drew his blank paper, relief flooded his face. One by one, neighbors revealed their fate. Finally, Mira's turn arrived. Her trembling fingers extracted the slip. The crowd exhaled collectively at the small black dot. The stones felt surprisingly cold in her palm.

Foreshadowing

Personification

Onomatopoeia

Allegory

Character Trait

Unreliable Narration

## Analysis

- ✓ **Orientation:** Establishes setting (foggy village), character (nervous Mira), and stakes (lottery)

✓ **Foreshadowing:** Trembling bell, shadows, cold stones hint at the dark outcome

✓ **Characterisation:** Physical actions (trembling hands, forced smile) show internal conflict
- ✓ **Personification:** Human qualities for objects (whispering footsteps, hungry box)

✓ **Allegory:** Free autumn leaves vs trapped villagers represent tradition vs freedom

✓ **Voice:** Varied sentence structure and mood help build atmosphere and tension