

# A quick lesson in writing

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Boksídan

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Probably most stories are never completed. Sometimes, perhaps because the authors do not think they will be good enough. Writing gives them such agony that they can't continue, or get stuck in constant edition of the already written. The editing should wait until the whole story is finished and everybody that gets stuck, should keep in mind that very little of all that is written is good. What you find in bookstores is just a small part of all the stories written. The small part that the editors thought was good enough. So it may not be so likely that they find that your story is good enough. But it doesn't matter! Even if no one else will even want to read it to the end, you have at least written it. You have created your own world, with your people and your environment. It's fun and something to be proud of.

I think that most people, who have an idea for a novel, first get an idea of the story. It's usually the story as it is creative in a novel, the rest is a craft. There are of course exceptions, novels with new thinking on how for instance environments are described. It does not mean that such novels are entertaining reading, maybe it's the opposite. There are even novels that did not have its own story at all, but are still very entertaining. This course does not dwell on such matters, rather it is about the craft of decorating a story with events, people, environments and dialogue.

## Set-up

In order for a story to become a book it requires that the author finds the appropriate words to describe it. In addition, the words have to be put together so that they will form an agreeable text flow. The text should also not be too sprawling and it should fit for the intended story. To achieve this in a good way, the author, in my experience, should think through and take a position in a number of important issues here summarized as set-up. After that, as a rule, the same appropriations should be maintained throughout the story. These important questions are:

- Telling shape, i.e. the relationship between you and your main character. Often the author's main character is the author (I-form), even more often, the author is outside, and the main character is depicted in (his/her form). There may also be several I (rare) or several he/she (common) whose thoughts the reader follow through the novel.
- Telling eyes. With this it's meant the eyes that see what happens in the story. If it strictly follows one person everything is usually seen from that person's point of view. If the story, however, follows more people the telling eyes usually are placed on an all-seeing observer that both can see people and events from the outside and can go into the brain of any of the characters.
- Telling brain. Different people who look at the same event note different things and they make different associations. No matter how many pairs of eyes that see a course of events, it is usually the same brain that interprets what is happening.
- Telling language. What words the telling brain uses to describe the events.

Many novels are always seen through the protagonist's eyes. It is thus the same eyes, brain and language that sees, interprets and embodies the whole story. Those who choose such appropriations can choose any real person that he/she thinks would be suitable for the role. Then, just imagine how that person would experience the story. What the person would have noticed of the environments and events, what he/she would have said, done, and thought about the other characters, and finally how he/she would have described all this. For those who made a good choice, the text is then more or less generated by itself. On the other hand, if a person is chosen that he or she can identify with, it will be a lot harder to produce text.

Here are some examples of how the story would look like with a few different set-ups. The story is about a man who comes home unusually early from work one day and then finds his wife in bed with a man. When he becomes aware of this, he briskly leaves home and back into his car, thinking about what he should do and decides to take revenge.

### Version 1.

Narrated in the first person. The I-person (telling eyes and telling brain) is cowardly, bitter and he thinks everyone wants to fuck with him. The telling language of the text is an interpretation of the main character's inner monologue. With this appropriation and him as the main character it is tempting to believe that the revenge consists of that that he makes small discrete viciousness things against his wife. Contagious units which are not seen so clearly, so that he does not need to stand up for them, or is forced to confront his wife.

"Typically, the manager did not even bother when I said that it felt as if I have a fever. So he would never do if it was Frederick or Thomas who said they felt bad. Then he would probably say "but oh oh, gee, yes it was sad to hear, but then you should get home to rest. Hope it passes soon. Do not worry about the meeting, I say to them that you are sick." Now, he just said "oh well, get well then." It did not even seem like he thought I was sick. I might have coughed a bit just to emphasize how damn it feels, but it might just have sounded ridiculous. Luckily I did not. But I'm actually sick, definitely, I usually do not puff when I walk down the stairs. I usually don't even do that when I go up the stairs. Perhaps my condition, is poorer? Damn there is Sven. He comes in my direction. He will surely ask, in his cheeky way, how I feel. Should I say that I feel bad and thus have to explain my symptoms? Or should I say it's good. But then he is to wonder why I leave so early. Maybe he will think that I leave out of sheer laziness. Consider also if I do not come tomorrow, and I say I'm fine now. Then he will think that I stay at home for the smallest thing. Though what if I say that I feel sick and he thinks I do not look sick. Then he will definitely think I'm a hypochondriac.

Damn, I have to hide myself, it's the only way. But anyway, it is too late already, he has seen me. But now I feel actually even a little worse or it might just be cold here in the hallway. But I have the jacket on me and freeze anyway, though it's indoors. Maybe I'll snap the jacket as if I really am freezing. Then it's probably obvious that there is something wrong with me.

Now he nods at me, he surely wants to shake hands. How should I explain it without it being weird, I mean that maybe we should not take each other's hand because I might infect him with a dangerous infection. Should I maybe just forget to explain it but just stretch out my hand? But then he is to think that I'm selfish when taken him by the hand. He may be thinking, "that guy will do anything to show that he knows me. Even if it means I get sick." But how shall I say it now then, he barely usually waits for an answer when he asks how I am and stretches out his hand. Then I have to, in a few seconds, say that I have a fever and do not want to shake his hand. He damned happy look also remains, as if he thinks it is fun to see me. Should I also look happy now then, but then it surely is less likely that I'm sick. I'll be taciturn, I think. I usually so it ought to seem natural. Now that I am sick, he understands how much effort it is for me to walk all the way to the car.

- Hello Mats, what's up?

- Hello, nothing but I got fever, but how about you then?

- Ouch, must hurry to the meeting, but get well!

Damn, did not ask how it was with him, but he did at least not reach out his hand for a shake. But why did he not do that? Isn't he interested in me anymore? Is it just because we do not work on the same project anymore, Was it only therefore that he was so nice to me before."

This is a fairly simple appropriation to elaborate on for anyone who has a picture of the main character's mind. It will be easy to add page to page, but there is a risk that it becomes quite tedious in the long run. Moreover, it can be difficult to get dialogues, environmental descriptions as well as events into the story in a smooth way. That's probably why this set-up is quite unusual.

Version 2.

This set-up is designed in the same way as, for instance, many hard core criminal stories. The main character is witty, confrontational and uncompromising. The story is here seen with the eyes of an all-seeing observer. Eyes that sees the protagonist sometimes from the outside and sometimes from within. The telling brain is pretty cool and do not waste time thinking about emotions. Everything is described with a narrative language that uses appropriate words for the phenomena's that occur in the history.

With this approach, it is reasonable to think that the main character pretty quickly decides to beat up the man in the bedroom. Then the story would maybe focus on how he faces society and the legal system for his deed.

"- You Bosse, I go home now, have a fever, I think.

- Well, yes, get well then. Think you come tomorrow?

- I hope so.

- By the way, is there anything I need to know, do you have something that needs to be done today, or what?

- No, I can take care of it all when I come back, bye.

- Bye, but the phone, you have programmed it?

Mats gave him a sharp look that clearly showed how stupid the question was. Then he left the manager's room without further altercation.

It was raining outside. The drops came down hard and cold on his nearly bald head. He stretched out the steps, even though his breathing increased. However, he did not bother to pull up the jacket's zipper because the car was just a few rows away. A puddle had formed outside the driver's door. It was so deep that the water reached up to the instep of his black walking shoes. When he stepped into the car, he touched the neck seal so that a trickle of cold raindrops ran down the inside of the collar of his shirt. Quietly he cursed the automaker and thought as so many times before: the next time I buy a car for adults not some little silly Japanese sports car. Then he inserted the ignition key and started the engine."

### Version 3.

Here the man is very ordinary. He likes life, loves his wife and their home. He gets devastated by grief when he discovers his wife in bed with the man and his whole world crumbles. The design would be suitable for an all-seeing observer that allows the readers to follow other characters actions and thinking as well. The telling brain interprets a rather ordinary way, with references to common Swedish homes. The telling language is as close to normal spoken language as possible to further enhance ordinariness.

With this approach the lead character might decide to go home to his best friend and take some beer with him and his wife while he eases his heart. He sleeps in his friends house friend in a week, while he text-and maybe makes a few phone calls to negotiate with his girlfriend about the future of their relationship. The revenge could be that he begins to search the Internet for a mistress.

"The bad feeling had been there since the morning, but at lunch he was almost sure. Otherwise, when he felt a little sluggish in the morning, it got better after lunch and coffee. But now there was hardly any difference, even though he chose a healthy lunch, with lots of vegetables and had a slice of lemon in the water. The appetite was also worse, even though he hardly said anything during the entire lunch, both Thomas and Fredrik were ready before him. Otherwise he usually almost always eats faster than at least Frederick. In addition, he froze, despite that had added a pullover over the shirt. Both Thomas and Fredrik just had t-shirts, and they seemed to be comfortable with it.

- Hey, isn't it cold in here?

Fredrik looked a little surprised at him and shook his head. Thomas asked, with a slight hint of concern:

-What do you mean, Mats, you have a fever or, it's warm in here.

Back in the office he was not even able to move the mouse to remove the blue colour on the screen and the text about the operating system, so he was convinced. He rose from his chair, picked up the jacket from the hook and started walking toward the door. Thomas and Frederick looked at him, waiting.

- I will go home now, I must have some cold or something. Lisa has been home for a few days, it's probably her cold that I got.

- Yeah! Said Thomas, they're like little viral bombs. But its okay, we tell the boss. Is there something else that we should do?

Mats shook his head as he thanked them and felt a bit of heat from their kindness spread in his body. Then he went as fast as he could, without even turning off the computer or reprogram the phone. He did not have to stop and talk to anyone during the walk down to the car, except for one guy from the design department, who greeted him when passing. The weather was autumnal with a light rain that would otherwise not have disturbed him so much during the short walk to the car. Now it made him freeze so that his hands were shaking. He had to sit for several minutes with the climate system on maximum heat, before he released the handbrake, put in a gear and drove away."

In this version it is suitable to take in a bit of all sorts of more or less irrelevant facts, to give the reader a sense of recognition. Just stir in personal experience of car rides, arguments, and more.

### Version 4.

Which is a copy of the previous version, but now he's changed to me.

"I had a feeling it in the morning, but at lunch, I was almost sure. Otherwise, when I'm feeling a little sluggish in the mornings, it gets better after lunch and coffee. But now there was hardly any difference, even though I chose the healthy lunch, had a lot of vegetables and put down a slice of lemon in the water. The appetite was also worse, even though I hardly said anything during the entire lunch, both Thomas and Fredrik were ready before me. Otherwise, I almost always eat faster than at least Fredrik. I even freeze despite that I wear an extra pullover, while Thomas and Frederick just wears t-shirts, and they do not seem to freeze.

- Hey, isn't it cold in here?

Fredrik looked a bit surprised at me and shook his head. Thomas asked with a slight hint of concern:

-What do you mean, Mats, do you have a fever or, it's warm in here.

When I came back from lunch and found that I hardly managed to move the mouse I realized that I had to be sick. I rose from the chair, picked the jacket from the hook and started walking toward the door. Thomas and Frederick looked at me, waiting.

- I will probably go home now, I must have some cold or something. Lisa has been home for a few days that are probably her cold that I received.

- Yeah! Said Thomas, they're like little viral bombs. But its okay, we tell the boss. Is there something else that we should do?

I shook my head while I thanked them and felt a little heat from their kindness spread in my body. Then I went as fast as I could without even turning off the computer or reprogram the phone. I did not stop to talk to anyone during the walk down to the car, except for one guy from the design department who I greeted when passing. The weather was autumnal with a light rain that would otherwise not have troubled me so much during the short walk to the car. Now it got me to freeze so that my hands were shaking. I had to sit for several minutes with the climate system on maximum heat, before I released the handbrake, put in a gear and drove away."

It got worse, right?

If you let the main character observe and tell us what is happening it is, as I said, important to note that the text match how it would have sounded if the imaginary protagonist had told the story himself. Furthermore, one should avoid describing events that he would not have thought it would be interesting to tell. It is also important to remember that people usually leave out all unnecessary environmental descriptions in oral storytelling. In addition, most people use a more undifferentiated language with many repetitions, for example, "he came, then she came," compared with conventional written language.

# Environments

As a rule the scene in which an event takes place is described in an environment description. Often the description of the event begins with that the environment is described, but occasionally the two are described in parallel and other times the environment is described through the description of the event. As in the example below:

"Robert's skinny figure disappeared into the pine grove, where the bark gleamed golden and yellow in the morning sun. He walked in a brisk pace as long as they saw him. He walked without any direction, went about obstacles like bushes, passed around holes and uprooted trees and sat his foot where the ground was the easiest to cross."

From "**The new land**" by **Vilhelm Moberg**.

Or this, which is taken from an autobiographical tale about a safari in Africa. Note how the author used a number of metaphors for us to understand how it was.

"The sunshine was unbearably oppressive. The heat in my back felt as if someone had hurled spears in it. I crawled under a bush to eat an orange and let the juice slowly run down into my throat that was like dry sand. It was the sweetest sense of relief I have ever felt. When I emptied the sand out of my shoes, I knew that my muscles would torment me less, the next day."

From "**Leopard in my arms**" by **Michaela Denis**.

In the following quote the environment (and the events there) is watched by an all-seeing observer. In the quote ten describe the environment and events by the all-seeing observer gone into the brain of one of the drama's main characters looking at his reflections, which the telling brain then have summarized.

"In this mess, this half-mil long and several hundred meters wide chaos of an escaping army, one after the other of the laws and war articles expired without anyone really cared, rode captain Pilfelt at eight o'clock in the evening."

"Two things Pilfelt particularly noticed. At the field office's wagons they were busy throwing bundles of incriminating letters and papers on the fire. And over at the king's tent, slightly tucked away by a birch grove, packed at best down the royal silver dining equipment for four hundred forty eight people and the barrels with the Saxon gold they had squeezed out of the occupied territories before marching against Russia."

From "**A time for outrage**" by **Lars Widding**.

It's pretty easy to make an environmental description. Take an environment that you know and filter it through the selected set-up. But since it is so easy, one could quite easily fill out an entire novel only with environmental descriptions. And how amusing would that be? On the other hand, a novel entirely without environmental descriptions gets a bit boring as well. Though it is probably almost impossible to write a story without any environmental descriptions because every noun is an environment description. The question in this context is: Which scenes should be described and what should be described in them?

The answer depends on what the purpose is, it could be that:

- Create an image of one or more of the individuals in the story, such as that they are poor or snobbish, because the image is needed for the understanding of the later events.
- Filling out the pages, which unfortunately seems to be common in some novels.
- Communicating information about the viewer. It may be the main reason because the viewer's attitude towards what he/she looks at may explain the later behaviour.
- Describe an atmosphere. May also provide an explanation for someone's behaviour.
- Create excitement. If a site is described more accurately than previously described locations it creates a



premonition that here it will happen something important.

Anyone who has ambition to make a good description of a scene in a story should generally use as few words as possible to describe it. This is especially true in environments that are not important to the story or environments that everyone knows. For example, it would be quite tedious to read a long description of the inside of a regular taxi, unless it is so that the viewer in the story has never been in a car and therefore looks astonished at everything.

But it is, in spite of the above, usually not sufficient to describe an environment with only an adjective, because then it becomes quite meagre. Say for example that a person in the story stands on a sidewalk expecting to be picked up by a regular taxi, but instead he gets picked up by a limousine. In the limo it will then happened something that is so important for the further development of the story, that the car requires some form of description. This could be described as:

In the viewer's eyes

"In the queue of cars slowly rolling along the street he could see a long white car with tinted windows and flags on the wings. One such car that he had seen the movie stars come in, to premieres and galas."

Or:

"Far away in the line of cars behind the rusty car that rattled, he saw a long white car that resembled to a cream cake. When it came closer, a yellow light began to flash in one corner and the car turned towards him. He felt a thrill from his eyes down to the toes, imagine if it was meant for him."

From the outside, with eyes that do not sit on any of the participants (in the same way as in a movie):

"A white limousine pulled up to the curb and parked next to him."

This description might be suitable for a thriller, but not at all suitable if it was a romantic story where the love of his life awaited him in the back, ready to propose to him.

Or:

"A luxurious car veered toward the curb and parked next to him."

With the last description, there is a risk that the reader gets stuck in to wonder what the author mean by luxurious and that he thus loses pace in the reading. It is usually better to describe something so that the reader thinks it sounds like an exclusive, beautiful or ugly thing/place compared to simply writing that.

Some environments are more difficult to describe than others. Take a look at the environment in the photograph below. What can you write about it?



Probably that it's autumn, it rains, it looks pretty wet and the water puddle is big, the road turns to the right, a car is passing. But why would a writer want to describe any of this? It depends on what will happen there. Let's say that it shortly will be a traffic accident in which one of the characters is involved. Then maybe it would be important to describe the place in detail, if the accident is caused by water puddle.

But if the site is only one place that the protagonist passes on her to a place where something will happen, this puddle should probably not be devoted that many words. The reason to write about it could then be to illustrate how terrible the conditions were during her walk. Below you can see a few attempts:

### In the viewer's eyes

"She froze and the clothes were wet. The legs were so tired that it seemed doubtful whether she would be able to go all the way. Even a puddle in front of her, but she didn't care anymore. The shoes were already soaking wet, but the puddle appeared to be deep, so she forced herself to take a detour around it."

Or with a little more emotions involved:

"The rain had held on for so long now that everything felt wet. The pants were wet, the shoes were wet, and the hair felt like she just got out of the shower. The drops were cold, the air was cold and the wind was blowing. Before her there was a giant puddle, she could barely care about it. Did it make a difference if she took a detour around it? The shoes were soaking wet anyway. Was it by the way going in the right direction? She saw no signs that could give her any information about the name of the road, but it wouldn't make any difference, really. Her steps were formed by the hopelessness of the trip, but she began after a moment's hesitation to circle the puddle."

### From the outside

"The raindrops continued to cool her, but now it was blowing too. She turned onto Hook Road, but stopped abruptly. For the next step, she had set foot in a deep puddle that spread out before her. Instead of continuing along the roadside, she went across the road to the other side. "

Or with more focus on the weather:

"The rain was industrious and she had been exposed for so long now that it had penetrated her jacket and wet the blouse. It made the cold even more palpable. Moreover, the wind had increased and soon it would be dark. Despite these circumstances, she chose to take a detour around a large puddle that was in her way."

It may be easier to find something to write about an environment that is created for an event that will happen. For example, a table setting for a coffee break.

In this case, the author, for example, may describe the furniture, the table setting, point out that there is no milk cartons or the fact that the table is set for five persons. It is of course depending on what's going to happen there and who made the table setting. If it were set for a birthday party, one would, tentatively, write that the table setting was pretty meager, but if it on the contrary, was set for a regular coffee break at work .....



Here are some different types of environmental descriptions taken from a number of novels.

### In the viewer's eye's

Many novels are written so that it is clear that there is a person (usually the protagonist) who observes the environments. For those who choose this approach, it is important that they are described in a manner consistent with the viewers supposed personality. The easiest way to do this is probably to try to imagine what the person in question would have told you about if he had told you about the scene. So maybe Norman Mailer did when he wrote this (note that it is written in I-form and present, which is unusual):

"So often I go to these emerald green swamps in the end of the town, I think of the pilgrims. The coastal dunes farther out are so low that you can see the ships along the horizon even when the water is invisible. Sport fishing boats seems to travel in caravans across the sand. If I have a drink inside, I start laughing, because opposite the memorial plaque over the pilgrims, not five ten feet from the stable where the United States began, is the entrance to a big motel. It may not be uglier than any other giant motel but it is certainly not more beautiful either, and the only tribute to pilgrims is that they call it the "inn". The paved parking is as large as a football field."

From "**Tough guys don't dance**" by **Norman Mailer**.

The novel "The Window" (see below) is very rich in environmental descriptions, and about half of the 100 first lines of the book contain text that describes an environment. As the following excerpt in which a small digression on garden walls that leads us to understand that the main character is in an exclusive area. The novel is written entirely in the I-form and the past, but the description is strangely impersonal.

"The road was lined with estates surrounded by walls and fences. Some had high walls, some had low walls, some with an ornate iron fence, and some were a bit old-fashioned and coped with large hedges. The street

had no sidewalk. There was no one who walked in this area, not even the mail man. The evening was warm, but not as hot as in Pasadena. It was a hypnotic fragrance of flowers and sunshine, a gentle rustling of garden sprinklers behind hedges and walls, the clear crackling sound of lawnmowers that delicately moved over peaceful lawns."

From "**The Window**" by **Raymond Chandler**.

In the following excerpt, we see the environment through a viewer's eyes, but the text is written in he-form:

"Where he lay the hill sloped slowly, but further down it was steep, and he saw the dark path of dust control agent's shelter from the wind through the pass. Next to the road was a creek and further down the pass he saw a sawmill by the stream and the water that fell over the dam, white in the summer sun."

From "**To whom the bell tolls**" by **Ernest Hemmingway**.

From the outside

Objectively

In a "factual" description the author gives the impression to only describe hard-boiled facts about the environment. Sometimes without involving the actors feelings about it. In the event that such set-up is chosen, it is particularly important that the scene match reality (in the case of that a real environment is chosen) or is logical and reasonable (fictional setting) otherwise it may create irritation among the readers. Objective environmental descriptions are pretty common in some mysteries, such as the following two examples. In some factual detective stories, there is pretty much scene descriptions in others it is less. In the novel "**The Man on the Roof**" (see below) contains about 40% of the first 100 rows environmental descriptions. As in this text, in which one of the main character sees a corridor in a hospital.

"He was already on the steps and opened the right half of the door, which squeaked wretchedly on unlubricated hinges. Another couple of steps and a door and he were in a sparsely lit corridor. On one side were rooms for the patients, the other appeared to reserve for cleaning rooms, linen storage and examination facilities. There was an old black wall phone that shall be fed with small coins. Rönn stared at an oval white enamel sign with the laconic inscription....

From "**The Man on the Roof**" by **Maj Sjöwall** and **Per Wahlöö**.

The detective story "**The hatred**" by **Ed McBain**, however, is much more economical regarding environmental descriptions. There are hardly any at all. Perhaps because the story takes place in a fictional city. This author probably inspired Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö a lot. In any case, it is them who translated this story into Swedish.

"The photographer's name was Jody Lewis and the sign above the entrance to the premises one could read the word JODY'S plain and simple. The shop was housed in a one-story brick house with a storefront, where various tests on the result of the photographer's previous activities could be seen. Across the street, about seven feet from the curb was a two-story house. This house had six windows facing the street. From one of the windows upstairs the photo shop was clearly visible."

In the window stands a man with a rifle and wait for someone he's going to kill.

However, it is not necessarily to all the time described how the environment looks. Sometimes it can benefit the story better to write a little story about some details in it, which the author of the next quote has done.

"The school had a central radio system, small speakers were bolted to the wall above the classroom doors and above the entrance to the kitchen. Two weeks earlier, they had taken down the framed portraits of the old and bloodhound like wrinkled president and replaced him with the newly elected one, admittedly bald and with glasses but otherwise appeared virile and assertive, with steel in his eyes, sharp chin and carrying voice. It was the voice that was heard from the speaker when Werner and Leo stepped into the kitchen, there was a broadcast from the parliament and the president began with the words: "Dear representatives of the Finnish people ...""

From "**The danger of being Skrake**" by **Kjell Westö**.

The novel "**The new land**" (588 pages) is quite choosy on environment descriptions, especially towards the end. In the 100 pages (over 3000 lines) at the end of the book there are less than 400 lines that can be considered to contain environmental descriptions. In the beginning, however the scenario is painted in a moderate number of descriptions, such as in the novel's opening paragraph, in which the following description is read. It is really not a description of the setting in the ordinary sense, i.e. it's not a stenographic description. Instead, the aim was probably to give the story a poetic introduction and a picture of the new era in America.

"A giant tree was knocked over by a storm and had fallen on a path that ran along the shores of the Ki-Chi-Saga, a lake in the Chipewain Indians country. It lay untouched where it had fallen, obstructing walkers on the trail that went a detour around the roots. No one got the idea that it could be cut down and rolled to the side. With time a new trail was made, that went in a big hook around the tree. Instead of moving away the obstacle the Indians moved the way. So was the big tree there and as the years went by moss spread over it. A man's age passed by, and the fallen tree began to rot. The path around it was now well used, and no one remembered anymore, that it once had been a different route here. Hunters wasted over the years a lot of time to go around the tree, but this people utilized their time wasting it. One day a man of a different skin colour walked the trail. He carried an axe under his arm and walked heavily in footwear, which had been made in another continent. With his axe he cut the tree in some places and threw it away."

From "**The new land**" by **Vilhelm Moberg**.

# People

Anyone who wants to make it easy for himself occupies all roles in the history with people who he knew in reality. Then it's basically just to try to see them with the telling eyes and interpret the seen with the telling brain.

But all the people in a story need not be described. A simple rule of thumb is that the more important the person's character is the understanding of the history, the more detailed description of him/her. And the more central a person is in the story, the more detailed description. If a person appears in many places in the text the description of him should be spread out on several of these occasions. And a large part of the description should be in what he says and thinks and/or how others perceive him.

There are a number of different ways to describe people. They are mainly:

1. A person in the story observes the one that is to be described and he/she reflects about the appearance.
2. The person described reflects about himself.
3. An all seeing observer sees and reflects over the person.

Some examples of these different ways to describe people:

## 1. In the viewer's eye's

"Peter Olausson took off his hat, revealing a bald circle on the skull. He seemed a decade older than Karl Oskar, as a forty-year man. It appeared on his clothes and was heard in his voice, that he was no newcomer to America. He used the same mixed tongues as Anders Mansson in Taylors Falls, one of the first Swedes in the Territory."

From "**The new land**" by **Vilhelm Moberg**.

In the following text, taken from "**Tough guys don't dance**" by **Norman Mailer**, the author has chosen to focus on some other physical properties. By allowing the person to be a former American football player, the readers get a picture of the whole personality. The reference to a fire hydrant also says a lot about the main character.

"He was a shorter, blonde Greek-Norwegian on his father's side and on the mothers Portuguese, with a physique like a fire hydrant. He was the second, second shortest who had ever played in the football's big league (though he only stayed there one season)."

It is also quite fastidious with personal descriptions in the novel. It takes ten pages before the first description of the appearance of any person in history. And the description is very brief:

"A blonde who was strikingly similar to Patty Lareine sat with her company less than three meters away from me."

Another example:

"A fair-haired man in a brown suit, black glasses, and the now familiar hat came in the vestibule and went discreetly between planted trees and plaster vaults to the cigar counter."

"Leslie Murdock was wearing a cool greenish suit and his hair looked wet as if he had just taken a shower. He sat leaning forward, looking at his white suede shoes and spun the ring he had on his finger. He had with him his long cigarette mouthpiece and seemed a bit lonely without it. Even his hair seemed to droop a little more than it had done in my office."

From "**The window**" by **Raymond Chandler**.





## 2. In the eye's of the described

It happens that authors describes someone by letting him/her see themselves, perhaps when he or she looks in the mirror, as in this example:

"When Connie came up to her room, she did as she had not done for a very long time, she took off all her clothes and stood naked in front of the large floor mirror. She did not know what she was looking for or at, but she moved the lamp so that she stood in full light.

And she thought, as so many times before.... what a naked human body seems brittle, easily hurt, a little touching, somehow not quite finished, unfinished.

She had been considered to have a beautiful figure, but now she was out of fashion. A little too voluptuous, not enough boy slim. She was not very tall, a bit Scottish and sat, but there was a certain beauty in her long sloping curves and lines. Her hull had a slight brown shimmer, it was something bright on her arms and legs, her body should have been plump, bulging, but there was something missing. Instead of mature her firm, sloping curves had started become flat and a bit harsh."

From **"Lady Chatterley's lover"** by **DH Lawrence**.

## 3. From the outside

Objectively

This description is rather wordy, but then it is a key person who is introduced in the story.

"The man in the attic was wearing beige lumberjack jacket and black ski pants, a machine knitted black polo shirt and brown boots. The moustache was long but well-groomed and a shade lighter than the smooth sloping pinned hair. His face was narrow with clean profiles and contours finely cut and behind the frozen mask of accusatory dissatisfaction and adamant insistence were almost childish traits, weak and perplexed and appealing and yet a little bit calculating. The look in those bright blue eyes was steady but empty. He looked like a boy who has suddenly become very old."

From **"The Man on the Roof"** by **Maj Sjöwall** and **Per Wahlöö**.

Anecdote form

In the first quote describes a group of individuals with very short anecdotes about their merits. The quote is taken from a novel that takes place in one location, at a time when it might have been not so much focus on clothes and appearance, but more on the person abilities. In the second quotation although a person's clothing is described, but only with a few words.

"Neither on the Ön or in Ecksträsk there were some so dexterous children like Skrattars. The girls could milk cows at the age five, the boys dig ditched and cut trees at twelve. They worked for the sake of peace, laughing, chattering all the time."

"His name was Robert, and was the eldest son of Nordmark. He had a pair of sailor pants that sat low on the hips and fluttered cavaliered down at his ankles. He was said to be a communist."

From **"Hjortronlandet"** by **Sara Lidman**.

All persons in history should be described in different ways and different characteristics should be highlighted for each of them, otherwise it easily tedious and confusing, such as the following, exaggerated, example:

"Three men stood on the loading dock, the one who stood next to the entrance to the warehouse building was long and rather narrow, his hair was carbon black. He seemed to have a Latin American descent, perhaps one of his parents was from South America.

The other man, who stood looking down from the loading dock was long and rather narrow, his hair was carbon black. He seemed to have a Latin American descent, perhaps one of his parents was from South America. The third stood by a pile of pallets and he was also long and rather narrow, his hair was also carbon black. He seemed to have a Latin American descent, perhaps one of his parents was from South America."

Besides that the text is ridiculous, it will become completely hopeless to distinguish between these three men. Of course, the author must focus partly on the characteristics "they had a slightly Hispanic appearance" and partly on what distinguishes them, such as:

"Three men stood on the loading dock, they were dark-haired and reminded him of some Latin Americans he knew. The one who stood nearest the entrance to the warehouse was dressed in a dark suit, shirt and tie. The man seemed a little misplaced as he stood on the dirty loading dock, thought Richard. The other seemed to fit in much better, in his blue overall. He stood looking down from the loading dock, as if he was looking for something on the ground. The third, which was leaning against a pile of pallets, was ordinarily dressed in a pair of jeans."

Generally, it is better not to enumerate a list of clothes, hair and so on, but instead takes up some, for the person characteristics or clothing and describes them so that they are saying something about its wearer. As in the following example, which describes an old woman in a bygone era:

"and is wearing her thick, black green duffel coat that reached down to her feet. On the coat a striped, homespun apron and a thick black woollen shawl tied around her head. The frozen chin protrudes from the shawl as a red button, her eyes blinking at the sun, tears flowing out due to the bright light, the creases in her cheeks are like cut with a knife."

From "**The road under the stars**" by **Moa Martinson**.

The same woman could be described also, for example like this:

"its day and the sun are shining. In the sunlight stands the old woman. Her face is worn and her chins are. She wears a coat, a black woollen shawl and a striped apron."

But it gets very boring, right?

It is obviously important that people feels real, which means that they should have both good and bad sides (otherwise they will be uninteresting), and secondly, that the described characteristics match. These rules may seem ridiculously simple, but they are not always followed. The first rule I see many violations of in American action movies. There are heroes who are so talented that I just hope it will go to hell for them. The latter rule, there are many violations of in literature. One common such is that the characters often argue much more logical and lucid than a real person in the same situation would do. But it's probably something that the authors choose in order to make it easy for the reader to follow the story. However, what is completely unnecessary is to not adapt the wordings in the thoughts to the character. Below the thoughts in the mind of a teenage thug, who in the story is described as stupid, unpredictable and completely without compassion, is quoted:

"Lukas was clearly annoyed over his friend who took far too lightly on the problem and who always considered himself to be the one who knew the best. What others thought, he did not often care about, unless it happened to coincide with his own opinion, of course.

He had just a little over two months left of the school year on Wheleskolan, an establishment which he regarded as a pure torture chamber. Then a fall semester and a spring one - and then working life."

From "**Domination**" by **Björn Hellberg**.

# Events

Events referred to everything that happens in a story beyond that people are talking to each other. A novel consists, as well as a film, of a number of events or scenes. An event is a story in itself, and it takes place during a certain time period. Between each event there may be time-lapses.

Each event should bring something to the story and they should also have different tempo<sup>3</sup> and perhaps to some extent also different tense<sup>4</sup>.

Together, the events make up the entire story. In the least complex stories event are added to event in a strict chronological order, without obvious gaps and it is the same person that the reader follows all the time. In very complicated stories, however, the reader follows several people's experiences and there are time gaps in between the events.

- <sup>2</sup> A common trick to keep the readers interested is to, in the midst of an exciting event, pick up another thread of the history during a few pages.
- <sup>3</sup> Events that are supposed to be more exciting should be pretty straight, written with shorter sentences and fewer digressions from the events. This is because the reader of these passages is anxious to know how it goes and then maybe read faster. Thus there is a risk that he is losing the thread if the text is complicated.
- <sup>4</sup> Exciting events is getting less exciting in the past tense because it means that they occurred in the past, giving the reader the feeling that the event is over and that it ended in a way that was successful for the protagonist.

Key elements of an event should be described in greater detail than unimportant ones. For example, it would seem odd to describe a sequence of events as follows:

"He stepped on the brake pedal, gently at first, then a little harder, and finally he pressed it as hard as he could. Yet he almost touched the tree with the bumper. When the car stopped, he released the brake pedal. He quickly moved his right hand from the steering wheel to the handbrake lever, closed his fingers around the handle, and pulled it. Then he moved the same hand to the ignition switch and closed his fingers around the key. In the next second he turned it to the left so that the engine stopped. Only then, he released the steering wheel with his left hand and brought it down to the left thigh. The right hand he laid on the right thigh, and then he twisted his left leg outward against the car door. A few sunbeams found their way through the foliage and into the windscreen. The rays dazzled him a little, but it did not bother him. However, he realized how dirty his glasses were. He took them of and laid them on his lap. Then he moved his right hand to the glove compartment and opened it as if to search for something. He searched around among the things in the compartment without really see what was in it. Perhaps he was too nearsighted to actually see anything without the glasses on. After a while he pulled out his hand. In his hand he held a pack of paper napkins. He grabbed the pack with his left hand, dropped it with his right hand and took the now free hand a grip on a napkin. Which he carefully wrapped around the right lens and then he began to rhythmically rub back and forth. The movement was repeated on the left lens, with a clean section of the napkin. When he had rubbed a few times on each of the lenses, he tested the result by putting on the glasses. He seemed pleased, for he did not repeat the procedure. Instead, he stuffed back the pack with napkins in the glove compartment. The use napkin he threw into the same place. He seemed relaxed now, he sat with half-closed eyes with his head resting against the headrest without even move a finger.

Ulrika walked past the car seemingly without taking notice of the man who sat in it. However, he watched her carefully. When she was just behind the car he ran out of it and stuck the knife in her stomach. Then he drove off the fastest he could."

The events should, as well as the text in general, be described through the set-up. The set-up not only determines which words are appropriate, but also which events that should be described. If the set-up is that the story is seen through the eyes of a lovesick young man, which also is the telling brain and telling language, it is reasonable to think that a meeting with one for him attractive woman is more well described, than if the set-up is that the man is completely disinterested in anything but engines. Here are some examples of how various authors have described events.

### In the viewer's eyes

The first quotation is taken from a text in which the telling eyes are sitting on a very naive girl in the upper teens. In the second, they sit on a young man interested in fishing and in the third on a cool male detective.

"We ate entrecote with béarnaise sauce and fries and drank cider. For dessert, I made a chocolate pudding, it was an instant pudding.

We were in a really long time with math. I sat very close to him and did everything so that we could leave it. In the end I said I could not manage more and thought we'd watch TV.

I sat close to him and took his hand. We looked each other in the eyes, and his mouth was shaped as if to kiss. We leaned against each other and slowly, slowly we kissed. Then we did not want to let go, we continued to kiss for hours. He squeezed my breasts, and I put my hand between his legs. I thought we'd go up to my room, he nodded and looked very serious.

On the way to my room, I came to think of the Bruins in bed and that I had the pink sheets with small bears on. It is just not right, he must feel that he was going to bed with a twelve year old. So I thought we'd take my parents' room instead. He just nodded seriously.

Then we made love, it was embarrassing, both for him and for me. I think he came before he did put it in me. When I grabbed his dick, it felt that quite soft and sticky. I pretended not to notice it and aimed it towards my vagina. There was a halt, the dick was so soft and I was so tense that it had been hard to even get a finger in it."

From the "**Small and big crimes**" by **Elisabeth Nilsson**.

"We drank a few beers that night, without disclosing Riggert as the source, I tried to ask Werner if he actually asked Vera to move because he did not want to share his humiliation with her.

He was silent a long time, and then he said quietly that people do not know the real reasons for their actions. Then I repeated my question, he changed topic, and afterwards we talked no more about it.

In the morning we looked up my rod and my reel and went out to fish for a few hours at Tistelskär, Ytterharun and Hästkobben. It was half overcast, a warm breeze from the southwest, it was high tide and the beaches smelled strongly of seaweed, all the conditions were perfect.

But we got no fish. "

From "**The danger of being Skrake**" by **Kjell Westö**.

"I went around and looked at the wheel. No nameplate. I wrote down the registration number on the back of an envelope, for all eventualities, and went into the house. He was not in the hall or in the hallway upstairs. I stepped into the office, looked at the floor after mail, could not find any, I could not stay longer if I wanted to get down to town before three. The sand-coloured car was still in the parking lot and was still empty. I stepped into my and started and drove out into the lane. "

From "**The window**" by **Raymond Chandler**.

The following quote is taken from one in it's time, very popular novel. Note how easy it is written with a lot of "I did it, and then I went there." It works quite well in the novel, I think. Perhaps because the telling eyes and the telling brain belong to a young man in the 50s and it is reasonable that a young man at the time, would tell a story in this way.

"When I came out of the skating rink I felt a little hungry, so I went into a drug store and took a cheese sandwich and a glass of Malted Milk. Then I went into a phone booth. I was going to call Jane and see if she had come home yet. I had the evening off and thought that if I called her and she was at home, I could take her out to dance or something. I had never danced with her, even though we had known each other for quite a while."

From "**Catcher in the rye**" by **JD Salinger**.

In the novel "**Mia and Stefan**" by **Elisabeth Nilsson** the same events are depicted with two grants. The text is quite "tight" as if the protagonists are upset, which probably the author's was meaning.

Appropriation one where he says his eyes, tells your brain and tells cairns:

"Finally she sits down again, but now she has a chocolate bar in his hand. She takes the fan several rows at once and she did not even ask if I want. But actually, I would probably not have any chocolate. But she ought to at least ask me. A little bit enough good by the way. Not much, but a number were each good. Several lines at once will just disgusting, but a range would brighten up. By the way, it's so much fat in chocolate, so I would never take more than one line. Now she pours the entire cake itself. She just stuffs them with it. She already is a bit fat as it is. Maybe I should take a few lines, just so she does not gorge herself all over the cake and become fat like an American. But on the other hand, she's just less attractive in the market then. Then she can sit there in a dull second in some suburbs and take care of our children. She thinks some eat the whole cake at once. It looks disgusting crap out. She does this to tease me, or what it is. It can not be that she thinks it's good with a whole bar of chocolate in your mouth at once. In itself becomes the caries attack shorter, but it teaches well she shit in. What the hell, now she sneezed also the shit out of the dashboard. It looks the shit out disgusting. Should I scold her now? I say somewhat sarcastically instead: - Mia darling, was the chocolate was good? "

Appropriations two where she tells her eyes, tells your brain and tells cairns:

"A third of a chocolate bar, then you have to run well at least three kilometres, she thinks before two lines to go into the mouth. They were pretty easy to get in for the other pieces had already melted into a batter. The batter smears all over your mouth. Stefan still does not look in her direction. Maybe she would ask if he wanted, just before she put the last line of the mouth. Just like that Ulrika had made when she was little. He would not get more than a line in any case. It felt good to do something so useless. As like spanking myself. The two last rows of chocolate have just started softened, and then it starts to tickle the nose. You can not stop it. She can not even count to five, which still had not been the case before she sneezes so that it becomes brown chocolate thoughtfully across her side of the dashboard. It looks really nasty out. As if someone had defecated on it. Stefan looks at her, but he says nothing. But he looks at least scowl. After looking for a while on the dashboard, he asks if the chocolate was good. Mia nods, but Stefan does not see it right then he looks down the road."

## From the outside

### Objectively

Anyone who uses "objective" descriptions should describe the essence of the event, as in a newspaper article. And use the proper language, with appropriate term for the phenomena's depicted.

"Early on Easter Sunday morning, just as the business class passengers on the SK901 has got a light meal served before the approach to Newark, a fire bomb was thrown through the living room window of a house in Charlottenlund. The villa is owned by the head of a pharmaceutical company that uses tests conducted on laboratory animals in England. A BBC documentary has recently revealed that the animals live under miserable, indeed barbaric conditions and are subjected to extreme suffering. "Stop animal testing!" And "A taste of your own medicine!" Reads the flyer found outside the house, which fortunately was empty because the director and his family had travelled to Mallorca on Easter holiday. Large parts of the living room are burned, but the fire department, which is alerted by an early morning newspaper delivery man, quickly gets control over the fire. There are no other witnesses or trace of the perpetrators, but the ochre yellow walls are spray painted with meter-high letters saying green guerrilla. The director, a modern bellwether of humanistic philosophy and high ethical profile, want despite the shocking notification not to dramatize "the event" and would have neither the police nor the press involved. But the police are already looking "very seriously" on the case, and the press, well, the witness was newspaper. So Cats strategy works - the new strategy provide much greater coverage in the media than to free minks. Jyllands-Posten places the story on the front page. Yet it has barely begun."

From **"The crown princess"** by **Hanne-Vibeke Holst**.

### Through the dialogue

In some novels, the events consist mostly of someone saying something to another person. Then it can be effective to build the events around the dialogue, such as in the following two examples. Note how the author, in the first example, has added some descriptive words for each "he said" or "she asked."

""Hi, honey, "she said and walked over and kissed him with her coat on."I was afraid you would have gone to bed!"

"Of course I have not!" He said, stroking her hair out of her face.

"You must be very tired."

"Absolutely, but also turned up," she said, straightened up and looked out over the living room. Even there it was flowers everywhere.

"Who are they from?" She asked overwhelmed.

"All sorts. Your mom, my parents, your sister and brother in law, your friends, old boyfriends, the neighbour under us, the neighbour on top, the housing association, the children's nursery .... I have borrowed a lot of vases. "

"God how touching!" She exclaimed, and fell down at the other end of the couch."

From **"The crown princess"** by **Hanne-Vibeke Holst**.

"- 4251 Archer Street, said Meyer. We ask the first traffic constable we catch sight of.

It took ten blocks before they saw any police. They ran up to him and asked for Archer Street.

- Archer Avenue, you mean?

- Yes. I guess so.

- Tell me then what the hell you mean. And run over to the curb! You block traffic!

- We just wanted to know....

- I've already heard what you wanted to know. Are you trying to pick a quarrel?

- No officer, said Meyer. "

From **"Hate"** by **Ed McBain**.

# Dialogue

Some books are very dialogue-based while others are almost entirely without dialogue. An example of the former type is "**The crown princess**", which at times almost entirely consists of dialogue, while "**The new land**" is an example of the latter. Moberg's book contains no more than an average of about three comments/statements per page. The rest of the text primarily describes events and what the various characters are thinking.

Which is best depends on what kind of story it is. If there is a story that resembles a movie and it takes place over a finite period of time, makes it very suitable to have much dialogue. In some cases, if it is about one main character, you may include "everything" that is said. It is quite common in some thrillers in which you get to follow a protagonist both in personal and professional life during the short period that the criminal investigation is ongoing.

A dialogue characterized either by writing what each of the conservators says (see quote below) or by describing the conversation. Additionally both ways could, of course, be combined. One thing that is important in the first case is that what is said reflects the image of the speaker that you want to form. In the latter case, however, the summary shall be in line with the set-up.

" Grönkvist walked up to one of the pillars. He found a box with three buttons above the other. At the top there was a keyhole with a key in. The middle button was big and red. It was clearly an emergency stop button.

- Wait, screamed Sten, there might be some footprints or fingerprints there.
- What, you think it's a murder or something? Haven't you a little too much imagination. Just because you happened to stumble on two homicide investigations it's actually still not usual.
- Well, you never know, it seems like a rather strange accident, don't you think?
- Okay, we put barrier tape around the area with these buttons too, but I've already been there once with barrier tape, just so you know.
- However, we have to fucking lift the truck. Objected the doctor.
- I can stand at a distance pushing with this rod lying here on the floor.
- Damn, does not touch it, said Sten. Maybe it's very important information on the rod there. He might have done suicide.
- It's called committing suicide. Enlightened the doctor in a serious way.
- Thanks! Sten responded visibly irritated."

From "**The truck lift**" by **Fredrik Andersson**.

If the previous dialogue was described in text, it could look like this:

"The uniformed policeman was eager to try the lifting device. But he was stopped by Sten, which in pretty upset terms pointed out that it could mean that he spoiled any traces, such as fingerprints, from a possible perpetrator. The policeman questioned Sten's hints that maybe a crime had been committed, because it seldom a crime behind deaths. Sten persevered and pointed out that the fact that the accident seemed rather strange. The police officer thought that it was best to obey Sten, but he hastened to, in a snide tone, tell Sten that he probably already had destroyed some of the potential evidence by walking in the area in question. Then the doctor entered into the conversation by, in an irritated way, saying that they promptly should lift up the truck so that the corpse could be examined. The officer suggested that they should operate the truck lift with an iron bar that happened to lie nearby.

Sten stopped him by, with some irritation in his voice, saying that it would be unwise because it could be valuable traces of an offender on the iron bar. He in the same time fired a theory that the deceased himself may have used the bar to reach the controls while he lay under one of the truck's wheels. The sloppy way Sten expressed his thought led the doctor to give him a short lesson in the Swedish language."

It could certainly be done in a much more palatable way, but regardless of how it is written, it will probably be more tiring to read than an ordinary dialogue. As a dialogue can summarize pretty much of a person's



state of mind in words such as "he shouted." In addition, the words different people use says a lot about themselves, their mood and the situation in general. Finally, the text becomes more varied because the author can (and should) let different people speak in different ways.

The greatest risk with including a lot of dialogue is that it can become tedious, everything that is said doesn't need to be in dialogue form. There should be an object for each replica, so remove the replicas that do not add anything. For example, the dialogue:

- Hello you! The man waved happily.
- Stina waved back and returned the greeting in the same clamping cheeky way:
- Well hello to you old rascal!
- Good to see you, it was a long time ago!
- Yes, it really was!
- How are you?
- I feel good how about you?

With advantageously could be replaced by "They exchanged greetings and polite phrases about their health before the man asked her if ...."

In some novels, comments begin and end with quotes , i.e.: “ sign. While they in others start with: “-“, as in the examples below.

- "- So?
- The diagnosis is largely positive. Good news.
- Huh?
- Gunvald Larsson looked so stunned that he almost seemed dangerous and the doctor hastened to say:
- Yes, if he had been alive, of course. Pretty good news.
- What does that mean?
- That he had been able to recover.
- Blomberg thought about it and modified the statement.
- Well, relatively restored in all cases."

From "**The man on the roof**" by **Maj Sjöwall** and **Per Wahlöö**.

Previous dialogue would quotes look like this:

- “”So?”
- “The diagnosis is largely positive. Good news.”
- “Huh?”
- Gunvald Larsson looked so stunned that he almost seemed dangerous and the doctor hastened to say:
- “Yes, if he had been alive, of course. Pretty good news.”
- “What does that mean?”
- “That he had been able to recover.”
- Blomberg thought about it and modified the statement.
- “Well, relatively restored in all cases.””

I think it becomes cluttered with quotes, furthermore it becomes somewhat confusing when you want to indicate that a sentence is a quotation.

It is not necessary that the people in the story express themselves in the way that real people would have done in the same situation. The key difference is often that the replicas are shorter than they are in a real conversation. This is in order to not to confuse the readers and to maintain the tempo in the text. Here is a dialogue taken from the "**To whom the bells tolls**" by **Ernest Hemmingway**. It is probably not so likely that two people in their situation in real life would have talked like this, but it is very beautiful and erotic, I think. And it creates a much more romantic and charged atmosphere than what a genuine dialogue would have done.

"- But there has been something done to me.

- By who?

- By several.

Now she lay quite still, as if the body was dead and turned her head away.

- Now you can not love me any more.

- I love you, he said.

But something had happened to him and she knew it.

- No, she said, and her voice had become lifeless and thin. You can not love me. But you might want to take me to the home. And so I go to the home and I will never be your woman and nothing.

- I love you, Mary.

- No. It's not true, she said. And then she came to the last, miserable and hopeful:

- But I've never kissed a man.

- So kiss me now.

- I wanted to do all the time, she said. But I do not know how to do. Where there was where they did something, there I struggled against until I saw nothing. I fought until - until - until one sat on my head - and I bet him - and then they tied my mouth and held my arms behind my head - and then there were others who did something to me.

- I love you, Mary, he said. And no one has done anything to you. You, you no one can touch. No one has touched you, little bunny.

- Do you believe it?

- I know that.

- Can you love me? And again was warm to him now.

- I can love you more.

- I'll try to kiss you real good.

- Kiss me a little.

- I do not know how to do.

- Just kiss me.

She kissed him on the cheek.

- No."

Often it is quite clear who is saying what, especially if the replicas are short, but sometimes it must be described. The basic variant of this is, of course, "he /she said" (provided that persons have different sexes). But it gets boring pretty quickly. The most common variation is to switch to using the persons names, or a clearly distinctive characteristic such as "boy" and "man." The word "said" can advantageously be altered with other words like: whispered, moaned, screamed, yelled, etc. In addition, the text can be varied by sometimes, before the replica, write who is going to say it, for example:

"He looked into her eyes and whispered slowly:

- I love you!"

Instead of:

"- I love you! He whispered slowly as he looked into her eyes."

The confusion regarding who says what becomes much bigger if there are more than two people conversing. In this situation, one is often forced to after each replica tell who uttered it. Then it might not at all be possible to use the "he said/she", as all may be men or women. The basic rule is then to use the names. But it will obviously pretty quickly get tedious. A common alternative is to find other determinations for some people, such as in the following example in which one of the players called the "police officer" while the main characters "Gunvald Larsson" and "Kollberg" are called by their names:

"- Get on them boys, commanded the police in command. Now enough is enough.

More white batons were drawn and became visible.

- Stop, roared Gunvald Larsson with his stentorian voice.

All activity ceased.

Gunvald Larsson stepped forward and said:

- What is it about?

- I clear the area in front of the roadblock, said the older of the two police men.

The gold stripe around his sleeve showed that he was a first police assistant.

- But this is fucking nothing to block, Gunvald Larsson said angrily.

- No Hult, said Kollberg."

It is usually better that people in the dialogue does something that shows their feelings than to write that they are in a certain state of mind.

"- Fucking asshole! She said and slammed the door."

Sounds better than:

"- Fucking asshole! She said angrily."

# Inner monologue

What often distinguishes different fictional stories from each others the most is how the characters thoughts are described. Incidentally, the story might pretty thin, but the characters reflections make it big and exciting. And opposite: a fantastic scenario without reflections can become sluggish. However, there is hardly any novel that has no reflections from the characters. At least sometimes the author switches from describing a phenomenon to describe how a character is experiencing this "the car looked almost blue in the weak evening sun," or something similar.

In some stories the author has obviously tried to create an internal monologue that is about how people in general think. The aim was perhaps to give the reader a wise message. In other (less common) the author strives for to reflect how a real person would be thinking in the same situation. The latter is unusual for several reasons, but the main one is probably that a real chain of thought would be too long and messy for someone to be able to read it. Descriptions of internal monologues are therefore usually a summary<sup>1</sup> and more rarely printed in its entirety. Take for example the following three examples. The first describes the main characters thoughts without telling the actual thoughts. The second is more specific, without being literally described. The third may give the impression that the whole thought is literally described (it is just part of the reasoning that is quoted here).

- <sup>1</sup> If there is a summary of the thoughts, it is, of course, the telling brain that has made it and then his/her shape fits the best. But if it is the whole chain of thoughts that are written it might just as well be I shape (as in the third example).

"He was walking in stocking feet back and forth, between the window and the door in the narrow house and gathered all his attention on tomorrow's future work; arranged chores in his head, handed them; countered objections in advance, overcame obstacles, and after one hour of work, he had peace and rest in his head, now felt thoroughly and aligned as a passbook in which all records have been inserted in its place and summed up, so that one in a moment could see the score."

From "**Hemsöborna**" by **August Strindberg**.

"If one could possibly suggest a visit to Skrattars or if she has to settle with Nordmark. The older Nordmark boys called her Kladda and Lellfarmora and it was certainly sneer. But their imagination was not enough to find new annoyances."

From "**Hjortronlandet**" by **Sara Lidman**.

"It actually seems to be so, I said to myself while my eyes wandered from the lower lip to the lower lip through the room, all the less sympathetic properties of the human animal, pride, greed, gluttony, debauchery and all the others, was clearly announced in that little brink of red skin. But you have to know the code."

From the short story "**The wife change**" by **Roald Dahl**.

# Introductions

Some think that the first sentences of a novel are especially important. Maybe it's not uncommon for writers to agonize long before these, in their opinion, important sentences.

For those who find it difficult to get past the beginning of the novel, it can be a smart move to start, for example, in the middle of the story, or when things start to happen. Thus rounding the problem with that the decisions about how to start and about the set-up must otherwise be taken simultaneously. With this arrangement, both the introduction and the set-up may emerge by themselves. It doesn't do so much if it's a few pages that are a little un-stringent in the middle of the text.

To continue elsewhere in the story, I think, incidentally, is a trick that works in all situations when I have stalled and is getting nowhere. Then I go on to describe an event, an indefinite number of pages further on in the story. It does not matter exactly what happens in the event or if it is linked to the rest of the story. Just if the set-up is the same, I usually mix it with the rest of the story soon enough. And if that doesn't work, it's not so bad if I have to delete it. I have at least been relieved from the situation where I came nowhere and instead continued to write (which is fun).

Some introductions are a bit cryptic and mysterious, like this:

"No month, can as January last for eternity.

Thus it begins. Late in the evening he sits with the old play. In the circle of light over the desk the characters are brought forward. They live and speak. Love, suffer and die for his pen and the world out there in his own winter darkness is neither clearer nor more permanent than theirs, but precisely even the same. Just evenly. As also is intended. Such is the idea of the play. Bewitched and enclosed he bends over the table - encased in heavy insight, ignoring the black pain that runs like a vague recollection down the spine. Dipping the pen in inkwell, feel the heat from the lamp over the back of the hand. The pen against the paper; balancing on words, on the razor sharp edge between reality and reality."

From "**The fly and eternity**" by **Håkan Nesser**.

The story's protagonist should be presented fairly early in the story, otherwise there is a risk that the reader starts liking the wrong person. It is often useful to begin the story when the main character encounters something that changes his life. As in this piece of text that begins with the protagonist's journey to the place of drama.

"He came like a storm on an April evening with a Höganäs jar in a belt around his neck. Clara and Lotten were there with the rowboat to pick him up at Dalarö, but it took ages before they came in the boat. They would go to the tradesman and have a barrel of tar and to the pharmacy to buy a lotion for the pig, and then they would go to the post office to get a stamp, and then they would go down to Fia Lövström to borrow the rooster and finally, they had ended up at the inn, where Carlsson invited them for coffee and cake."

From "**Hemsöborna**" by **August Strindberg**.

Many stories, however, have not such an obvious event to begin with. Then they can instead begin with an anecdotal description of the main character, which **Sara Lidman** did in the story "**Hjortronlandet**".

"Franz was as successful as a crofter that the neighbours occasionally called him a farmer.

But early in his life, perhaps before he was born, he had suffered any injustice that has never ceased to fret him. He could not, like the neighbours, settle with the circumstances as a crofter as a fully valid reason to be angry, there was another reason that applied only to him. It is difficult to have forgotten why, when resentment squeaks and hisses.

He had been newly married when he came to Ön and with a woman who brought horse, cow and house wares. Instead of having a baby, she had carried stones. She was the crofter wife that the state commissioners must have dreamed of as their tenants but never dared to describe in any contract."

Alternatively, the story can begin with a proclamation of what kind of history it is and who it is telling it, as in this example:

"If you really want to hear this story, you probably expect that I should start by saying where I was born, how shitty my childhood was, what my parents were doing before I came into the world and such drivel, as in David Copperfield, but I do not feel like it. Firstly, I am so tired of it, and secondly my parents would have a stroke if I revealed anything about their private lives. They are very sensitive on this point, especially my father."

"I will begin to tell you about the day I left Pencey Prep. Pencey Prep is thus a school in Agerstown, Pennsylvania. You've probably heard of it."

From "**Catcher in the rye**" by **JD Salinger**.

It is not obvious that the novel begins with the start of the process that is to be portrayed. Take the story in which Mats and the unfaithful wife, it is also reasonable that the story begins when he met her. Or maybe it starts when his father is unfaithful to his mother, or ...

Say we start when Mats meets her at the university. Then one pretty soon realize that either it will be a long haul until the excitement begins. Or a sharp jump in the history from teenagers in love to the occasion when he finds her in bed. If one instead would start when Mats walk through the door and finds his wife in bed, the risk would be great that the reader gets a little too overwhelmed. Who should the reader sympathize with?

I think that if the story is about Mats revenge, it would be appropriate to start with a few pages about him, for the reader to understand that it is he who is the main character. Then to present the problem (his wife is unfaithful), then ....

The story would then certainly be improved by that that the author occasionally added flashbacks from their life together. Mats maybe wonder if she has stopped loving him. Has she ever done it and so on. In such inner monologues it is probably very suitable to write about things like the first time he saw her.

# Checklist

- Do not poke and modify your text before you have finish typing the whole story, or at least finished a section. Otherwise, it's easy to get stuck and thus never become ready.

- Wait a few days before you go through what you have written. Then try to read it as if you've never seen it before, in that way it may be easier to see the shortcomings.

1. Set-up, check that:

- You haven't accidentally changed the set-up somewhere.

2. Spelling

- Remember that word processing program, such as "Word", does not select the words that appear in the program's dictionary. Which means that the wrong word is spelled correctly.

- It is easy to make double space sometimes. You can easily correct that, if you use "Word", and with the function "Replace" replace all double spaces with simple ones, i.e. "\_\_" is replaced with "\_".

3. The language, check that:

- It is a proper mix of long and short sentences. Remember that when it's exciting, it is often useful to have more short sentences.

- Several sentences in sequence do not begin in the same way. If so, you should rearrange a bit.

- Not different tenses are accidentally mixed in one event.

- The words fit the situation.

- The words are not repeated too often. If so, consider synonyms that you can replace them with sometimes. Check in particular that it is not too tight between the words he/she. If so, you can:

- a. Replace a part of them with the word, as an example, for the body part that does something, such as "the hand closed around the handle" instead of "he gripped the handle."

- b. Replace some of them with his/her such as "Her eyes swept over the room" instead of "she looked around the room."

- c. Remove sentences.

- d. Remove the word he/she sometimes the sentences works anyway.

- e. Replace some of the he/she with the person's name or nickname.

4. The story, check if:

- There are longer pieces of text that do not add anything. If so, remove them.

- It is possible to understand why things happen. Otherwise: supplement.

- It has the potential to give the reader what you want it to provide, for example, excitement, humour, eroticism and romance.

5. Environments, check that:

- There aren't a lot of unnecessary environmental descriptions. Major events should probably have a better described scene than unimportant ones. Unless it is a very special place that the unimportant event takes place in.

- The environments are described in various ways.

- The descriptions match the intended observer (the telling eyes, brain and language). Otherwise modify.

6. Dialogue, check that:

- The reader will recognize themselves in how the different people talking. If an individual often use slang terms in the beginning he should probably continue to do so (unless there is a specific point in that he changes his way of speaking, which may be the case).

- All the people in the story are not using the same language.

- What the characters say fits with how they are described.

- The words fit the situation.

- It is possible to follow who says what. Sometimes you may need to add some "he said" or "she said" for the reader to keep up. But one should certainly not have such clarifications after each comment.

- There is not too much unnecessary dialogue.

7. People, check that:

- Someone have not accidentally changed name through the story.
- That it in every situation is clear to the reader which person it is about at the moment.
- Each person looks the same throughout history.
- All persons are described in different ways.
- That the character and personality traits that you want to front for each one are clear enough from the descriptions.
- Every person is described with just enough details so their character is visible for the reader. Everybody, or even not a single one, doesn't need to be described by appearance.

8. Events, check:

- That there are motives to include each one of the events described in the text.
- The length of the descriptions of the events. Pay particular attention to ensure that important events are not only been swept away in a couple of sentences. Or that there is a lot of unnecessary descriptions in the middle of an exciting event, which makes the reader lose momentum.
- The course of events seems credible.
- That it is possible to understand what is happening.