

Day 1

What is
Creative
Writing?



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Fiction

- Something invented by the imagination
- Something made up – not factual
- Speaking the truth through lying



Creative Nonfiction: A Working Definition

- Nonfiction that is rendered using fictional techniques: dialogue, and narrative, imagery, and other elements that are leveraged to evoke a certain emotional response.
- Much creative writing reads like fiction.



Writing that is Surprising Yet Convincing



A characteristic of good writing is that it is *surprising yet convincing*, *Aspects of the Novel*, E.M. Forster



Surprising – something happens that surprises us in some way, impresses us with its unexpectedness or freshness.



Convincing – the surprise has to be convincing. We get a jolt, and then a sense of the rightness of it all.

Good writing can't be paraphrased

What I mean by that is a good novel cannot be summarized. There is more to it than "it's a love story" or "it's a mystery."

It's complicated.

Creative
Nonfiction:
Capturing what
has eluded the
capture

The same is true for creative nonfiction. The writer wants to capture what eludes easy summary, or paraphrase.

"Redneck Secrets" by William Kittredge) page 31-32

On Sentiment and Sentimentality

By being surprising and convincing, you may avoid sentimentality and melodrama.

Melodramatic: When a work is characterized by extravagant theatricality and by the predominance of plot and physical action over characterization.

Sentimental: Falsely emotional in a maudlin way. Extravagant or affected feeling or emotion. When a work exhibits an excess of emotion that doesn't feel "*earned*" by the piece.

Note:

1

Sentiment is not bad. Sentiment is variously defined as "refined feeling"; "delicate sensing of emotion"; "an idea colored by emotion."

2

If we don't strive for true sentiment, we will never achieve truly moving work. But if a piece is *sentimental*, this basic "good" thing has been overextended or misapplied.

3

Shakespeare sonnet (page 33)

Our First Job as Writers: To Notice

- Really noticing things
- Now, notice what you noticed. It's a beginning
- Creative work comes from noticing.
- "Goodbye to Berlin by Christopher Isherwood (page 36)
- Your first job is to turn your "camera" on, to notice as you walk.



Avoiding the Writerly Voice

Something happens sometimes when we sit down to write. We want what we write to be Important, we want it to Matter, and so we get pompous.

We can sound like we're making proclamations instead of observations.

Or, we can try to make the language sound so sophisticated that it comes off flowery or overwrought.

See the letter that Anton Chekhov wrote to the novelist Maxim Gorki (page 37)

Writing Voice

One of the things that can be hardest for beginning fiction writers to grasp is that they must develop a voice that is unique and natural to them.

Your job is to discover and/or develop your voice. It may not be the same as the way you talk.

It is the unique way you have of expressing yourself in the written word.

Use words that come naturally to you (page 37).



Voice (continued)

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- We spend most of our lives trying to fit in. We don't want to be noticed because we are different.
 - Creative writing is one area where you don't want to be "appropriate."
 - Appropriate is for dinner parties.
 - This is the place where the things that make you weird, the things about yourself that you know are different and even difficult, count the most.

Exercise 1: "I Don't Know Why I Remember ..."

Goal: To pinpoint some previously unexplored material that remains "hot" for you in some important emotional way.

What to do:

Scan back over your past and think about the things that have stuck in your mind, but not for obvious reason. (No births or deaths or graduations or other "Important" moments, please. Go for smaller ones.)

Render them precisely on the page using concrete details, beginning each one with the phrase, "I don't know why I remember."

Exercise continued:

Don't try to explain why they stuck with you, or interpret the meaning of them. Just put the reader *there*.

Page 39 – student example

Reference

- LaPlante, Alice. *The Making of a Story: A Norton Guide to Creative Writing*. WW Norton & Company Inc. , 2019.