

MODULE: APPROACHES TO CREATIVITY: MASTERS IN CREATIVE WRITING
2012

Task: *Write an essay on a subject that you are passionate about or a subject whereby you have an insight into something nobody else knows and you'd like to explore it further.*

1000 words and 500 critical commentary (tracking your steps in a more objective way). Also note (in your commentary perhaps) where you would send this article/essay – name the paper, magazine, etc so that you are aware of writing to a specific audience.

We have covered prose, we've explored poetry, drama, film but creative non-fiction is pretty much a fourth genre though it could encompass a lot of prose, some drama, and poetic devices as well. So in fact it could be considered as the fourth genre (Stephen Minot). You are able to develop in an essay all the elements present in prose and poetry (a title may feel like a startling title to a poem or succinct phrases in the opening or closing lines).

There is a website dedicated to creative non-fiction by Lee Child—seek it out).

Some people believe that writing non-fiction is a good way into writing creatively.

You're given a subject and have to try and find a new angle, a new way of looking at it that hasn't been done before.

There are some things that distinguish between creative non-fiction and say short story writing. And very often you will find that there is a lot of anecdoting in an essay, a lot of telling a story, characters too feature heavily. You are taking your reader on a journey remember and your *style* of writing is as much the vehicle as the destination. Nowadays, we rarely talk of style—rather we use the word voice. What kind of voice will you portray in your piece:

- Argumentative
- Persuasive
- Sympathetic
- Impressionistic

- Poetic
- Questioning
- One feature of successful essayists is that they are honest (truth being a difficult word anyway) to themselves and to the reader. They will often show a vulnerability, and more than anything be willing to ‘ change their minds’ in the conclusion of a piece (the American novelist Marilynne Robinson said that she liked the essay form because it allowed her to change her mind.

The task I’ll want you to write about is something that excites you—something that you think you know (or will get to know through research) that will make it entertaining to somebody else. One year, we had someone writing about drains and she went into enormous detail about her drains, the odours , the animals who congregated around it – and didn’t stop there – looked at the drainage system in London at the beginning of drainage and sewage. Riveting.

1. So find yourself a good subject.
2. What will be your relationship to the subject. We like to think that the writer has really been there.. If somebody is writing about ‘death row’ say, that they have if not visited someone, has spoken to a member of the family or has tried to get in touch with someone waiting to die. So walk the walk. If you want to write about how difficult it is to get to someone/somewhere by bus, then do it and see where the story takes you. You might even end up writing not about the bus but about someone who visits her mother on that route every week.

3. Research is crucial.

4. Narrative is interesting / also description/ present tense sometimes to make it more urgent, action, conflict. Especially conflict. People like to read about people having difficulty . Remember Aristotle’s conflict:

Human versus human
Human against nature
Human against himself
Human against society
Human against god
Human against machine

5. i] Grab the reader from the start either by a smart opening line/title etc. e.g Annie Dillard—It was a kind of dying or Thomas McCarthy—By the time you read this the cat will be dead.
ii] the body of the article will be up to you to develop- to meander in your own way
iii] a succinct ending perhaps.

I should perhaps have told you that I have been writing a features/opinion column for the *Western Mail* every fortnight since 1994 so there are few topics I haven't covered. What I have learned (apart from annoying people who disagree with me and send me letters, and the odd letter of praise!) is that people often read articles/columns on a hoof- so the language/style must be immediate, quick and fairly simple (that does not mean simplistic!). That's why (above) I want you to consider who your audience is—if it's a magazine such as National Geographical—people will spend time over it – and linger on words/new ideas/facts).

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