

Beginning, Middle, and End

September 9, 2024

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Thank you, writers, for spending 60 minutes with me today. Here's how we'll divide our time:

Brief Intro into narrative/memoir/creative nonfiction in short (500-1000 words)

15-Minute Freewrite

Recap on Beginning, Middle, and End

Responding to a Manuscript/Share Stories

Questions

Brief Intro: (10 minutes) Six key elements for keeping your story contained to 1000 words

1. **Pick a key emotion to color the story** (Readers love it when they feel something)
2. **Pick a strong image** (Give us a meaningful and memorable visual)
3. **Use a small idea** (Big ideas belong in BIG stories. With a small idea, you keep it simple, and only probe one aspect with a very narrow focus)
4. **Focus on one main conflict** (Skip the subplots)
5. **Start in the middle of the story, at the beginning of the conflict** (Avoid backstory or prologue, and it is best if you do not use flashbacks or flash forwards either)
6. **Make sure you have a character arc** (There's nothing more disappointing than a character who doesn't grow/change/learn)

15-Minute Freewrite: Below are 10 ideas for freewrites. Use one of the prompts and start writing without stopping for 15 minutes. Try to think of a beginning, middle, and end to what it is you are writing. Start your writing and don't go back to edit, just keep your ink moving. This frees our creative thinking. I'LL TELL YOU WHEN TIME IS UP. (5,10,14)

10 IDEAS FOR FREE WRITES

1. Choose an object in the room and describe that object for 5-7 minutes using third person point of view and present tense. Then write for 5-8 minutes in present tense from the object's point of view.
2. Describe your happiest moment.
3. Write about a lie you once told.
4. You have a memory in which you are running fast. Write about it.
5. You have a memory in which you are laughing in the dark. Write about it.
6. You have a memory in which you witnessed someone hurting someone else. Write about it.
7. You have a memory of a certain house. Write about it.
8. Recall your most embarrassing moment and write about it.
9. Recall your proudest moment and write about it.
10. Write about something you have never told anyone about.

Recap on Beginning, Middle, and End: (5 minutes) What was your writing process like? Did you go to unexpected places?

Responding to a Manuscript/Share Stories: (25 minutes) Generating Phase while stories are being shared

Questions: (5 minutes) Suzanne.nielsen@metrostate.edu

Some Thoughts When Responding to a Manuscript

Your purpose in responding to a manuscript is to give significant, specific, helpful feedback to the writer and to point out problems, not solve them. You should not expect the piece to be written in the way you would write it. Your first responsibility is to decide what the purpose and the scope of the piece is. What is the writer trying to accomplish?

Your responses should also take into account the writer's process. Think of the writing process in **three phases**:

1. **Generating Phase:** The goal of the writer in the generating phase is to develop masses of material. The reader should be asking the writer for more data, more information; the reader can ask probing questions about things, physical descriptions, setting, colors, smells, ideas, relationships to help the writer generate more material than he or she thinks is there. Try to help the writer become grounded in the material, to be as specific as possible.
2. **Revision Phase:** It is important to remember that revision means seeing again. At this point the writer is evaluating and restructuring the mass of material generated, trying to find the final content and form, trying to discover what shape the material wants to take. The reader should be asking why, responding to what is confusing or not fully developed. The reader should try to understand the writer's purpose and ask questions to help the writer clarify the content and structure of the piece.
3. **Editing Phase:** At this point the writer has settled on a final form and content for the piece of writing and is ready to focus on elements of style, language, grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Editing comments and corrections are often the easiest to make, so it is important that the reader not jump to this stage too quickly.

This is a moving, living process, and the phases of writing often overlap and feed off one another. It will not necessarily proceed in a neat, orderly, controllable manner.

For the writer: Comments from readers will overlap and contradict one another. Writers must learn to understand which comments are appropriate to the goals of the writing, and when it is appropriate to adjust those goals. Be patient. It takes a while to develop the ear for critique.

For the reader: It is important that we make responses that are carefully considered and specific. It is particularly helpful for the writer to know what the strengths of the piece are and what the weaknesses are—what works well and what doesn't work. It is not helpful for the reader to give personal anecdotes or opinions stimulated by the writing.

"There is always light. If only we're brave enough to see it. If only we're brave enough to be it."

Take Amanda Gorman's message with you throughout life, and face the light. Writing will lead you to see things beyond your imagination.

Feel free to contact me with further questions.

Enjoy your life,

Suzanne