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Creative writing

Introduction to creative writing

There are many forms of creative writing. In this section, we are going to look specifically at **narrative**, **descriptive** and **empathic writing**.

Narrative writing is writing that tells a story about people involved in a particular situation.

Descriptive writing is writing that describes a particular person, place or event in great detail. By doing this, the author of the descriptive writing invites the reader to visualise and interpret what is happening in the text.

Empathic writing is characterised by the writer taking on a persona and writing from that point of view throughout the piece. The reader is able to gain a sense of what that particular character is going through by reading the text.



Structure and style

In the winter of 2010, inspired by Elmore Leonard's ten rules of writing published in *The New York Times* nearly a decade earlier, *The Guardian* asked some of today's most celebrated authors to supply *their* rules. Here is the list sent in by Neil Gaiman, journalist and English author of short fiction, novels, comic books, graphic novels, audio theatre and screenplays, including the award-winning young adult novel, *The Graveyard Book*. He has won numerous awards, including the Hugo Award, Nebula, Bram Stoker, Newbery Medal and Carnegie Medal.

Neil Gaiman's Rules for Writing

1. Put one word after another. Find the right word, put it down.
2. Finish what you're writing. Whatever you have to do to finish it, finish it.
3. Put it aside. Read it pretending you've never read it before. Show it to friends whose opinion you respect and who like the kind of thing that this is.
4. Remember: when people tell you something's wrong or doesn't work for them, they are almost always right. When they tell you exactly what they think is wrong and how to fix it, they are almost always wrong.
5. Fix it. Remember that, sooner or later, before it ever reaches perfection, you will have to let it go and move on and start to write the next thing. Perfection is like chasing the horizon. Keep moving.
6. Laugh at your own jokes.
7. The main rule of writing is that if you do it with enough assurance and confidence, you're allowed to do whatever you like. (That may be a rule for life as well as for writing. But it's definitely true for writing.) So write your story as it needs to be written. Write it honestly, and tell it as best you can. I'm not sure that there are any other rules. Not ones that matter.

Getting started**Express myself: a writing journal**

Writing requires discipline and practice but can be an enjoyable journey. A journal or portfolio is a useful way to express your thoughts based on material you gather. You can glue in pictures and reading material, then annotate each item with your thoughts, feelings and descriptions. This will provide you with material throughout the year on which to base your writing. To get you started, try this activity.

Express myself

Choose a theme for your portfolio. The theme can be fleshed out to provide material for both your creative writing and your formal writing.

It would be a good idea to choose something that is relevant to you as a person so that you find it interesting. You will be able to express strong, confident feelings and views if you care about the ideas. If you can't think of a theme, you might consider one of these:

- Bullying – who has the power?
- Family relationships: love, compassion, betrayal, abuse, all in one household
- Child poverty
- The –isms: racism, sexism, age-ism
- Image: how the beauty industry and media control our self-image
- Dealing with adversity – meet the challenge
- Being a New Zealander
- The wonder of the natural world and how we can protect it.

Find a picture that has something to do with your theme. Glue it in the box opposite and annotate it with expressions of your thoughts and feelings. Ask yourself questions, such as: what is it about this picture that grabs my attention? How does the image relate to my theme? What emotions do I associate with the colours? Which verbs and adjectives could I use to describe different parts of the image? There is no right or wrong response – just express yourself!

Working with words

Connotations

Writing requires careful word choices to capture just the right description. Words have both a literal meaning (the **denotation**) and figurative meanings (**connotations**). It is very useful to think of words that have connotations to create a particular mood in a piece of writing. Mood is a piece's atmosphere, the overall feeling the writer wants the reader to experience. A description of a green forest on a sunny day may make the reader feel relaxed and peaceful, while a description of the same forest being thrashed by a thunderstorm might communicate fear. Creating mood begins with diction, the writer's selection of words. When developing atmosphere, writers especially consider the connotations, or emotional associations, of words. Descriptions can create a positive or negative mood depending on the words' connotation.

Example

'Candyfloss clouds floated in the sky' creates a relaxed, playful mood while 'Heavy, grey clouds loomed overhead' suggests a foreboding mood.

Connotations

Answers
p. 67

1. Identify the mood in each example following and quote the words used to convey the mood.
 - a. The dark, narrow street stretched relentlessly ahead of us as we tried to decide on our route.
 Mood: _____
 Words: _____
 - b. Waves thundered over the jagged, unforgiving rocks as the fisherman threw his rod into the sea.
 Mood: _____
 Words: _____
 - c. Spirals of delicious aromas floated out from the kitchen where mum was making dinner.
 Mood: _____
 Words: _____
2. Writers choose words to express actions and feelings more accurately, as well as to create positive or negative connotations. Identify the difference in meaning between the following sets of words describing a similar action or feeling. The first word in each case is neutral.
 - a. walk _____
 stroll _____
 stride _____
 - b. fat _____
 voluptuous _____
 obese _____
 - c. cry _____
 wail _____
 sniffle _____
 - d. ugly _____
 homely _____
 repulsive _____

3. Fill in the denotation and connotations of the words in the table following. The first one has been done as an example. Use a dictionary and thesaurus to help you.

Word	Denotation	Connotations
Green	A colour	youthfulness, environment, freshness, immaturity, envy, sickness
Rough		
Fire		
Autumn		
Snow		

Show, don't tell

When you want the reader to visualise a description fully, you need to avoid using neutral, literal words and focus on revealing information through your word choice.

Example

Tell: The muscular man is running fast on the grass.

Show: The man's leg muscles rippled with tension every time his foot pounded the brittle grass.

Show, don't tell

Rewrite the following examples to 'show' rather than 'tell'.

- The trees that lined the driveway were tall and dark.

- He was feeling really angry as he walked into the garage.

- The hamburger was delicious.

- She was very selfish and didn't listen to her friend's problems.

- The fire was hot.

- She was very pale and felt faint.

- The jellyfish looks dead.

- The clouds in the sky are moving fast today.

Appealing to the senses

Using words that appeal to our senses enables the reader to imagine the world you are creating very vividly. Here is a simple but fun exercise to help you express yourself more vividly.

Five senses activity

Use your imagination to complete the following activity. Remember to consider all five of your senses. This is a skill that can be used when writing your descriptive and empathic texts. An example has been supplied for each sense as a guide.

Jellybeans

(You will need a jellybean for this task)

- Drop your jellybean on the desk. Describe the sound it makes, using poetic language.
Example: nail-tapping; pill-popping; tinkly
Your description: _____
- Rub your jellybean between your thumb and index finger. Describe how it feels by comparing it to something else.
Example: silky-smooth; gluey; like satin
Your description: _____
- Look at your jellybean. What does it look like?
Example: crescent moon; alien baby
Your description: _____
- Bite it in half, smell it, then describe the smell.
Example: sickly-sweet; sugary; toxic
Your description: _____
- Taste it, and describe the taste.
Example: like chewing glue; vomity
Your description: _____

Compound adjectives

Compound **adjectives** are great for creative writing. They let you develop your description using only a few words. Understanding this skill will help you to develop your proficiency in written language. Compound adjectives can be used in both descriptive and empathic texts.

What are compound adjectives?

Compound adjectives are two (or sometimes more) words that are grouped together to form one idea (for example, *light-fingered* or *bright-and-early*). That idea is then used to describe or modify a noun (for example, the *light-fingered* pickpocket; our *bright-and-early* departure).

The general rule is to place a hyphen between the words that make up the compound adjective when the adjective is used **before** the noun (this is called the 'attributive' use of the adjective). For example, 'The *well-known light-fingered* pickpocket removed my wallet from my handbag.'

Be aware that compound adjectives that are formed using an adverb ending in -ly (such as *swiftly flowing*) are usually not hyphenated. For example, 'We crossed the *swiftly flowing* river'.

Wordstorms

Wordstorming is a useful way to choose words and create images for a particular topic and purpose. You can brainstorm a range of words that tap into your five senses. These become a bank for you to use when you start drafting your piece of writing.

Wordstorms

Fill in the 'wordstorm' grid below, based on your writing journal and the picture you glued in for the task on page 2.

Think of as many words as you can, both positive and negative, that relate to your theme. Deposit the words in a 'word bank', as shown below.

You can create more of these grids in your writing journal. Start with 10 words in each category and keep 'depositing' more over time.

Word bank

Sense	Nouns	Adjectives	Verbs	Adverbs
Sight				
Sound				
Touch				

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

ANSWERS

Creative writing

Connotations (page 4)

1.
 - a. Mood: ominous, forboding
Words: dark, relentlessly
 - b. Mood: dangerous, aggressive
Words: thundered, jagged, unforgiving
 - c. Mood: inviting, mouth-watering
Words: delicious aromas floated
2.
 - a. walk: move one's way forward on foot
stroll: to walk in a relaxed, casual manner
stride: to walk fast and with purpose
 - b. fat: over the accepted norm for weight
voluptuous: having a full and curvaceous figure
obese: excessively fat
 - c. cry: make a sound to express grief, pain or distress
wail: make excessively loud sounds to express grief, pain or distress
sniffle: make very small, soft sounds to express grief, pain or distress
 - d. ugly: unpleasant to the eye, ear or mind
homely: plain or unattractive to the eye
repulsive: disgusting or loathsome

3.

Word	Denotation	Positive connotations	Negative connotations
Green	A colour	youthfulness, environment, freshness,	immaturity, envy, sickness
Rough	Uneven level/ bumpy surface/ coarse texture	An approximation of something	Unpleasant, unfair, lacking taste, crude
Fire	Combustion with oxygen, giving off light and heat	Warmth, energy, light, power, enthusiasm	Destruction, violence, aggression
Autumn	Season between summer and winter	Warm colours, mellow mood, beauty of nature, peacefulness	Old age, wrinkles, the time before death
Snow	Frozen vapour falling to earth in white flakes	Purity, clarity, innocence	Cold, melancholy, sadness

Descriptive writing (page 16)

1. Students' own answers.

2.

Comment on style	Relevant quotes	Techniques	Effectiveness
The imagery works through differentiating between the earth and sea	'big bush-covered hills were smothered' versus 'it looked as though the sea had beaten up ... wave had come.'	Metaphor 'hills were smothered' Sibilance – s-sounds	A visual image describes the mistiness on the hills as if a blanket is covering them entirely. The sound imagery suggests the soft sounds of the waves.
The imagery creates a powerful sense of movement	Smothered, covered, fallen, hung, bowed, lay, had beaten, flicking, flowing, stirring, shaking, rising, dissolved, rolled up, sped, jostled, shouldered, broadened, reflected, flashed, leaping	Past tense verbs mixed with present tense continuous verbs	Conveys a sense of nature's vitality and liveliness.
The imagery appeals to our senses	Sight – 'big twists and curls jostled' Sound – 'splashing of big drops' Touch/sight – 'pearls of dew'	Personification emphasises movement Onomatopoeia – splashing Metaphor – emphasises reflection	All our senses are engaged in the experience so that we feel as though we are there.
Colour images create a visual intensity	White sea-mist; reddish grass; blue grass; silvery toi-toi; pinks; pearls of dew	Visual, literal images	Combinations of blue, pinks, whites, silver – to denote the sky and land just as the sun rises and shines.

Formal writing

Personal engagement (page 36)

Marea – issue 4
Ben – issue 3
Hine – issue 1
Tim – issue 2

Craft and control 1 (page 45)

Line	Technique	Example	Effect
Line 2	emotive language	'love'	Positive connotations for the argument
Line 3	alliteration	'tourists ... travellers'	Memorable parties in the argument
Line 4	emotive language	'thrives'	Positive natural connotation
Para2 Line1	concrete example	Hillary	Respected reference point
Line2	evidence	<i>Time</i> magazine	Supports choice of reference
Line 7	personal pronoun	'we'	Includes the audience in the argument
Line 8	repetition	'we can'	Emphasises reader's position in the argument
Line 9	repetition	'proud'	Positive connotations supporting idea
Line 10	emotive language	'love'	Positive connotations of the outdoors
Line 11	sibilance	'same/sustaining'	Makes argument gentler and memorable
Para 3 Line 1	alliteration	'pivotal part'	Emphasises economic importance of OE
Line 2	statistics	'20%'	Implies data used to construct argument
Line 4	emotive language	'qualified guides'	Initial link to next point about education
Line 5	examples	'abseiling to Zorbing'	Implies activities cover the whole alphabet
Line 6	emotive language	'trained and skilled instructors'	Implies professionalism in the industry
Line 7	repetition	'maintain and grow'	Natural image and links tourism to OE
Para 4 Line 1	metaphor	'cornerstone'	Emphasises importance of education
Line 2	example	Degree course	Implies high-level skills needed
Line 3	example	Postgraduate course	Develops high-level skill idea
Line 4	emotive language	'welcomes'	Positive connotations including foreign students
Line 5	balanced sentence	'To our economy ... to our people'	Balancing value of both ideas
Para 5 Line 4	alliteration	'price/pay'	Highlights link between monetary and social gain
Line 6	emotive language	'help'	Implies positive role played by OE
Para 6 Line 2	rhyme	'heritage/image'	Highlights link between past and present positive views of New Zealand
Line 4	emotive language	'vital'	Implies the life force of New Zealand
Line 5	balanced sentence	'costly mistake ... priceless investment'	Presents rational measured conclusion using contrast.

Analysing an editorial (page 50)

1. The focus is placed on 'victims before bullies' which shows the direction of the editorial.
2. The main issue is whether school policies are effective in dealing with bullies and how to assist the victims more successfully. In the content, the writer clearly addresses how the issue is viewed by various members of the community – the schools, parents, the bullies and the victims; it also includes views expressed by the Prime Minister, John Key. A specific event is mentioned as the trigger for the editorial – video images of a 15-year-old girl in Wanganui being kicked unconscious by another girl.
3. Find at least THREE opinions expressed in the article about the issue, say whether you agree or disagree and give your reasons. Your reasons must be backed up with facts as stated in the article. Examples of opinions: 'His concern sounds genuine, not driven by an opinion poll.' 'this is their opportunity to assess whether the policy is working' 'he will discover what schools mean by zero tolerance is quite different from the ordinary meaning of the term.' 'Bullies are trying to hide their own deficiencies.' 'From the victim's point of view, though, retaliation does work'

All other answers in this task will be students' own opinions.

Identify features of a film review (page 56)

Genre and context: Ebert points out that this is a New Zealand film that is set in 1984 at the time when Michael Jackson's song 'Thriller' was 'the central fact of his [the main character's] life'.

Situation: Ebert explains the situation Boy is in and how this young man's life is affected once his father returns – 'what gradually reveals itself is a bittersweet coming-of-age experience in which Boy outgrows his hero worship and realizes most of Alamein's most admirable qualities exist only in his imagination'.

Film language: Ebert questions a technique but is reassured: 'the movie, which includes flip-card style animation, threatens to go overboard on flashy style. Neither thing happens, and what gradually reveals itself is a bittersweet coming-of-age experience in which Boy outgrows his hero worship and realises most of Alamein's most admirable qualities exist only in his imagination.'

Cinematography: 'The film is delightful in its colourful production values, with animated and fantasy interludes, many of which centre on the dead mother's tombstone, where Rocky spends many hours.'

Clear point of view: 'A film like this would have little chance without the right casting, and James Rolleston is so right as Boy, it's difficult to imagine anyone else.'

Strong conclusion: 'The question the film doesn't need to pose is: What direction will Boy's life take? Rocky seems already pulled toward art. Boy's imagination was occupied by his father, until he met him. Now what? When Taika Waititi was working on this screenplay at the Sundance Writers' Lab, its working title was "Choice".'