



Center for Writing and Speaking

F NO. 3 IN THE CENTER FOR WRITING AND SPEAKING HANDOUT SERIES

A Guide to Creative Writing

Embarking on a creative writing project can be a little daunting because it is so different from academic writing. If you follow certain guidelines, however, your experience—and your product—will be much more rewarding.

Read.

You have to be a good reader to be a good writer. Read anything and everything, because whether you notice it or not, you are collecting information on what you think does or does not constitute good writing. Every word you've read and every technique you've appreciated becomes a tool you can use.

Write.

Like every other skill, you'll get better and faster at writing the more often you practice writing. Take some time every day, if possible, to write. Your writing doesn't have to be perfect—in fact, being too focused on perfection can prevent you from learning how to revise your language and grow as a writer. Also, keep in mind that crossing genres, such as writing poetry if you usually write stories, can develop your skills in new ways.

Keep a journal or notebook.

Your writer's journal is a place for you to practice your writing in any way that feels right to you. You could write interesting ideas or things you'd like to remember, your responses to those things, notes to yourself, or even works in progress. Just like constant reading, constant writing gives you an expanded toolbox.

Show, don't tell.

Don't spell out what can be evoked with dialogue, imagery, or action. Revealing your subject through “showing” is almost always more effective in helping your audience connect more deeply with your writing.

Be aware of language conventions.

Grammar, spelling, punctuation, and usage remain important in any type of writing. Although it is common to bend these rules in creative writing, such usage should be intentional and serve a specific purpose. You have to be comfortable with the rules of language convention to know when and how to break them effectively.

Edit.

A work is very seldom finished the moment it's written. Always look at your writing as a work in progress, and continue to work at improving it; don't be afraid to make major revisions or even start over. Look at it from a different angle, or ask another person for advice—such as a Center for Writing and Speaking tutor. To be an effective (and publishable) creative writer, you must learn to be comfortable sharing your work with others. The purpose of creative writing, after all, is communication with others.

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