

Creative Writing

This project is designed to help you explore your writing talents. Much practice is necessary in order to develop good writing skills. You may choose to try poetry, or you may wish to experiment with essays, short stories or newspaper reporting done in conventional or desktop publishing format.

Your individual interests should determine the topic you choose to write about. It could be something of current concern such as the pros and cons or nuclear energy production, or the problem of landfills in Indiana. Or maybe you would prefer to write a story or poem about an event that affected you personally or an editorial about a key issue such as recycling and environmental concerns.

Whatever the topic, be sure to write it in a tone you are comfortable with. Will it be a serious, factual account or a humorous look at life?

Just let yourself go and have fun with this project. Write to your heart's content. There will be time later to edit and proof your finished work.

The Creative Writing Project is divided into two categories: Poetry & Prose. All work done in the Clover division **MUST BE HANDWRITTEN** and submitted in a 9" X 12" folder. All work done in the Junior and Seniors division may be handwritten, typed, or produced on a word processor/desktop publishing and submitted in a 9" x 12" folder.

Poetry

- Clover: Exhibit a poem of at least three stanzas.
Junior: Exhibit a collection of three or more poems. Each poem must consist of from 3 to 5 stanzas.
Senior: Exhibit a collection of five or more poems. Each poem must contain at least five stanzas.

Definition of a **STANZA**: a division of a poem consisting of a series of lines arranged together in a usual recurring pattern of meter and rhyme.

Prose

- Clover: Exhibit a one-page, handwritten short story or essay.
Junior: Exhibit a short story or an essay that is at least two pages in length.
Senior: Exhibit a short story or an essay that is at least three pages in length.

First Of All...

Get your tools together. Paper, several pencils, a notebook, dictionary and thesaurus will all be helpful. You may also wish to have a pouch which zips tightly to keep all of your materials together.

One skill that you will find helpful as you set out to write is observation. How can you express how you view an object or happening unless you really "see" it? You can practice this skill by looking at a very ordinary thing such as playground swings at an abandoned school playground, and giving a full description of what you see. Did you notice the rusting frame, the broken seat, and the weeds growing around it? Did it give you a different feeling than a shiny new set of swings at a store? Of course! So, you see your descriptions of what you see can also help set a mood.

You may also find it helpful to look at the same object at different times of the day or in various types of weather. Note how this can change how you "see" the object or event.

Let's Choose A Subject....

Choosing a subject is important and you can get ideas from many places. Think about an event that you have found exciting to tell about in a normal conversation with your friends. Look through your "observation notebook". Take an ordinary event like walking to school and give your imagination freedom to develop it into a wild adventure. Maybe something that you recently read about made you angry and you wish to tell your feelings about the subject. No matter which method you use in selecting your subject, be sure that it is what YOU really are interested in writing about.

GENERAL PROCEDURES - PROSE

Outlining

You have already selected your subject, so the next step is to put your ideas down in an outline. Write down how you plan to begin the story, your characters, the major events (in chronological order, if possible), location and your plan for an ending. Remember that an outline can be flexible. As you write, alternatives may present themselves. Refer to your outline and decide which path you shall take. It is your decision.

Filling in the Spaces

Once you start developing your story from the outline, you may worry that your story is too short. But do not make the mistake of trying to put in more to fill up space. Nothing is more boring than a book or short story which is full of unneeded words. Just say what you need to say and quit. This is not to take enough space to fully develop your plot and its characters; but avoid needless gibberish.

Who is the Storyteller?

It is easier to develop a story in the third person (he, she, it) rather than the first person (I). Too many "I's" can be distracting. Usually it is easier to describe he, she, or it, rather than I. Try writing in statement form without using "I." Example: Instead of "I was really tired after running," use "It was an exhausting run."

Developing Your Characters

If the characters are a major focus in what you are writing you may want to develop them further by writing a detailed description of each. This can be used to refer to as you include your characters into the story. Here is an example:

Jason Leer - 17 years old; 6' 2" tall with light brown hair cut in a fashionably relaxed style; dresses in brand-name, Oxford-style traditional clothing; athletically built with sharp, attractive features, limpid blue eyes and perfect teeth; active in school - member of the track and football teams, Captain of the debating team, Student Council Vice-President, Junior Class President, National Honor Society member; majoring in math, chemistry, biological sciences and English; career ambition is to be a research scientist in the health field; gets along well with parents and peers; seems well-adjusted.

As you read, you got a clear picture of Jason Leer. You may not want to put all of this into one paragraph of description in your story, but it can be a reference. This exercise can also help you to feel that you really know your characters and can identify with the part they shall play in the story.

GETTING STARTED - PROSE

Once you have all the outlining and background work done, you will want to start writing. At first, write as it comes to you, without worrying about grammatical polish; that can be done later, but the flow of ideas may not.

The Beginning

The beginning of your story must invite further investigation. It must set the scene and make the reader feel that he or she is involved.

Conversation

Conversation can do a lot in the way of giving personality to your characters, explaining the story and setting the mood or tone. Use conversation as needed, but do not include lengthy conversations about subjects which have no relation to the story.

Try to avoid repeatedly using "he said" or "she said"; it gets monotonous. Clarify who the speakers are and then proceed. Here is an example:

As Joy left, Sue and Marie continued their grumbling.

"Why, I'll declare," said Marie, "she certainly has a lot of nerve."

"Nerve isn't the word," stormed Sue, "Why, ever since she was selected to serve on the Student Council, you would think she was the Queen of England."

"Who'd have thought that she would snub us, of all people!"

"Well, let's teach Queenie a lesson."

This conversation seems real and makes it obvious who is speaking, but avoids repeated use of "she said."

Another point to remember in conversation is to avoid slang usage. Unless you are purposely trying to capture the flavor of an ethnic group or say something about the character's personality, standard English is considered more acceptable.

Description

Description is another way in which the writer can set the mood, make the characters' personalities more understandable, or add details that will help the reader more fully enjoy the richness of the story.

Here is an example of what description can do: You could write, "Each day I passed the swings in the old schoolyard." This tells a fact but little else. To be more descriptive you might say, "Each day I walked past the rusty, broken-down swings in the abandoned schoolyard. Except for a few birds perched on the warped, wooden seats, it seemed that no one had used them in years." Notice how a mood is set by the description of the swings.

Remember to also write in the character's point of view. For example: 'John remarked, "Mary is very angry!";' instead, try writing 'John remarked, "Mary appears to be very angry."' Then write a description of her anger -- use word pictures.

The Ending

The ending must leave the reader with a feeling of satisfaction; that the questions posed in the story were adequately answered. This does not mean that the reader was left with all the answers. Quite the opposite is true. The reader should be left with food for thought - satisfied yet stimulated.

Touch-Ups

If, in reviewing your writing, you notice that some words are overused, use a dictionary or thesaurus to help you find alternatives. Variety makes the book or story more interesting. Remember also to clean up any grammatical errors and give proper credit to your sources. Then work up your improved copy.

GENERAL PROCEDURES - POETRY

A poet sets out to present an idea. Often this idea has come from the emotional stimulus of a scene which may appear to be very ordinary to any other person, but to the poet it is a unique experience worthy of putting down in a poetic form. If something that you see or hear strikes you, write it down. Though you do not have the intention of writing about it at the moment, it may be useful in the future.

Observation and writing practice are as important in writing poetry as they are in prose writing. You may wish to review the paragraphs about observation.

First Of All...

Before you begin, you must plan. Decide what you hope to accomplish with the poem. Do you wish to entertain? Educate? Put forth an opinion? Or describe something? Next you may want to decide on a form. Though this is not necessary, it can often be helpful for a beginner.

Meter

Words, like music, have a "beat." In poetry, this "beat" is called meter. Meter is organized by syllables and accents. These syllables and accents are called poetic "feet." Here are five types of "feet."

iambic foot:	One light stress followed by one heavy stress (upset')
trochaic foot:	The reverse of iambic; one heavy stress followed by a light stress (mur' der)
anapestic foot:	Two light stresses followed by a heavy stress (un der stand')
dactylic foot:	Reverse of anapestic; heavy stress followed by two light ones (har' row ing)
spandaic foot:	Two heavy stresses (coat' tail')

The number of feet in a line determines the meter. Here are some types of meter:

monometer:	one foot (rarely used)
dimeter:	two feet (rarely used)
trimeter:	three feet
tetrameter:	four feet
pentameter:	five feet
hexameter:	six feet

Therefore, a line of poetry with five sets of one light stress followed by a heavy stress would be a line of iambic pentameter. Here is an example: The girl' / has put' / her hat' / into' / a box'. /

Notice how you can almost tap your foot to the rhythm. Continue the same basic meter throughout your poem with only slight variations to break up the monotony.

Form

One of the most common types of verse is "blank verse." Blank verse consists of unrhymed, iambic pentameter lines. Slight variations to avoid monotony are acceptable.

Another form is writing in couplets. Iambic pentameter lines which are rhymed in pairs are called couplets. Here is an example (from a poem of unknown authorship circa 1612):

The silver swan, who living had no note,
When death approached, unlocked her silent throat;

Though the couplet can serve as a stanza (like a paragraph in prose), the quatrain, which has four lines, is much more popular.

The sonnet is another popular English form. A sonnet consists of fourteen lines of iambic pentameter verse which have a rhyme pattern. The English sonnet is usually arranged as three groups of four lines (quatrain), and then a couplet. Many times each quatrain expresses a separate idea.

Free verse is a form which has no particular pattern (iambic pentameter, etc.) but should still have a rhythm or beat. It would seem that without all those rules about patterns, free verse would be easier to write. This, however, is not true. Good free verse still takes much thought and planning.

Though not the only forms of poetry, those described above do give an idea of the major types. Remember that all of them have slight variations which are acceptable.

Metaphor

Metaphor is very important in poetry. It is the comparison between two things that are quite different, without using "like" or "as." If "like" or "as" is used the comparison is called a simile. Here are examples:

Metaphor: Her rose-blushed cheeks
Simile: Her cheeks, like red roses

HOW TO READ POETRY

Poetry is a concentrated way of telling a story, documenting an event or expressing a feeling. It should be noted that a poem, just like a story, is "saying" something. The poet does not intend to confuse the reader, but is trying to get a point across in just the same way a writer of prose would be doing - through use of the written word.

Because a poem is so concentrated, it may take a little work to get to the meaning. In a story, the writer can devote several paragraphs to the description of a character, whereas in poetry the poet must convey the personality of a character by the use of a couple of well-placed lines in the poem. Though you may find this way of expressing ideas difficult to figure out, this concentration of things may be just the thing that gives power and beauty to the poem.

In unraveling the meaning of a poem, looking at the punctuation can help. Though the lines are arranged according to rhyme or meter rather than having one sentence per line, you can find the sentences by looking at the punctuation marks.

Try reading from the beginning of a sentence to the end of sentence without regard for where the line of the poem stops. Here is an example:

Her hair is bright strands flowing down
Is what I loved. It was not her
Beguiling smile or ways so sweet
That lured me so
And made my life so full.

As you can see, if you read "Her hair of bright strands flowing down" and then "Is what I loved. It was not her," as a separate part, you will have a hard time getting at the meaning. But if you read, "Her hair of bright strands flowing down is what I loved, " as a complete sentence, you get the idea immediately. If you are having a rough time understanding a poem fully, try to look closely at the punctuation.

Tone

Try to pick up the tone of the poem. Is it loving, sarcastic, or matter-of-fact in tone? Just as you can say "come here" in a variety of ways, the words of a poem can mean different things depending on the tone.

GRAMMAR: A QUICK REVIEW OF SOME PROBLEM AREAS

Their, There, They're

All three of these words are pronounced in the same way, but when writing, the proper word must be used, based on the spelling. Here are the differences:

Their is a possessive word. (Their books, their house, their cookies)

There can be a place (Go there); or concerning this matter (There you are wrong); or express concern (There, there, don't worry); or as an intensive (John there is a good boy); or as denoting an action taking place not (There goes the whistle).

They're is a contraction (two words joined together). In this case "they" and "are" are joined. If you question when to use they're, just substitute "they are" in the sentence. "They're here" and "They are here" say the same thing. "There here" is never used as a sentence, as it makes no sense.

- *Circle the correct answer to the following:
- (There, Their, They're) is a monster on the loose.
 - (There, Their, They're) dog bites kids.
 - (There, Their, They're) the biggest animals in the world.
 - This is (there, their, they're) red car.

Was, Were

“Was” is usually used if you are talking about one person or thing (I was there, Ted was there, She was there, It was there). NEVER use “We was there” or “They was there.” “Were” is usually used where more than one person or thing is involved (We were there, They were there).

There is an exception, however. Whenever "you" is used, “were” is correct, no matter if the you is one person (You were the only one there), or if the you is more than one person (You dancers were there). NEVER use "You was there."

- *Circle the correct answer to the following:
- The dog (was, were) in the house.
 - They (was, were) in the house.
 - We (was, were) in the house.
 - You (was, were) in the house.

Themselves, Himself, Herself, Itself

"Theirselves" and "Theirself" are not words; do not use them in your speech and writing. The correct word is "themselves." (They were proud of themselves.) For one person or thing, use himself, herself, or itself (He was proud of himself, The cat gave itself a bath).

- *Circle the correct answer to the following:
- They did it (theirselves, themselves).
 - They were happy with (theirselves, themselves).

Theirs, There's

These two words are pronounced the same way, but used differently. "Theres" is not a word unless it has the apostrophe: "There's."

There's is a contraction for "there is". (There's a cookie on the table.)

Theirs is a possessive; someone has ownership. (These books are theirs.)

*Circle the correct answer to the following: (Theirs, There's) a good movie on tonight.
This dog is (theirs, there's).
(Theres, There's) nowhere to go.

There's, There are

"There's", which is just like "there is", is only used when talking about one person or object. NEVER use, "There's five ducks over there."; because that is like saying, "Five ducks is over there", because "There are" is used when speaking of more than one.

*Circle the correct answer to the following: (There's, There are) only one cookie left.
(There's, There are) many activities going on.
(There's, There are) ninety students in the class.

ANSWERS TO GRAMMAR QUESTIONS ON BACK OF THIS PAGE

ANSWERS TO GRAMMAR QUESTIONS

There is a monster on the loose.

Their dog bites kids.

They're the biggest animals in the world.

This is their red car.

The dog was in the house.

They were in the house.

We were in the house.

You were in the house.

They did it themselves.

They were happy with themselves.

There's a good movie on tonight.

This dog is theirs.

There's no where to go.

There's only one cookie left.

There are many activities going on.

There are ninety students in the class.