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TEACHING CYCLE 1:
ESTABLISHING AN EFFECTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR YEAR ONE WRITING STUDENTS

CONTEXT
In his useful digest of the distinctions between “deep” and “surface” approaches to learning, John Biggs stresses the effects of the pedagogical environment on students’ learning behaviour to the extent that, “surface and deep approaches to learning are not personality traits, as is sometimes thought, but reactions to the teaching environment” (Biggs 2003, 30). This cycle of innovation and reflection focuses on the classroom climate as the first ground in teaching to encourage students’ deep learning behaviour, characterised by Biggs as:

- teaching to *elicit* a positive response from students, e.g. by questioning or presenting problems, rather than teaching to *expound* information;
- teaching by building on what students already know;
- confronting and eradicating students’ misconceptions;
- assessing for structure rather than for independent facts;
- teaching and assessing in a way that encourages a positive working atmosphere, so students can make mistakes and learn from them;
- emphasizing depth of learning, rather than breadth of coverage;
- in general, and most importantly, using teaching and assessment methods that support the explicit aims and objectives of the course; this is known as ‘practising what you preach’. (Biggs, 17)

For Creative Writing, the “teaching environment” can claim an especially literal significance, since writing is conventionally taught through a ‘workshop’ format. In Aberystwyth this comprises a weekly two-hour seminar of around twelve students. Typically, a workshop involves critical discussion of students' work from the previous week, the introduction of a new element of technique, form or genre, close analysis and discussion of examples, an in-class writing exercise or low-stakes “practice”, and the setting of a more extended writing task for the following session (see appendices 1.1 – 1.7 for some examples of seminar plans from Part One writing modules).

PROBLEMS
1) Writing students, especially in Part One, often approach the workshop format with real trepidation, especially since it is one which they have seldom encountered before. They quite naturally find the idea of in-class writing and peer feedback from relative strangers awkward or intimidating, and are concerned about feeling personally “exposed” through their writing. Such anxieties can be extremely demotivating.

2) Because the workshop format is quite intensive, if a student misses a session it can be difficult for her to catch up properly in order to participate fully in the next session. This can lead to a feeling of apathy or alienation on the part of absentees,
or tension in the group as a whole, which makes a collaborative learning atmosphere difficult to maintain.

**PLAN FOR TEACHING INNOVATION**

Given the apparent significance of the classroom climate to learning behaviour, it seems important to establish a strong and supportive group dynamic as early as possible. The first session is therefore crucial. In this year’s Part One Writing teaching I decided to devote the *entire* first session to developing the group dynamic, with only one or two very ‘low-stakes’ writing exercises in class. Instead of glossing over or anticipating students’ concerns and expectations with a lengthy introductory talk, I invited the group to discuss them as freely as possible with each other and with me, so that a ‘Teaching/Learning Contract’ (or TLC, aptly enough) could be established between us by the end of the seminar. I felt that, within reason, I would be able to respond to the ‘character’ and needs of each group more accurately, the better to facilitate individuals’ learning. As Biggs points out, “The institutional climate is a given. We have to work within or around institutional requirements as best we may. As to the classroom climate, that is more under our control” (26). To this end, I structured the first writing class around the following activities:

1) Each student (and me) made a name card: these were to be kept by me and distributed at the beginning of every seminar. Not only did this make it easier for me to learn the students’ names, but it reduced their own embarrassment at addressing each other if names were forgotten.

2) Each person (including me) then wrote a brief piece (to be read aloud) about their name: where it came from, how they felt about it, any associations it held for them, etc. This helped us all to put names to faces, and invariably yielded some memorable and funny ‘icebreaker’ stories.

3) Each person (including me) then 'interviewed' their neighbour for five minutes, with a view to introducing that person to the group. I handed out examples of ‘personality profiles’ from the Sunday supplements to prompt interesting, but not too personal questions, along the lines of "how would you like to be remembered?" “who would you most like to meet from history?” etc. Again, this is just an icebreaker, but it often throws up interesting and unexpected connections between group members.

4) Handing out blank pieces of paper, I asked everyone to write answers to the following questions:
   - What do you hope to learn from this module?
   - What is your worst fear about this module?
   - What do you expect from a) yourself b) the rest of the group and c) the tutor?
I made it clear that these would be anonymous: all answers would be put in a hat and distributed randomly, so each student read aloud somebody else's answers. The ‘fears’ were, as I expected, quite consistent. Examples included:
   - ‘I won’t have anything to say or any good ideas’
   - ‘Everyone else will be better than me’
   - ‘I’ll realise I just can’t write’
   - ‘People will laugh when I read out my work’
   - ‘I’ll never get any better’
   - ‘I can’t write poetry’
   - ‘I’ll fail the course’
The consistency of these responses seemed to reassure students that they were, if not in exactly the same boat, certainly part of a close flotilla. I was then able to address their concerns, answer any outstanding questions, and outline my own expectations, my role as facilitator, and the formal requirements of the course. After a brief coffee-break, this led to:
5) A draft learning contract on the whiteboard, to be typed up by me when everyone was in agreement and distributed the following week, with the proviso that we would return to it midway through the module to check that it was still working and appropriate for the needs of the group (see appendix 1.8). This left enough time to begin the first writing exercise “proper” which would generate work for the following week's workshop.

REFLECTION
It is difficult to assess the effects of this innovation through directly quantitative means. However, both my own experiential reflection throughout the module, and students’ module evaluation forms (see appendix 1.9) suggest the following:

1) The supportive and informal atmosphere of the seminars was considered by students significant to their personal confidence, and subsequently to their class participation and learning. Arguably the overall improvement in grades between the first assessment in November 2002 and the second in January 2003 suggests a strong cognitive level of engagement (see appendix 1.10).

2) The mid-term review of the learning contract was useful in providing a structured but informal environment for students to raise ongoing concerns (the principal of these is addressed in Teaching Cycle 2).

3) During the inevitable mid-term 'slump' when attendance and participation became less than exemplary, it was helpful for me to be able to remind students that the contract was a two-way deal, and that it was difficult for me to support their learning effectively if they were skimping on preparation.

4) It transpired in the mid-term review that students sometimes failed to hand in weekly tasks (then often decided to miss the class altogether) because they hadn't managed to write 'finished' pieces. Because this was also an especially demanding time for them in terms of workloads across modules, we amended the learning contract so that students could (within reason) bring unfinished pieces to the workshop for discussion. In the event, this was a useful opportunity to remind them about the workshop's practical emphasis on the process of drafting, revising and editing rather than on the finished product. Indeed, some of the most lively debates in such sessions were about 'where to take this piece from here,' with the most helpful suggestions being made by other students.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT
I have found it very helpful in the long run to have invested so much of the introductory seminar in establishing a workable group dynamic. I intend to continue this strategy with Year One Writing courses, and to modify it slightly for Year Two and Three modules. Certainly an atmosphere which makes explicit the students’ expectations and anxieties, the parameters within which they will be working, and the
tutor’s role(s) and expectations right from the start makes it much easier to manage seminars and to motivate individuals toward deep and collaborative learning behaviour.
Part One Writing: Examples of Seminar Handouts

These examples are taken from the Year One Writers’ Art modules ‘A Beginner’s Guide to Technique’ and ‘Transpositions’. Part One writing tasks tend to be more tightly structured than Level 2 and 3 tasks (see Cycle 3 for examples). Generally I preface each one by asking students to consider out which aspects of the task draw on skills already practised, and which elements present a new challenge. Hopefully, this allows each student to feel more confident when approaching new work.
Module Identifier  WR10220
Module Title  WRITER'S ART 1: A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO TECHNIQUE
Academic Year  2003/2004
Co-ordinator  Dr Tiffany S Atkinson
Semester  Semester 1
Assessment  Students will present for assessment two 100% portfolios of creative work, one mid-term and one at the end of the semester, each with a word count of approximately 2500-3000 words (or approx. 10 pages of text, where poetry is included), each demonstrating an engagement with at least two literary forms or genres. The portfolios will be accompanied by a critical commentary, reflecting on the writing and editing process, of approximately 500 words. The module materials will set out the requirement for each of these in detail.
Supplementary Assessment  Resit any failed elements and/or make good any missing elements

Learning outcomes
By the end of the module, successful students will be able to:

- Negotiate the techniques and styles of their chosen genre(s).
- Structure their work with the needs of genre, reader, content and economy in mind.
- Manipulate and control their (literary) language(s).
- Demonstrate the acquisition of professional presentational skills appropriate to the level of the module.
- Contextualize their own writing and to reflect critically on their own writing process in the accompanying critical commentary.

Brief description
This module is a practical introduction to a range of techniques and styles in poetry and prose. It aims to give new writers a basic understanding of the craft of writing, and to work with confidence in a variety of forms and genres.

Content
Workshops: 10x2 hours
Outline of Weekly Programme: each week students will undertake a writing exercise on which they will receive feedback the following week.

1. The King Died: The Queen Died of Grief: Basic plotting, causality and denouement.

2. No Ideas But in Things: Showing and telling (direct/indirect exposition), effective use of images, detail etc.

3. Conflict and Tension: Building a more complex tone; pacing; having 'something at stake'.

4. Secrets: 'Seducing' the reader; techniques of concealment and revelation

5. Everything Happens Somewhere: Developing context, setting and atmosphere.

6. Surprises: Metaphor and defamiliarisation, risk-taking, going beyond the obvious in language, imagery, plot, character, perspective, etc.

7. Shrink and Expand: 'Long shot' and 'close up' techniques; temporality and pacing.

8. Say Something: Monologue and dialogue, different conventions for employing voice in prose and poetry.
9. Be Someone Else: Writing from unfamiliar subject positions, (eg. in age, gender, race, time, species); The limitations of 'actual experience' v. 'authentic' and well-observed imaginative writing.

10. Old Wine, New Bottles: Working from myth, legend, fairytale etc., 'writing back' using any of techniques practised throughout the module (preparation for 'Transpositions').

Select Bibliography: Workbooks (at least one will be recommended, and material provided in seminars)

Paul Mills, Writing in Action, Routledge 1996
Module Identifier: WR10120
Module Title: THE WRITER'S ART (2) 'TRANSPOSITIONS'
Academic Year: 2003/2004
Co-ordinator: Dr Tiffany S Atkinson
Semester: Semester 2
Co-Requisite: EN10320, EN10420
Course delivery: Other 20 Hours Workshop. (10 x two-hour workshops)
Assessment: Two transpositions, each 2500-3000 words, each 100% accompanied by an overall descriptive rationale and a text-specific annotation.

Learning outcomes

On the completion of this module students should typically be able to:
- recognize a range of literary genres and demonstrate an understanding of how they work;
- demonstrate an ability to write in a range of literary genres;
- demonstrate a developing critical awareness of their own writing practice;
- demonstrate an ability to express themselves clearly in writing and in speech.

Brief description

This module is based upon a series of writing tasks which involve 'transposing' a pre-existing piece of material in some way, either from one medium to another (for example, from picture to words), or from one genre to another (for example, from biblical story to thriller), or from one viewpoint to another (for example, from first-person narrative to third person 'omniscient narrator' style), and so on. The idea is to remove the burden and anxiety of conceiving plot and situation, so that technique and treatment can become the focus.

Outline of weekly programme

Weeks 1-2: From Picture to Words
Weeks 3-4: From Genre to Genre
Weeks 5-6: From Viewpoint to Viewpoint
Weeks 7-8: From Long to Short, from Short to Long
Weeks 9-10: From Then to Now

Workbook: The Creative Writing Handbook, John Singleton and Mary Luckhurst, 2nd ed, Macmillan 1999

Aims

This module aims to develop students' knowledge and understanding of a range of literary forms and genres, to develop their range and capabilities as writers, and to enable them to work with increasing confidence in a variety of forms and genres.
Proposed Changes to Part One English and Creative Writing, 2002-3

PD and TA propose that A Beginner’s Guide to Technique replace Transpositions as the first semester compulsory module, to be taught in 10 two-hour sessions. Transpositions would be taught as a second semester option module of 10 one-and-a-half hour sessions with a series of five fortnightly lectures.* We would recommend strongly that all English and Creative Writing students take it. Our experience of teaching Transpositions in the first semester suggests a need for more attention to style and technique than we can provide under the remit of this module. We feel that students’ writing potential would be better realised in Transpositions following a ‘foundation’ course in the elementary craft of writing. As a second semester module, Transpositions would also be complemented by the compulsory Genre module.

*Transpositions lectures:
1. Introduction: what is transposition? Example: from picture to words
2. From genre to genre
3. From viewpoint to viewpoint
4. From long to short/short to long
5. Adaptation and modernisation: from then to now

WR10120 The Writer’s Art (I): A Beginner’s Guide to Technique (10 x 2 hour seminar workshops)
(Double Module: 20 Credits)

Aims and Objectives
This module is a practical introduction to a range of techniques and styles in poetry, prose and monologue. It aims to give new writers a basic understanding of the craft of writing, and to work with confidence in a variety of forms and genres.

Learning Outcomes
On completion of this module, students should be able to:
1. Negotiate the techniques and styles of their chosen genre(s).
2. Structure their work with the needs of genre, reader, content and economy in mind.
3. Manipulate and control their (literary) language(s).
4. Present their work to a professional standard, that is, to a standard normally required by agents and publishers when considering work for possible publication.
5. Contextualize their own writing and to reflect critically on their own writing process in the accompanying critical commentary.

Brief Description
This module is organised thematically around the formal and technical issues which typically confront the inexperienced writer. Each thematic section is largely applicable across all genres, and will be illustrated through a variety of weekly practical writing exercises. The workshop format enables students to learn how to give and receive constructive criticism, and to editing and revise their own work throughout the module, prior to its presentation for assessment.
Assessment

Students will present for assessment two portfolios of creative work, each with a word count of approximately 2500-3000 words (or approx. 10 pages of text, where poetry is included), each demonstrating an engagement with at least two literary forms or genres (outcomes 1-4). The portfolios will be accompanied by a critical commentary, reflecting on the writing and editing process, of approximately 300 words (outcome 5). The module materials will set out the requirement for each of these in detail.

Workbooks (at least one will be recommended, and materials provided in seminars)


**PART ONE DRAFT CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING WRITING**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>70-100</td>
<td>Excellent, original work. Demonstrates full control in the manipulation and use of language. Maturity of expression, dexterity in negotiation of style and technique. Demonstrates clear understanding of the possibilities of structure. Full control of observed detail and clearly demonstrates the ability to edit text. Excellent presentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>Good work. Shows a high level of skill in overall control of language, structure and detailed observation. Largely effective negotiation of style and technique. Good, careful presentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Inadequate work. Little evidence of control of language. Insufficient knowledge of structure, style and technique. Poor presentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-29</td>
<td>Fail. Inadequate understanding and use of language. Unsatisfactory grasp of structure. Total dependence on cliché and/or archaisms and generalities. Unacceptable presentation.</td>
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</tbody>
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The Writer's Art 1: Plotting

• Think of some of your favourite stories. What makes them work? What are the essential ingredients?

• In *Aspects of the Novel*, E.M. Forster defines a story as 'a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence.' A plot, he writes, is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality. 'The king died and then the queen died' is a story. 'The king died, and then the queen died of grief' is a plot. The time-sequence is preserved, but then the sense of causality overshadows it. Or again, 'The queen died, no one knew why, until it was discovered that it was through grief at the death of the king.' This is a plot with a mystery in it, a form capable of high development. It suspends the time-sequence, it moves as far away from the story as its limitations will allow. Consider the death of the queen. If it is in a story we say 'and then?' If it is in a plot we ask 'why?'

• Read Guy de Maupassant's story, 'The String' (overleaf).

What motivates the main character and his actions?

What is the effect of each of his actions?

What conflicts are present in the story?

Is there any resolution of denouement at the end?

• Plot and write your own story: you could try the following--

Write a narrative account of a short part of your day: begin at some point where your clear wish or need meets an obstacle; leave the narrative where you think it should end: this could be angry frustration, or resolution. Whether or not you end up embellishing or fictionalising, this is a simple linear plot.

What is your earliest memory of something or someone that changed?

Choose someone you know and use them as a character to motivate a story. Think of their needs, desires, environment, etc. What could the character do, or have done to him/her to generate a piece of action?
A long all the roads around Goderville the peasants and their wives were coming towards the little town, for it was market-day. The men walked with plodding steps, their bodies bent forward at each thrust of their long bowed legs. They were deformed by hard work, by the pull of the heavy plough which raises the left shoulder and twists the torso, by the reaping of the wheat which forces the knees apart to get a firm stand, by all the slow and strenuous labors of life on the farm. Their blue smocks, starched, shining as if varnished, ornamented with a little design in white at the neck and wrists, puffed about their bony bodies, seemed like balloons ready to carry them off.

From each smock a head, two arms, and two feet protruded. Some led a cow or a calf at the end of a rope, and their wives, walking behind the animal, whipped its haunches with a leafy branch to hasten its progress. They carried on their arms large wicker-baskets, out of which here a chicken and there a duck thrust forth its head. The women walked with quicker, livelier step than their husbands. Their spare, straight figures were wrapped in a scanty little shawl, pinned over their flat bosoms, and their heads were enveloped in a piece of white linen tightly pressed on the hair and surmounted by a cap.

Then a wagon passed, its nag’s jerky trot shaking up and down two men seated side by side and a woman in the bottom of the vehicle, the latter holding on to the sides to lessen the stiff jolts.

The square of Goderville was filled with a milling throng of human beings and animals. The horns of the cattle, the rough-napped top-hats of the rich peasants, and the headgear of the peasant women stood out in the crowd. And the clamorous, shrill, shouting voices made a continuous and savage din dominated now and again by the robust lungs of some countryman’s laugh, or the long lowing of a cow tied to the wall of a house.

The scene smacked of the stable, the dairy and the dung-heap, of hay and sweat, and gave forth that sharp, unpleasant odor, human and animal, peculiar to the people of the fields.

Maitre Hauchecorne, of Bréauté, had just arrived at Goderville. He was directing his steps toward the square, when he perceived upon the ground a lit-
the piece of string. Maître Hauchecorne, economical like a true Norman, thought that everything useful ought to be picked up, and he stooped painfully, for he suffered from rheumatism. He took up the bit of string from the ground and was beginning to roll it carefully when he noticed Maître Malandain, the harness-maker, on the threshold of his door, looking at him. They had once had a quarrel on the subject of a halter, and they had remained on bad terms, being both good hatters. Maître Hauchecorne was seized with a sort of shame to be seen thus by his enemy, picking a bit of string out of the dirt. He hid his find quickly under his smock, and slipped it into his trouser pocket; then he pretended to be still looking on the ground for something which he did not find, and he went towards the market, his head thrust forward, bent double by his pain.

He was soon lost in the noisy and slowly moving crowd, which was busy with inextricable bargainings. The peasants looked at cows, went away, came back, perplexed, always in fear of being cheated, not daring to decide, watching the vendor’s eye, ever trying to find the trick in the man and the flaw in the beast.

The women, having placed their great baskets at their feet, had taken out the poultry, which lay upon the ground, tied together by the feet, with terrified eyes and scarlet crests.

They listened to offers, stated their prices with a dry air and impassive face, or perhaps, suddenly deciding on some proposed reduction, shouted to the customer who was slowly going away: “All right, Maître Anthime, I’ll let you have it for that.”

Then little by little the square was deserted, the church bell rang out the hour of noon, and those who lived too far away went to the different inns.

At Jourdain’s the great room was full of people eating, and the big yard was full of vehicles of all kinds, gigs, wagons, nondescript carts, yellow with dirt, mended and patched, some with their shafts rising to the sky like two arms, others with their shafts on the ground and their backs in the air.

Behind the diners seated at table, the immense fireplace, filled with bright flames, cast a lively heat on the backs of the row on the right. Three spits were turning on which were chickens, pigeons, and legs of mutton; and an appetizing odor of roast meat and gravy dripping over the nicely browned skin rose from the fireplace, lightening all hearts and making the mouth water.

All the aristocracy of the ploughs ate there, at Maître Jourdain’s, tavern keeper and horse dealer, a clever fellow and well off.

The dishes were passed and emptied, as were the jugs of yellow cider. Everyone told his affairs, his purchases, and sales. They discussed the crops.

The weather was favorable for the greens but rather damp for the wheat.

Suddenly the drum began to beat in the yard, before the house. Everybody rose, except a few indifferent persons, and ran to the door, or to the windows, their mouths still full, their napkins in their hands.

After the public crier had stopped beating his drum, he called out in a jerky voice, speaking his phrases irregularly:

“It is hereby made known to the inhabitants of Goderville, and in general to all persons present at the market, that there was lost this morning, on the road to Benzeville, between nine and ten o’clock, a black leather pocketbook containing five hundred francs and some business papers. The finder is requested to return same to the Mayor’s office or to Maître Fortuné Houlbrèque of Manneville. There will be twenty francs’ reward.”

Then the man went away. The heavy roll of the drum and the crier’s voice were again heard at a distance.

Then they began to talk of this event discussing the chances that Maître Houlbrèque had of finding or not finding his pocketbook.

And the meal concluded. They were finishing their coffee when the chief of the gendarmes appeared upon the threshold.

He inquired:

“Is Maître Hauchecorne, of Bréauté, here?”

Maître Hauchecorne, seated at the other end of the table, replied:

“Here I am.”

And the officer resumed:

“Maître Hauchecorne, will you have the goodness to accompany me to the Mayor’s office? The Mayor would like to talk to you.”

The peasant, surprised and disturbed, swallowed at a draught his tiny glass of brandy, rose, even more bent than in the morning, for the first steps after each rest were specially difficult, and set out, repeating: “Here I am, here I am.”

The Mayor was waiting for him, seated in an armchair. He was the local lawyer, a stout, solemn man, fond of pompous phrases.

“Maître Hauchecorne,” said he, “you were seen this morning picking up, on the road to Benzeville, the pocketbook lost by Maître Houlbrèque, of Manneville.”

The countryman looked at the Mayor in astonishment, already terrified by this suspicion resting on him without his knowing why.

“Me? Me? I picked up the pocketbook?”

“Yes, you, yourself.”

“Oh my word of honor, I never heard of it.”

“But you were seen.”

“I was seen? Who says he saw me?”

“Monsieur Malandain, the harness-maker.”

The old man remembered, understood, and flushed.

“Ah, he saw me, the clodhopper, he saw me pick up this string, here, the Mayor.” And rummaging in his pocket he drew out the little piece of string.

But the Mayor, incredulous, shook his head.

“You will not make me believe, Maître Hauchecorne, that Monsieur Malandain, who is a man we can believe, mistook this string for a pocketbook.”

The peasant, furious, lifted his hand, spat at one side to attest his honor, repeating:

“It is nevertheless God’s own truth, the sacred truth. I repeat it on my soul and my salvation.”

The Mayor resumed:

“After picking up the object, you went on staring, looking a long while in the mud to see if any piece of money had fallen out.”
The old fellow choked with indignation and fear.

"How anyone can tell—how anyone can tell—such lies to take away an honest man’s reputation! How can anyone—"

There was no use in his protesting, nobody believed him. He was confronted with Monsieur Malandain, who repeated and maintained his affirmation. They abused each other for an hour. At his own request, Maître Hauchecorne was searched. Nothing was found on him.

Finally the Mayor, very much perplexed, discharged him with the warning that he would consult the Public Prosecutor and ask for further orders.

The news spread. As he left the Mayor’s office, the old man was surrounded and questioned with a serious or bantering curiosity, in which there was no indignation. He began to tell the story of the string. No one believed him. They laughed at him.

He went along, stopping his friends, beginning endlessly his statement and his protestations, showing his pockets turned inside out, to prove that he had nothing.

They said:

"Ah, you old rascal!"

And he grew angry, becoming exasperated, hot and distressed at not being believed, not knowing what to do and endlessly repeating himself.

Night came. He had to leave. He started on his way with three neighbors to whom he pointed out the place where he had picked up the bit of string; and all along the road he spoke of his adventure.

In the evening he took a turn in the village of Bréauté, in order to tell it to everybody. He only met with incredulity.

It made him ill all night.

The next day about one o’clock in the afternoon, Marius Paumelle, a hired man in the employ of Maître Breton, husbandman at Ymauville, returned the pocketbook and its contents to Maître Houlbréque of Manneville.

This man claimed to have found the object in the road; but not knowing how to read, he had carried it to the house and given it to his employer.

The news spread through the neighborhood. Maître Hauchecorne was informed of it. He immediately went the circuit and began to recount his story completed by the happy climax. He triumphed.

"What grieved me so much was not the thing itself, as the lying. There is nothing so shameful as to be placed under a cloud on account of a lie."

He talked of his adventure all day long, he told it on the highway to people who were passing by, in the inn to people who were drinking there, and to persons coming out of church the following Sunday. He stopped strangers to tell them about it. He was calm now, and yet something disturbed him without his knowing exactly what it was. People seemed to wink at him while they listened. They did not seem convinced. He had the feeling that remarks were being made behind his back.

On Tuesday of the next week he went to the market at Goderville, urged solely by the necessity he felt of discussing the case.

Malandain, standing at his door, began to laugh on seeing him pass. Why?
The Writer's Art 1: Voices/Monologue

Convincing dialogue isn't often how we imagine. People don't always answer each other properly, or even listen to each other. They interrupt, hesitate .... misunderstand, repeat themselves, repeat themselves, say their grammar wrong, use, like, informal diction, innit, swear all the bloody time, cliché till they're blue in the face, leave sentences unfinished and... Conversation doesn't follow a logical sequence. People jump from subject to subject, avoid some topics altogether, say one thing while meaning another, take ages to get to the point, etc etc. Listen in on conversations wherever you go. Make notes.

Much of the above also applies to monologue. Read the monologues overleaf.

- **What** does each person 'give away' about themselves: their fears, desires, past experiences, states of mind, views of themselves and the world, etc?
- **How** is this accomplished through the writing itself? Think of the language used, the turns of phrase, pacing, sentence structure, what is said and what is left unsaid, etc.

Write a monologue of your own, where everything important about the character is dramatised through what they say and how they say it. How they say it—their tone of voice, their pacing etc.—must be implicit in the writing itself: you cannot use stage directions ('she shakes her fist') or tagging ('she said angrily'). Read it aloud, or better still, get a friend to read it aloud to you, so you can test how it sounds.

NB. If you can write a good monologue, you are well on the way to writing good dialogue.
Talking Heads
Alan Bennett

Her Last Chance. Lesley's flat. Afternoon.

LESLEY. I know something about personality. There's a chapter about it in this book I'm reading. It's by an American. They're the experts where personality is concerned, the Americans; they've got it down to a fine art. It makes a big thing of interviews so I was able to test it out.

The director's not very old, blue suit, tie loose, sleeves turned back. I put him down as a university type. Said his name was Simon, which I instantly committed to memory. (That's one of the points in the book: purpose and use of name.) He said, 'Forgive this crazy time.' I said, 'I'm sorry, Simon.' He said, 'Like 9.30 in the morning.' I said, 'Simon. The day begins when the day begins. You're the director.' He said, 'Yes, well. Can you tell me what you've done?' I said, 'Where you may have seen me, Simon, is in Tess. Roman Polanski. I played Chloe. 'I don't remember her,' he said. 'Is she in the book?' I said, 'Book? This is Tess, Simon. Roman Polanski. Chloe was the one on the back of the farm cart wearing a shawl. The shawl was original nineteenth-century embroidery. All hand done. Do you know Roman, Simon?' He said, 'Not personally, no.' I said, 'Physically he's quite small but we had a very good working relationship. Very open.' He said that was good, because Travis in the film was very open. I said, 'Travis? That's an interesting name, Simon.' He said, 'Yes. She's an interesting character, she spends most of the film on the deck of a yacht.' I said, 'Yacht? That's interesting, Simon. My brother-in-law has a small power boat berthed at Ipswich.' He said, 'Well! Snap!' I said, 'Yes, small world!' He said, 'In an ideal world, Lesley, I'd be happy to sit here chatting all day but I have a pretty tight schedule and, although I know it's only 9.30 in the morning, could I see you in your bra and panties?' I said, '9.30 in the morning, 10.30 at night, we're both professionals, Simon, but,' I said, 'could we just put another bar on because if we don't you won't be able to tell my tits from goose-pimples.' He had to smile. That was another of the sections in the personality book: humour, usefulness of in breaking the ice.

When I'd got my things off he said, 'Well, you've passed the physical. Now the oral. Do you play chess?' I said, 'Chess, Simon? Do you mean the musical?' He said, 'No, the game.' I said, 'As a matter of fact, Simon, I don't. Is that a problem?' He said, 'Not if you water-ski. Travis is fundamentally an outdoor girl, but we thought it might be fun to make her an intellectual on the side.' I said, 'Well Simon, I'm very happy to learn both chess and water-skiing, but could I make a suggestion? Reading generally indicates a studious temperament and I'm a very convincing reader.' I said, 'because it's something I frequently do in real life.' I could tell he was impressed. And so I said, 'Another suggestion I could make would be to kit Travis out with some glasses. Spectacles, Simon. These days they're not unbecoming and if you put Travis in spectacles with something in paperback, that says it all.' He said, 'You've been most helpful.' I said, 'The paperback could be something about the environment or, if you want to maintain the water-skiing theme, something about water-skiing and the environment possibly. I mean, Lake Windermere.'

He was showing me out by this time but I said, 'One last thought, Simon, and that is a briefcase. Put Travis in a bikini and give her a briefcase and you get the best of every possible world.' He said, 'I'm most grateful. You've given me a lot of ideas.' I said, 'Goodbye, Simon. I hope we can work together.' The drill for saying goodbye is you take the person's hand and then put your other hand over theirs, clasp it warmly while at the same time looking into their eyes, smiling and reiterating their name. This lodges you in their mind apparently. So I did all that, only going downstairs I had another thought and I popped back. He was on the phone. 'You won't believe this,' he was saying. I said, 'Don't hang up, Simon, only I just wanted to make it crystal clear that when I said briefcase I didn't mean the old-fashioned type ones, there are new briefcases now that open up and turn into a mini writing-desk. Being an up-to-the-minute girl, that would probably be the kind of briefcase Travis would have. She could be sitting in a wet bikini with a briefcase open on her knee. I've never seen that on screen so it would be some kind of first.' Ciao, Simon. Take care.' (Pause.) That was last Friday. The book's got charts where you check your interview score. Mine was 75. Very good to excellent. Actually, I'm surprised they haven't telephoned.
The Rules of the Game
(IL GIUOCO DELLE PARTI)

Pirandello 1918
translated & adapted by David Hare 1992

At the request of his wife Silla, Leone has lived alone for three years
with his books and his cooking, allowing her some freedom. He
visits her for half an hour each evening, though he never goes up the
stairs. This evening, Silla is at home with her lover, Guido. When
her husband arrives, she asks him to come up, leaving Guido to face
him alone. Guido finds Leone unnerving: 'You insist on behaving as
if you don't exist. Which is extremely confusing and utterly
pointless'.

LEONE
You're right. Of course. I ought not to exist. In fact I
promise you that I do my utmost to exist as little as possible.
Not just for other peoples' benefit but for my own. But the
blame goes back a very long way. Back to the very fact I
was born. There we are. I'm imprisoned for life. I exist. It's
a fact. Other people should take that much into account
because there's nothing I can do. I'm on earth. At least for a
while. I married Silla. Or, rather, let's be accurate, I let her
marry me. Another fact: another prison. What can you do?
Almost at once she became unhappy, she started
to complain, to fret, to panic, to twist. Guido, I tell you, she
was desperate to escape. And I ... I promise you, you must
believe me ... I was deeply hurt. Then we hit on this
solution. I left her here with everything. I just took
my books and my saucepans. Life without saucepans, Guido:
unthinkable. But I know it's no good. I am stuck with my
role. I married her. It's a fact. My part is: the husband.
Perhaps people should take that into account also.
However.

(there is a pause)
You know how it is with the blind? The blind are never
next to anything. If you tell a blind man who's feeling
round for something, "you've got it there, just beside you," he'll
immediately turn his whole body to face it. And that
woman is like that. She's never alongside you. She's always
away...
The Writer’s Art 1: Everything Happens Somewhere

Nothing happens in a vacuum. Don’t forget to include a sense of place, atmosphere, bodily presence, texture in your work. Look for examples that you find effective in other people’s writing. The following is an exercise in creating a sensory experience for the reader that is real, immediate, intense.

Think of a place that has special significance for you.

Locate yourself in it. How old are you? Why are you there? Who is with you?

How do you feel, what is your posture like, where exactly are you?

What are you wearing?

· Describe the quality of the light
· the temperature
· the weather

You reach out and touch something. What is it?

· How does it feel?
· What associations does it have?

What can you hear?

· What can you smell?

Who or what else has been there before you? How do you know?

Now you leave. On the way out, you turn and look back. What do you see?

On your way out have taken something to remind you of this place. What is it?

Now write a poem or short piece of prose using this material. You must include five of the following:

· a person’s name
· a brand name
· a place name
· a childhood word
· something that needs inverted commas (“…”)
· an item of clothing
· evidence of the season

Now take out half of the adjectives. Take out all the abstract nouns. And it should go without saying that Clichés and Lazy Language of any kind are forbidden.
The Writer's Art 1: Be Something Else!

One of the best ways to change your habitual views on the world is to write from the perspective of something non-human (sometimes even inanimate). Consider how the poems below manage to capture their subject's 'animalness'.

Choose an animal that especially appeals to you from the Natural World Photography exhibition at the Arts Centre. Write a poem from its perspective. Forget your own human perspective. What motivates and drives and preoccupies your animal? How does it think? How does it experience the world, etc? (you may need to do some research). Feel free to be experimental and surprising in language, form, imagery, etc.

Mary Szerszynski

Waterbird

Part otter, part snake, part bird the bird Anhinga,\(^3\)

divisive wings, draped open, dry. When slack-hinged, the wind flips them shut. Her cry,
a slatted clatter, inflates her chin-pouch; it's like a fish's swim-bladder. Anhinga's body, otter-furry, floats, under water-mosses, neck a snake with white-rimmed blue round roving eyes. Those long feet stilt-paddle the only bird of the marsh that flies submerged. Otter-quick over bream that hover in water-shade, she seeds, finds fillets among the water-weeds. Her beak, ferrule of a folded black umbrella, with neat thrust impales her prey. She flaps up to dry on the crooked, look-dead-limb of the Gumbo Limbo,\(^4\) her tan-tipped wing fans spread, tail a shut fan dangled.

Eric Ormsby

Starfish

The stellar sea crawler, maw
Concealed beneath, with offerings of
Prismed crimson now darkened, now like
The smile of slag, a thing made rosy
As poured ingots, or suddenly dimmed—

I appreciate the studious labour
Of your rednesses, the scholarly fragrance
Of your sex. To mirror tidal drifts

The light ripples across or to enhance darkness
With palpable tinctures, dense as salt.

You crumble like a puppet's fist
Or erect, bristling, your tender luring barbs.
Casual abandon, like a dropped fawn glove.
Tensile symmetries, like a hawk's claw.

You clutch the seafloor.

You taste what has fallen.

To Shapcott

Goat

Dusk, deserted road, and suddenly
I was a goat. To be truthful, it took
two minutes, though it seemed sudden,
for the horns to pop out of my skull,
for the spine to revolutionize and go horizontal, for the fingers to glue together and for the nails to become important enough to upgrade to hoof.
The road was not deserted any more, but full of goats, and I liked that, even though I hate the rush hour on the tube, the press of bodies. Now I loved sniffing behind his or her ear, licking a flank or two, licking and snuffling here, there, wherever I liked. I lived for the push of goal muscle and goat bone, the smell of goat fur, goat breath and goat sex. I ended up on the edge of the crowd where the road met the high hedgerow with the scent of earth, a thousand kinds of grass, leaves and twigs, flower-heads and the intoxicating tang of the odd ring-pull or rubber to spice the mixture. I wanted to eat everything. I could have eaten the world and closed my eyes to nibble at the high sweet leaves against the sunset. I tasted that old sun and the few dark clouds and some tall buildings far away in the next town. I think I must have swallowed an office block because this grinding enormous digestion tells me it's stuck on an empty corridor which has at the far end, I know, a tiny human figure.
From Long to Short

In this exercise you will explore the poetic possibilities of a prose story. Coleridge said that prose was words in the best order, but poetry the *best* words in the best order.

Think about what you consider important to poetry. What can it do that a prose story can’t do? What do you want to be able to do in a poem?

Read the stories over the page. Choose one, and with a partner, discuss the aspects of the story which most interest you: this could be character, plot, an arresting image, a detail of a scene, an emotional tone, a moment of revelation, etc. Use the story as the basis for a poem, in a style of your choice. Make it your own.

What makes a poem? Consider the following:
- The layout of the poem on the page
- The division into lines and use of line-breaks
- The use (or absence) of punctuation
- The use (or absence) of rhyme or other sound-effects
- The choice of, and relation between, words
- Diction and style
- The balance between explicit and implicit
- Figurative language, eg. metaphor, simile, symbolism
- ??? What do you think is important?
You know there is a rat in the house because you have heard it at night, somewhere between the roof and the bedroom ceiling. Its persistent burrowing makes you think it is trying to bore its way through to your living quarters. He says it is a mouse, or a bird. You know it is something bigger than a mouse, and you know that birds do not burrow, they rustle. But, because he says these things in his drowsy, light-hearted voice, you curl up next to him and go back to sleep in the dawn. You are happy enough because your skins — his and yours — are the same temperature. As if you have the same skin, indistinguishable. Both pink and white and cool.

The day is cold. He jumps out of bed and races across the bedroom to put on a towelling dressing gown. From where you lie, you hear the splash of shower sounds, sharp water cleaning away the small liquids of your late-night lovemaking. This, by the way, is unsatisfactory to you, but you have not said anything. He is always bounding around, on the phone or clearing up the kitchen. He does most things well, and laughs while he does them which, to your mind, is rare in a man, and very satisfactory. One of these days, you think, you will sit him down and pour him a Scotch and say exactly what would turn you on. You just have to choose the right time.

It is eight o’clock. BBC Radio 4. Six beeps and the news. You like these presenters. They are familiar to you — their grave voices, their intelligence. In Kosovo, houses are burning and the villagers are hiding in the woods, watching the smoke rise. They must be cold now, these women (most of them women, their husbands shot) up in the woods, in late winter, with no houses.

You nestle down between the sheets and draw the duvet up to your neck. You look out of the skylight, a small square of window cut into the slope of the wall where it rises up to the rafters. The glass is spattered with raindrops. It always rains here, in this village, in the middle of England. It seems that you have never woken up to anything but rain. You have thoughts as pitty-pat as the drizzle ... how good breakfast is, always, in this house, with fresh fruit yoghurt and hot coffee and brown bread taken crispy and hot from the Aga. You will eat breakfast opposite him, and you will think how lucky you are, for once in your life, to have a man whose skin blends with yours, who has shoulders that carry problems without complaint, who laughs at himself and goes to fancy dress parties as a tree. You like all that. You like the village, too, with its trout farm and white wrought-iron tables spread under the plum trees, with its tea-rooms and Tudor mansion and its two ghosts. You like all this, after the city. It had been time to leave the capital. It had been good to you when you arrived, years ago. Of late, it had turned sour, the pavements all dog-shit and vomit, the beggars everywhere (and you never knew who was fake and who was real) and three friends dying in quick succession, and you holding each one’s hand in turn, with no words at all. as they left you.

It had been time.

You get out of bed and enjoy the space of the room. A thick clean carpet, the colour of honey. The wood beams, the slanting ceiling. The house is on the edge of the village. On one side there are fields with the first tiny lambs fluffy with the cold. On the other side, just down the road, but sheltered from view, is a house, but you have never seen its inhabitants, only builders coming and going, converting, as they are always doing in this part of the country. There is no one nearby who knows your name, no neighbour. You like this privacy. You walk around the room naked. You stop in front of the full-length mirror, and pull a face. Your body has
VIVIENNE VERMES

You are crying, but you have your back to him. You lean over the Aga as you open the oven so the heat makes your face red and he won't see the tears. They have gone by now, anyway.

You eat your fruit yoghurt and pour clear honey on your roll and he talks. He hates doing business with the Japanese, he says. He is straightforward, a farmer's son, brought up in Canada. He doesn't like Japanese 'tactics'. He is talking of setting up a system of video-conferencing, which means he won't have to travel so much. Your mouth goes down. You can feel the wrinkle slide back into place, and you are cross with yourself. You are always nagging him to stay at home, to be with you. After all, you gave up the city to be with him. And now your mouth is going down. If you admit it, you enjoy his absences, you have grown to like the silence of the house, even at night, alone, if it weren't for the sound in the space between the ceiling and the roof.

Now the house is quiet. He has gone to work. You have put the dishes in the dish-washer. You can hear its hum and churn from where you sit in the bedroom, your table facing two floor-length windows, so the cold, early spring light shines on your pen, your page. It is hard to write, thoughts crowd in on top of each other, a jumble - they block you, not the blank cold spring page, but the many little ghosts of thoughts all whispering at once, urgent and together. You walk around the room. Your feet, bare, rasp against the carpet.

You think of your father. You wish he were not so old. You wish he had told you more about his secrets, about the family that disappeared. There is a horror there, and the shunting of trains. You have seen it in his eyes, and, with a child's sense of the hidden, you have kept silent. Once, insistent, you made him take you through old photos. You made him guide you around his village, going from door to door, cousin to cousin. You imagined you were following his stooped back, wondering if this were cruel or kind, this opening of doors on to old corridors, full of laughter, once, and hung with portraits and diplomas, and smelling of
goulash and dumplings. He has never been back. For him, the houses now are so many empty faces.

This house is quiet. There is sun, then rain, then sun again, passing across the floor-length windows and the slat of the skylight. You walk and walk. Maybe you walk half a mile around the room, with the weather changing, with your feet rasping against the carpet.

Then you hear it. Faint, at first, then louder. When you walk, when you move, it stops. So you stop. You stand very still, opposite the full-length mirror, and you wait. You are patient. You could stand here, so, all day. The morning light is bright on you. You can see your wrinkle etched deeper, deeper. You can see yourself as a little old lady, so, with lines all over to match. When you stand, so, with the house so quiet, you can hear it quite clearly. It is boring its way through, persistent, coming closer to the plaster. The plaster is flaking, easy, under its claws. It is equipped, it can deal with these builders' fragile surfaces. It has burrowed through earth and walls and tunnels.

You stand quite still. You could go and pick up the phone in the corner of the room and call him. You can always reach him. His mobile is switched on at any time of the day. But you don't call. You stand quite still.

The plaster is crumbling. Small flakes fall on the carpet, like an early snowfall. Then more quickly, the plaster breaks off in chunks, easily, like sawdust, light wood, cut away from behind by the steady little sawmills of claws.

A hole now, as big as your fist. If you move now, make a noise, you could stop it. It would retreat, go back to its quarters, and leave you to yours. You could phone him, even now you could phone him, or call one of the builders down the road, have one of them come quickly and seal up the hole, put another layer of plaster there, get the ratman in, put the poison down, stop up the process.

But you don't. You want more than anything, more than the closeness of his skin, more than the sticky stuff between your legs and the maybe baby, you want to see what has lived and burrowed up in that space between the ceiling and the roof.

It is raining now, hard, against the skylight, insistent drops pattering, beating against the square of glass, little entities demanding entry.

And then, through the hole, it plops on to the floor, on to the carpet. It remains utterly still, as you are still, and you stare at each other across the clean carpet.

It is a rat – large, grey, and its brown eyes stare at you. It does not look afraid, as you are not afraid, yet utterly immobile. If you move towards it, you do not know which way it will go, as it does not know which you will go. So you both stay very still.

You see its ears are twitching at new sounds. The rain on glass, the hum of the dish-washing machine from the kitchen. You do not like it in your space, in your quarters. But it is here.

Your breathing is fast. Maybe your immobility is caving in like the plaster, easy, cracking. The rat knows this. It is quick, this rat. It flashes across the carpet, so quick that you do not have time to get out of the way, it has already streaked past you and out of the bedroom door and into the living quarters of the house beyond. It has rushed past you, and you are relieved it has gone, a grey flash, so quickly. Still you have had time to notice something, in a split second, about the rat's belly, that was big and swollen and slithered under it as it sped across the floor. You close the door and listen to the rain.

You can call now, take the phone and tell him he was wrong. It was not a bird, it was not a mouse. It was a rat. You could tell him with satisfaction. But something makes you hesitate. It is the bigness of the rat's belly.

So you don't call. You sit down at your table and think of what you will say to him tonight.

He will, after all, notice the hole.

Then you might say it was a bird, or a mouse, and decide which builder to call, to repair the damage.
Now I Lay Me

That night we lay on the floor in the room and I listened to the silk-worms eating. The silk-worms fed in racks of mulberry leaves and all night you could hear them eating and a dropping sound in the leaves. I myself did not want to sleep because I had been living for a long time with the knowledge that if I ever shut my eyes in the dark and let myself go, my soul would go out of my body. I had been that way for a long time, ever since I had been blown up at night and felt it go out of me and go off and then come back. I tried never to think about it, but it had started to go since, in the nights, just at the moment of going off to sleep, and I could only stop it by a very great effort. So while now I am fairly sure that it would not really have gone out, yet then, that summer, I was unwilling to make the experiment.

I had different ways of occupying myself while I lay awake. I would think of a trout stream I had fished along when I was a boy and fish its whole length very carefully in my mind; fishing very carefully under all the logs, all the turns of the bank, the deep holes and the clear shallow stretches, sometimes catching trout and sometimes losing them. I would stop fishing at noon to eat my lunch; sometimes on a log over the stream; sometimes on a high bank under a tree, and I always ate my lunch very slowly and watched the stream below me while I ate. Often I ran out of bait because I would take only ten worms with me in a tobacco tin when I started. When I used them all I had to find more worms, and sometimes it was very difficult digging in the bank of the stream where the cedar trees kept out the sun and there was no grass but only the bare moist earth and often I could find no worms. Always though I found some kind of bait, but one time in the swamp I could find no bait at all and had to cut up one of the trout I had caught and use him for bait.

Sometimes I found insects in the swamp meadows, in the grass or under ferns, and used them. There were beetles and insects with legs like grass stems, and grubs in old rotten logs; white grubs with brown pinching heads that would not stay on the hook and emptied into nothing in the cold water, and wood ticks under logs where sometimes I found angle-worms that slipped into the ground as soon as the log was raised. Once I used a salamander from under an old log. The salamander was very small and neat and agile and a lovely color. He had tiny feet that tried to hold on to the hook, and after that one time I never used a salamander, although I found them very often. Nor did I use crickets, because of the way they acted about the hook.

Sometimes the stream ran through an open meadow, and in the dry grass I would catch grasshoppers and use them for bait and sometimes I would catch grasshoppers and toss them into the stream and watch them float along swimming on the stream and circling on the surface as the current took them and then disappear as a trout rose. Sometimes I would fish four or five different streams in the night; starting as near as I could get to their source and fishing them down stream. When I had finished too quickly and the time did not go, I would fish the stream over again, starting where it emptied into the lake and fishing back up stream, trying for all the trout I had missed coming down. Some nights too I made up streams, and some of them were very exciting, and it was like being awake and dreaming. Some of those streams I still remember and think that I was fishing in them, and they are confused with streams I really know. I gave them all names and went to them on the train and sometimes walked for miles to get to them.

But some nights I could not fish, and on those nights I was cold-awake and said my prayers over and over and tried to pray for all the people I had ever known. That took up a great amount of time, for if you try to remember all the people you have ever known, going back to the earliest thing you remember— which was, with me, the attic of the house where I was born and my mother and father's wedding-cake in a tin
box hanging from one of the rafters, and, in the attic, jars of
snakes and other specimens that my father had collected as a
boy and preserved in alcohol, the alcohol sunken in the jars so
the backs of some of the snakes and specimens were exposed
and had turned white -- if you thought back that far, you
remembered a great many people. If you prayed for all of
them, saying a Hail Mary and an Our Father for each one, it
took a long time and finally it would be light, and then you
could go to sleep, if you were in a place where you could sleep
in the daylight.

On those nights I tried to remember everything that had
ever happened to me, starting with just before I went to the
war and remembering back from one thing to another. I
found I could only remember back to the attic in my
grandfather's house. Then I would start there and remember
this way again, until I reached the war.

I remember, after my grandfather died we moved away
from that house and to a new house designed and built by my
mother. Many things that were not to be moved were burned
in the back-yard and I remember those jars from the attic
being thrown in the fire, and how they popped in the heat and
the fire flamed up from the alcohol. I remember the snakes
burning in the fire in the back-yard. But there were no people
in that, only things. I could not remember who burned the
things even, and I would go on until I came to people and then
stop and pray for them.

About the new house I remember how my mother was
always cleaning things out and making a good clearance. One
time when my father was away on a hunting trip she made a
good thorough cleaning out in the basement and burnt
everything that should not have been there. When my father
came home and got down from his buggy and hitched the
horse, the fire was still burning in the road beside the house. I
went out to meet him. He handed me his shotgun and looked
at the fire. 'What's this?' he asked.

'I've been cleaning out the basement, dear,' my mother
said from the porch. She was standing there smiling, to meet
him. My father looked at the fire and kicked at something.

Then he leaned over and picked something out of the ashes.
'Get a rake, Nick,' he said, 'I went to the basement and
brought a rake and my father raked carefully in the ashes. He
raked out stone axes and stone skinning knives and tools for
making arrow-heads and pieces of pottery and many arrow-
heads. They had all been blackened and chipped by the fire.
My father raked them all out very carefully and spread them
on the grass by the road. His shotgun in its leather case and
his game-bag were on the grass where he had left them when
he stepped down from the buggy.

'Take the gun and the bags in the house, Nick, and bring me
a paper,' he said. My mother had gone inside the house. I took
the shotgun, which was heavy to carry and banged against my
legs, and the two game-bags and started toward the house.
'Take them one at a time,' my father said. 'Don't try to carry too
much at once.' I put down the game-bags and took in the
shotgun and brought out a newspaper from the pile in my
father's office. My father spread all the blackened, chipped
stone implements on the paper and then wrapped them up.
'The best arrow-heads went all to pieces,' he said. He walked
into the house with the paper package and I stayed outside on
the grass with the two game-bags. After a while I took them in.
In remembering that, there were only two people, so I would
pray for them both.

Some nights, though, I could not remember my prayers
even. I could only get as far as 'On earth as it is in heaven' and
then have to start all over and be absolutely unable to get past
that. Then I would have to recognize that I could not
remember and give up saying my prayers that night and try
something else. So on some nights I would try to remember
all the animals in the world by name and then the birds and
then fishes and then countries and cities and then kinds of
food and the names of all the streets I could remember in
Chicago, and when I could not remember anything at all any
more I would just listen. And I do not remember a night on
which you could not hear things. If I could have a light I was
not afraid to sleep, because I knew my soul would only go out
of me if it were dark. So, of course, many nights I was where I
could have a light and then I slept because I was nearly always
tired and often very sleepy. And I am sure many times too that I slept without knowing it - but I never slept knowing it, and on this night I listened to the silk-worms. You can hear silk-worms eating very clearly in the night and I lay with my eyes open and listened to them.

There was only one other person in the room and he was awake too. I listened to him being awake, for a long time. He could not lie as quietly as I could because, perhaps, he had not had as much practice being awake. We were lying on blankets spread over straw and when he moved the straw was noisy, but the silk-worms were not frightened by any noise we made and ate on steadily. There were the noises of night seven kilometres behind the lines outside but they were different from the small noises inside the room in the dark. The other man in the room tried lying quietly. Then she moved again. I moved too, so he would know I was awake. He had lived ten years in Chicago. They had taken him for a soldier in nineteen fourteen when he had come back to visit his family, and they had given him me for an orderly because he spoke English. I heard him listening, so I moved again in the blankets.

'Can't you sleep, Signor Tenente?' he asked.

'No.'

'I can't sleep, either.'

'What's the matter?'

'I don't know. I can't sleep.'

'You feel all right?'

'Sure. I feel good. Just can't sleep.'

'You want to talk a while?' I asked.

'Sure. What can you talk about in this damn place?'

'This place is pretty good,' I said.

'Sure,' he said. 'It's all right.'

'Tell me about out in Chicago,' I said.

'Oh,' he said. 'I told you that once.'

'Tell me about how you got married.'

'I told you that.'

'Was the letter you got Monday - from her?'

'Sure. She writes me all the time. She's making good money with the place.'

'You'll have a nice place when you go back.'

'Sure. She runs it fine. She's making a lot of money.'

'Don't you think we'll wake them up, talking?' I asked.

'No. They can't hear. Anyway, they sleep like pigs. I'm different,' he said. 'I'm nervous.'

'Talk quiet,' I said. 'Want a smoke?'

'We smoked skillfully in the dark.'

'You don't smoke much, Signor Tenente.'

'No. I've just about cut it out.'

'Well,' he said, 'it don't do you any good and I suppose you get so you don't miss it. Did you ever hear a blind man won't smoke because he can't see the smoke coming out?'

'I don't believe it.'

'I think it's all bull, myself,' he said. 'I just heard it somewhere. You know how you hear things.'

'We were both quiet and I listened to the silk-worms.'

'You hear those damn silk-worms?' he asked. 'You can hear them chew.'

'It's funny,' I said.

'Say, Signor Tenente, is there something really the matter that you can't sleep? I never see you sleep. You haven't slept nights ever since I been with you.'

'I don't know, John,' I said. 'I got in pretty bad shape along early last spring and at night it bothers me.'

'Just like I am,' he said. 'I shouldn't have ever got in this war. I'm too nervous.'

'Maybe it will get better.'

'Say, Signor Tenente, what did you get in this war for, anyway?'

'I don't know, John. I wanted to, then.'

'Wanted to,' he said. 'That's a hell of a reason.'

'We oughtn't to talk out loud,' I said.

'They sleep just like pigs,' he said. 'They can't understand the English language, anyway. They don't know a damn thing. What are you going to do when it's all over and we go back to the States?'

'I'll get a job on a paper.'

'In Chicago?'
'Maybe.'
'Do you ever read what this fellow Brisbane writes? My wife cuts it out for me and sends it to me.'
'Sure.'
'Did you ever meet him?'
'No, but I've seen him.'
'I'd like to meet that fellow. He's a fine writer. My wife don't read English but she takes the paper just like when I was home and she cuts out the editorials and the sports page and sends them to me.'
'How are your kids?'
'They're fine. One of the girls is in the fourth grade now. You know, Signor Tenente, if I didn't have the kids I wouldn't be your orderly now. They'd have made me stay in the line all the time.'
'I'm glad you've got them.'
'So am I. They're fine kids but I want a boy. Three girls and no boy. That's a hell of a note.'
'Why don't you try and go to sleep?'
'No, I can't sleep now. I'm wide awake now, Signor Tenente. Say, I'm worried about you not sleeping though.'
'It'll be all right, John.'
'Imagine a young fellow like you not to sleep.'
'I'll get all right. It just takes a while.'
'You got to get all right. A man can't get along that don't sleep. Do you worry about anything? You got anything on your mind?'
'No, John, I don't think so.'
'You ought to get married, Signor Tenente. Then you wouldn't worry.'
'I don't know.'
'You ought to get married. Why don't you pick out some nice Italian girl with plenty of money? You could get any one you want. You're young and you got good decorations and you look nice. You been wounded a couple of times.'
'I can't talk the language well enough.'
'You talk it fine. To hell with talking the language. You don't have to talk to them. Marry them.'
'I'll think about it.'

You know some girls, don't you?'
'Sure.'
'Well, you marry the one with the most money. Over here, the way they're brought up, they'll all make you a good wife.'
'I'll think about it.'
'Don't think about it, Signor Tenente. Do it.'
'All right.'
'A man ought to be married. You'll never regret it. Every man ought to be married.'
'All right,' I said. 'Let's try and sleep a while.'
'All right, Signor Tenente. I'll try it again. But you remember what I said.'
'I'll remember it,' I said. 'Now let's sleep a while, John.'
'All right,' he said. 'I hope you sleep, Signor Tenente.'
I heard him roll in his blankets on the straw and then he was very quiet and I listened to him breathing regularly. Then he started to snore. I listen to him snore for a long time and then I stopped listening to him snore and listened to the silk-worms eating. They ate steadily, making a drooping in the leaves. I knew a new thing to think about and lay in the dark with my eyes open and thought of all the girls I had ever known and what kind of wives they would make. It was a very interesting thing to think about and for a while it killed off trout-fishing and interfered with my prayers. Finally, though, I went back to trout-fishing, because I found that I could remember all the streams and there was always something new about them, while the girls, after I had thought about them a few times, blurred and I could not call them into my mind and finally they all blurred and all became rather the same and I gave up thinking about them almost altogether. But I kept on with my prayers and I prayed very often for John in the nights and his class was removed from active service before the October offensive. I was glad he was not there, because he would have been a great worry to me. He came to the hospital in Milan to see me several months after and was very disappointed that I had not yet married, and I know he would feel very badly if he knew that, so far, I have never married. He was going back to America and he was very certain about marriage and knew it would fix up everything.
Genre to Genre

Poetry to Prose

Read the poems overleaf carefully. Try to understand as much as possible about the events and the characters. Who are they, what has happened to them, what are their motivations, fears and desires? What is happening in their worlds? Consider the form and language of the poem: how does it shape and contribute to your understanding of the above?

Choose one of the following exercises to do in the seminar. These are exercises in using the passive voice, ie. describing something from the 'outside'.

1) Take the first poem, by Simon Armitage, and write a social worker’s or psychologist’s report or profile of this character.
2) Write a newspaper report on the events of any of the other poems. Bear in mind that the language and tone will vary according to the kind of newspaper journalism you think of: The Times employs a very different linguistic register from The Sun. Perhaps you could try both of these.

How does this transposition change the effect and meaning of the events?

Passive Voice to Active Voice

To do on your own for next week: find a piece of newspaper commentary or other piece of ‘official’ discourse where the passive voice is used (this usually and deliberately appears objective, impersonal, detached, without a clear sense of personal feeling or opinion), and write either a poem or a short monologue. The challenge is to find a tone and register which is active; which draws the reader into the events and/or the character’s experience. Remember you can use the techniques already used with the photographs to ‘flesh out’ your writing, and you can ‘borrow’ from the poetic techniques used in the example poems.
Not the ounce of snout
but the smell of the cabbage,

not the slopping out
but the smell of the cabbage,

not the landing light
but the smell of the cabbage,

not the Governor's wife
but the smell of the cabbage.

Not the petty cash
but the smell of the cabbage,

not the forearm smash
but the smell of the cabbage,

not the arm of the law
but the smell of the cabbage,

not the foot in the door
but the smell of the cabbage.

Not the hospital tuck
but the smell of the cabbage,

not the five-knuckle-fuck
but the smell of the cabbage,

not the Spanish guitar
but the smell of the cabbage,

not the budgerigar
but the smell of the cabbage.

Not the bird, the stretch,
the term, the porridge

but the sound of the town
and the smell of the cabbage,

not the girl, the wife,
the woman, the marriage

but the sun going down
and the smell of the cabbage.

Not the file in the cake
but the smell of the cabbage,

not The Great Escape
but the smell of the cabbage,

not the men on the roof
but the smell of the cabbage,

not the truth, the whole truth
but the smell of the cabbage.

Not the night on the block
but the smell of the cabbage,

not the light through the lock
but the smell of the cabbage,

not the eighteen months,
but the criminal damage,

and the smell of the cabbage,
Leda and the Swan

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.

How can those terrified vague fingers push
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?
And how can body, laid in that white rush,
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?

A shudder in the loins engenders there
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
And Agamemnon dead.

Being so caught up,
So mastered by the brute blood of the air,
Did she put on his knowledge with his power
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

III] Essentials

(Conversation with a Croat)

'I looked at my Shakespeares and said NO!
I looked at my Sartres, which I often read
by candlelight, and couldn't let them go
even at this time of direst need.

Because he was a Fascist like our Chetnik foes
I lingered for a while at my Célines . . .
but he's such a serious stylist, so I chose
Das Kapital to cook my AID canned beans!'
3 Active/Passive

A New writers often have difficulties negotiating their way through time and tenses. The most immediate, active tense is the present which places the reader in the here and now and lends an extra edge of uncertainty to it because anything can happen. Compare these two versions: (a) I have three hours to live. My last wish is to write these lines, my last hope that you may one day read them. And (b) I was given three hours to live. These lines were written as my last wish, your reading of them was my last hope. Note how in (b) the passive voice changes the meaning. In (b) we understand that the narrator has survived the threat of death and there is a feeling of reassurance in this. In (a) we are left guessing. Explore using the present tense in diary formats or epistolary forms such as Amos Oz’s novel Black Box. Always write your stage plays and scripts in the present tense, otherwise they will sound like prose that should be read rather than performed.

B The passive tense can be cumbersome and remove pace from your writing. Ask yourself whether it is really what you want. He was shot by her, for instance, is much less snappy than: She shot him. And he was proposed to does not have the same clarity as: She proposed to him. You may, of course, want to play on this style of formality and reportage. Look at Gabriel García Márquez’ novella Chronicle of a Death Foretold, which exploits the passive tense in order to mimic the language of official reports and testimonials in the reconstruction of a murder.

C Remember that you can switch tenses to bring a certain section of prose to life. For example, your main narrative may be in the past tense, but you might move to a dialogue which is conducted in the present.

He could never concede a point. For the purposes of argument, black was white and white black, it didn’t bother him.

‘I saw you do it,’ I say. ‘I heard you.’
‘Come off it!’ he says.
‘There’s no mistake.’
‘You’ve always got to be fictionalising!’
‘What?’ I say, getting riled now.
‘You heard.’

Make particular note of any tense changes that you come across in any book you read from now on. For instance try Margaret Atwood’s novel Life Before Man, especially passages from Part 5 of the book. Or the first pages and other passages from Michael Ondaatje’s novel The English Patient. Ask yourself what effect each writer is aiming for. Write a prose piece which experiments with a change from past to present tense.

TEACHING/LEARNING CONTRACT: Tuesday's Group: Writer's Art 1

STUDENTS' MISSION STATEMENT
To become the best writers they can possibly be

TUTOR'S MISSION STATEMENT
To enable students to become the best writers they can possibly be

To these ends, the group and tutor have agreed on the following points:

- Attendance and punctuality are vital for the cohesion of the group.
- Preparation is essential, as is the writing task every week. *
- It is the student's responsibility to catch up if a seminar is missed.
- The tutor can be contacted outside seminars by e-mail (tsa@aber.ac.uk) or during office hours (Monday 5-6 Tuesday 4-5)
- It is important for the feedback process that students read their work aloud in class. This will be introduced gradually so everyone gets used to it. However, a student may ask another member of the group to read his/her work aloud for them, and each person can opt to 'pass' once in each workshop.
- Everyone should read as widely as they can and share any interesting discoveries with the rest of us.
- Both students and tutor should exercise tact and diplomacy in giving critical feedback.
- All writing exercises should be attempted (but not all of them have to be submitted for assessment)
- The emphasis in the workshop should be on practice and process rather than product. Everyone should feel able to take risks with their writing.
- In this module the tutor will direct writing tasks in terms of form/technique/genre but beyond that the student has complete freedom. No subjects or topics are off limits.
- The tutor will give adequate guidance and advice about assessment, and answer any questions regarding this or other aspects of the module.
- Students can raise concerns and suggestions about seminars at any point, but this contract will be revisited mid-way through the course and amended where necessary.

* amended to allow students (within reason) to bring unfinished pieces for workshopping
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

MODULE EVALUATION SUMMARY SHEET
Semester 1, 2001/2

MODULE ID & TITLE: WR10120, The Writer's Art (1) 'Transpositions'

1. CONVENOR: TSA

2. No OF RESPONSES: 16 TOTAL NO IN GROUP: 22

3. OVERVIEW OF GRID RESPONSES

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<th>3 - neutral</th>
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5. OVERVIEW OF NARRATIVE RESPONSES

Positive comments

An enjoyable, challenging and well-organised module; lively seminars; a good range of assignments across different genres and perspectives; weekly writing tasks 'familiarised' students with the writing and editing process; students acquired greater knowledge and understanding of writing techniques through both reading and writing assignments; students' own writing generally felt to have improved.

Negative comments/suggestions for improvement

More direct commentary on individual students' work from the tutor each week; more direct guidance to students on how to give constructive feedback in 'workshop' situations; a writing option in semester 2 of Part One (this has already been remedied for the next academic year).
MODULE ID & TITLE: Writing Short Fictions: Narratives

1. CONVENOR: Tiffany Atkinson

2. No OF RESPONSES: 18

3. TOTAL No IN GROUP:

4. OVERVIEW OF GRID RESPONSES

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<td>3. The workload was manageable</td>
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5. OVERVIEW OF NARRATIVE RESPONSES

Positive comments

Enjoyable seminars; good balance between discussion and writing exercises; freedom of ‘open’ assignment

Negative comments/suggestions for improvement

Some students would have preferred more guidance in their assignments. * More attention to the process of giving constructive feedback on others’ work. Longer seminars. Weekly writing tasks rather than fortnightly. Difficult for tutor to integrate 2nd and 3rd year students within one group.

6. ACTION TO BE TAKEN

* Possible future development: keep ‘open’ assignments but offer guided tasks for less experienced writers.
* More guidance to students on feedback techniques.
MODULE EVALUATION SUMMARY SHEET: Semester 1, 2002/3

MODULE ID & TITLE: WR10220 The Writer's Art I: A Beginner's Guide to Technique

1. CONVENER: Tiffany Atkinson

2. No OF RESPONSES: 32

3. TOTAL No IN GROUP:

4. OVERVIEW OF GRID RESPONSES

5. OVERVIEW OF NARRATIVE RESPONSES

Positive comments

Enjoyable, encouraging and constructive seminars; freedom of portfolio assessment; opportunity to practise a range of techniques and genres; many students have gained greater confidence as writers.

Negative comments/suggestions for improvement

Word limit too strict on critical commentary; first assessment 'too early' in the semester; some anxiety about assessment criteria. Many would prefer more contact time, and more individual feedback.

NB. It is difficult for a tutor with several groups to offer individual feedback on a weekly basis. Perhaps feedback provision needs to be formalised in the handbook so students know what to expect regarding tutor- and peer--responses to their weekly written work.

ACTION TO BE TAKEN
Flag up the assessment criteria in the handbook; offer more individual direction in preparing for assessment. Formalise feedback provision in the handbook.
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Module Evaluation Questionnaire, Semester 1, 2002-3

Module ID: WR10220  Title: The Writer's Art: A Beginner's Guide to Technique

Please spare some time to complete this simple questionnaire. We like to have feedback from our students on what we are doing, right or wrong. If we are doing wrong, at least we can then set about reviewing our aims and methods and improve things for future students. The results of this survey will be discussed by the Staff Student Consultative Committee. Try to answer the questions as fairly as possible.

Please tick in the boxes below using the scale indicated. There is space for your own comments after each section and at the end.

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<tr>
<th>5-strongly agree, 4-agree, 3-neutral, 2-disagree, 1-strongly disagree</th>
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_Aditional comments on Section 1_

Interesting module - curriculum covers valuable topics. Enjoyable. Different feedback strategies work well.

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_Additional comments on Section 2_

 Worthwhile seminars - looked forward to them. Enjoyable. More of the same models
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**Additional comments on Section 3**

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Manageable assignments. Comprehensive & helpful feedback.  
Use of Blackboard - help post tasks for each week.
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**General remarks, if any**

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Enjoyable, fun, interesting. 'I've learnt a lot.'  
Early morning starts a pattern.  
Good supporting in writing skills.  
More (W) modules in Sem 2 please.  
Difficult assignments - but fun and challenging.
```