



# Class Goals

*Students should come away from this class possessing a greater knowledge of the theory and mechanics behind their art, have more confidence that their writing matches their intentions, and have more enthusiasm for writing by possessing better skills in its creation and editing. ©*

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# Warning

*This class may explore adult themes, language, and content.*

*—University of Utah*

*“I will probably take my shoes off. It’s my thing.”*

*—Johnny Worthen, your instructor*

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# Class Structure

- Workshop / Critiques
- Lecture
- Discussion
- Writing Sprints
  - Reading Homework
  - Writing Homework



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# Writing & This Class

- Creative Writing 1 (what happened?)
- Writing is a trade not a profession
- There are no rules
  - We are all making this up as we go along
  - If advice is useful, take it, make it your own
  - If advice doesn't speak to you, disregard with prejudice



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# Approaching this Class

- Use the assignments as general writing practice
  - **AND/OR**
- Use them to construct a larger piece
  - Come up with a **single story idea** and work it from the several assignments and critiques
    - Find a story idea based on **CONFLICT** from —
      - Character / Plot / Theme / Setting / etc.

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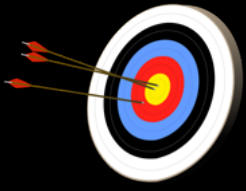
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# Make a Goal

- **Project above and beyond class assignments**
  - *Short Story, Flash Fiction, poetry,*
  - *Regular journaling*
  - *Novel progress*
  - *Editing*
  - *Queries*
- Let's keep you honest — weekly updates
  - *A goal is a dream with deadlines*



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# League of Utah Writers

- Submissions: **March 1st, 2026 - April 25th, 2026**
- Lots of categories (all <5,000 words)
  - Olive Woolley Burt - unpublished stuff
    - New Writers - unpublished never paid
  - Typewriters - published shorts
- Small fee (smaller for members), cash awards, Clout!



<https://www.leagueofutahwriters.com/2026-writing-contests>

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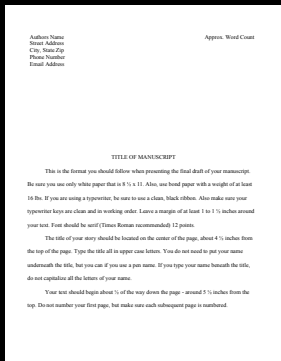
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## Standard Manuscript Format



**USE IT!**

Industry Standard

Kind to editors

*For this class, you don't need to put your actual contact information.*

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## Sharpening Your Language

*Find one-word synonyms for these descriptors*

- very noisy
- very quick
- very slow
- very often
- very rainy
- very clear
- very old
- very rich
- very angry
- very painful
- very sad
- very funny
- very perfect
- very scary
- very big
- very poor
- very shiny
- very easy
- very powerful
- very shy
- very clean

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# Characters (Cast)

- Get to know the primary players of your story before you begin.
  - *So you can hit the page writing!*
- "Character Worksheet" – an "interview" to get to know them
- Character Record sheet - rubber on the road details.



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# Character Desire

- **Motivation: What does the character want?**
  - *What do they think they want?*
  - *What does the character really need?*
    - *Can be the same thing*
- This will help define your story conflict
- *Your job as writer will be to make it as difficult as possible for them to get what they (think they) want.*



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# Character Forms

Character Name \_\_\_\_\_

Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Meaning: \_\_\_\_\_  
Middle: \_\_\_\_\_  
Nick or Surname: \_\_\_\_\_  
History/Backstory: \_\_\_\_\_  
Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_  
Allergies: \_\_\_\_\_  
Age (DOB): \_\_\_\_\_  
Family: \_\_\_\_\_  
Origin/Race: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender	Height	Weight	Eyes	Hair	Skin	Handed

Fashion: \_\_\_\_\_  
Mannerisms: \_\_\_\_\_  
Speech: \_\_\_\_\_  
Appearance: \_\_\_\_\_  
Personality: \_\_\_\_\_  
Beliefs: \_\_\_\_\_

www.johnpocorino.com

CHARACTER WORKSHEET

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age (DOB): \_\_\_\_\_  
Physical description: \_\_\_\_\_  
Spouse's partner's name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Children: \_\_\_\_\_  
Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_  
Parental status: \_\_\_\_\_  
Drinking/Smoking status: \_\_\_\_\_  
Earliest memory: \_\_\_\_\_  
Most embarrassing moment: \_\_\_\_\_  
Proudest moment: \_\_\_\_\_  
Secret dream or wish: \_\_\_\_\_  
Favorite things: \_\_\_\_\_  
Things in my wallet or purse: \_\_\_\_\_  
What I miss you to have: \_\_\_\_\_  
What I don't want you to have: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Only Seven Stories?

- Man against Man
- Man against Nature
- Man against Himself
- Man against God/Fate
- Man against Society
- Man caught in the Middle
- Man and Woman



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## Only Seven Stories?

- Man against Man - Count of Monte Cristo/Game of Thrones
- Man against Nature - To Build a Fire/Castaway
- Man against Himself - Hamlet/Fight Club
- Man against God/Fate - The Matrix/Oedipus Rex
- Man against Society - 1984/Chinatown
- Man caught in the Middle - The Pelican Brief
- Man and Woman - Pride and Prejudice/Sleepless in Seattle

Great stories often use several, if not all, of the stories types.  
Stories (conflicts) are the avenue through which meaning is conveyed.

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## Conflict

- A Defining Element - more than genre
- An integral part of modern storytelling
  - Necessary to keep interest
- One force set against another — dissension
- **Non-Fiction needs conflict too (Creative Non-Fiction)**
- **Even (Especially) Literary Fiction (man vs. self)**
- The best fiction has multiple conflicts
  - **Man vs X... and Y and Z too!**

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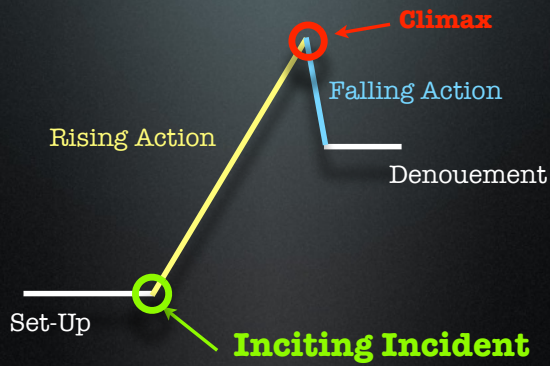
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# Freytag Story Pyramid



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## Setting

*“the room where it happens”*

- An excellent starting place
- Knowing **Where** and **When** the story happens can indicate *what happens* in the story
- All things are connected
- Creates Limits (a good thing)



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## Construction Choices

- **Point of View**
  - First / Third / Limited / Omniscient / Multiperspectivity
- **Tense**
  - Present / Past
- **Voice and Style**
  - Author presence
- **Genre**



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## Show & Tell: Do your good where it'll the do the most



- *She was depressed.*
- *The days dragged by, not in hours or minutes but in breaths, heartbeats and sighs. Each new unwanted moment was a weight on her chest, flat and crushing that squeezed the life out of her lungs and darkened the muddy light that found its way to her weeping eyes from under the dusty, drab, and lifeless curtains.*

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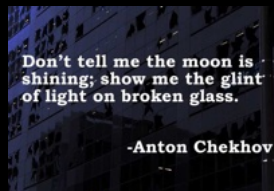
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## EXERCISE: More is More

- **SHOW**
  - Four separate statements
  - Reach emotional resonance

- *It was cold.*
- *The ship was in danger.*
- *The woman was poor.*
- *Someone drugged him.*



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## Central “Key” Details

- Not a description per se - But some **Defining Detail** that nails it
  - *It was the kind of place that sold rooms by the hour and lockers by the month.*
  - *The room smelled of clove cigarettes, bad choices, and vomit.*
  - *He spent the day shooting people and eating chocolate.*
  - *She'd weep at phone commercials.*
  - *He put fifty grand under the hood but kept the rust on top.*
  - *She spoke with a lisp whenever she was excited*

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## EXERCISE: Less is More

- IDENTIFY SETTING WITH KEY DETAIL

- *The beach was crowded*
- *The plane was old*
- *The club was trendy*
- *It was quiet, too quiet*

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## Key Character Details

- Few words, great impression
- A shorthand to remember a character
- A simple handle to grasp a complicated thing
  - For reader AND author
  - Name (HUGE)
  - Also: attitude / voice / scar / limp / nationality / smell

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## Examples

- Name: *Delores Umbridge, Willy Loman, Eleanor Anders*
- Attitude: *She was born rich and never forgot it.*
- Action: *He wouldn't pick up dropped change because he didn't like how his pants creased when he bent over.*
- How the world sees her: *She was seven foot three and single, of course.*

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# EXERCISE: Less is More

- IDENTIFY WITH KEY DETAIL
  - Come at this from an unexpected angle
- They liked sex
- He was untrustworthy
- She was afraid of change
- He was very stupid.

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# A Note on Poetry

- **LINEATION**: often considered the only absolute differentia between prose and poetry, although some theorists argue even this point. In most poetry, however, the poet retains absolute control over the line length and division.
- **SOUND/MUSIC**: the effects of rhyme, repetitions of various sorts, and the effects produced by specific word combinations
- **RHYTHM**: recurrent patterns of sound, pitch, stress, accent, etc., including both formal metrics and less formal repetitive syntactical, grammatical, and thematic patterns.
- **COMPRESSION**: the art of folding into the poem more meaning than a literal reading produces; this might include not only removing linguistic deadwood but also strengthening image and symbol

From: THE ART AND CRAFT OF POETRY, by Michael R. Collings

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# Cinquain

- Line 1 (2 syllables): x x
- Line 2 (4 syllables): x x x x
- Line 3 (6 syllables): x x x x x x
- Line 4 (8 syllables): x x x x x x x x
- Line 5 (2 syllables): x x

Requires neither rhyme or meter, but the last line should emphasize, under-cut or underscore the previous 4 lines

*Listen.  
With faint dry sound,  
Like steps of passing ghosts,  
The leaves, frost-crisp'd, break from the trees  
And fall.*

Five lines;  
Smooth left margin;  
Words well-controlled, well-spelled  
Fourth line long, taut, and ready to  
Snap back!

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