

Elements of Narrative

A Structural Approach to Writing Narrative:

The Five W's & H: Who, What, When, Where, Why, How

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Fiction and literary nonfiction can be analyzed by a historical/biographical approach, where the author's life and times are studied; by a psychological approach, where the psyche of the author and/or characters are analyzed; or by a structural approach, where the work is analyzed. This technique — also called deconstruction or exposition of the text — studies the five P's: People, Plot, Place, Point and Perspective. The Five P's concept is an easy way to remember the traditional elements of narrative: Character, Action, Setting, Theme, and Style. When writing a narrative story yourself, it's useful to remember SCAM (Setting, Character, Action, Meaning) or the journalist's Who, What, Where, When, Why, How.

Who : Characters : People

The characters are usually introduced early in the story. Two methods of describing characters are DIRECT and INDIRECT characterization:

DIRECT= What the author/narrator tells us about the character

- What the character looks like (physical description)
- What the character says
- What the character thinks
- How the character acts

INDIRECT=What we learn about a character for ourselves

- What the character says about himself/herself and how he/she says it
- How the character behaves in a revealing situation
 - The character's response to his/her environment or circumstances (setting)
 - The character's reactions to others
- What other characters think or say about him/her
- How other characters react to him/her
- Details of a character's appearance
- Details of the character's habitat (where he/she lives, works, plays)
- How the character acts

Characterization is often defined by the POINT OF VIEW the author uses, or the NARRATOR:

FIRST PERSON narrator is when the author/narrator is inside the story, telling the story as a major or minor character who says "I." Most first person stories are direct characterization because the author tells what he or she is thinking.

THIRD PERSON OMNISCIENT narrator is when the author/narrator is outside the story but still tells what the characters are thinking. This is direct characterization

THIRD PERSON LIMITED narrator is outside the story and gives the feelings of a single character—direct. Other characters are viewed objectively—indirect.

THIRD PERSON OBJECTIVE narrator is when no one's feelings are told. We surmise by their actions, comments, and how others react. This is "eye of the camera" technique, as if it were a movie or TV. It is indirect.

SECOND PERSON narrator, telling the story with "you" is very rare.

Either first or third person can use STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS to tell the story, where the character's thoughts are open to the reader, presented as a flow of ideas, often without logical organization.

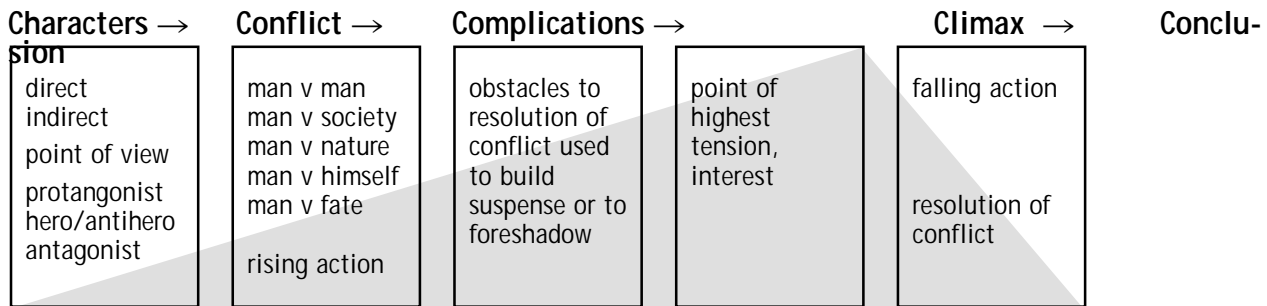
An INTERIOR MONOLOGUE switches from the narrator's voice to the thoughts of the character. Both are used in direct characterization.

The PROTAGONIST is the major character —or hero— of the story. Sometimes the protagonist doesn't have the usual attributes of a good guy, and is an ANTIHERO.

An opponent is the ANTAGONIST.

What : Action : Plot

What happens? The ELEMENTS OF A PLOT make up a sequence, or pattern of action, called the 5 C's:



ELEMENTS OF PLOT:

CHARACTERS (See People)

CONFLICT — The source of the tension or problem; the clash of people, forces and/or ideas which create the action of a story. This is the beginning of the rising action of the story. This action can take five basic forms (there are other variations):

MAN V. MAN — Protagonist (hero) v. Antagonist (villain)

MAN V. HIMSELF — Good v. evil, fear v. duty, training v. instinct, duty v. pride, etc.

MAN V. SOCIETY — An individual v. a group. Traditional elements of society include government, religion, education, business, media, family structure

MAN V. NATURE — Man against the forces of nature. Nature as a character only speaks through its actions against the protagonist; therefore, you must interpret what Nature is saying through its actions.

MAN V. FATE — Premised upon the belief that a person's destiny is established before birth, and there is little the protagonist can do but accept and face his fate.

COMPLICATIONS — These are the obstacles to resolving the conflict. These obstacles help build suspense and keep readers anticipating what will happen next. In addition, foreshadowing, i.e., hints or suggestions about what is going to happen later, adds to the believability of the story.

CLIMAX — This is the final scene which must take place in order to resolve the conflict. It is the point of highest tension or suspense; the moment in which there is doubt about who will win.

CONCLUSION — This is the resolution of the conflict, or the solution to the problem. It is sometimes called the falling action. In some literature movements, such as Modernism, it is sometimes short or nonexistent.

Where & When : Setting : Place

Where does it happen? What is the significance of the place? This usually includes geography and cultural, religious or political background that serves as a backdrop that supports the story's action. For example, *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller takes place in a Puritan colony in Massachusetts in 1620 at the height of the witch trials. *Dead Poets Society* takes place in 1959 in New England in a private boys prep school. Neither story would have the same impact in a different setting.

When does it happen? What is the significance of the time? This usually includes the year, season, month, day of the week, hour of day.

Is the specific time and place vague or missing altogether? Then it's a universal story that could take place in any time or place. In some stories, the setting is a crucial element; in others, it is not at all important.

Why: Meaning/Theme : Point

What is the meaning of the story? What is its theme? Main idea? Purpose? Moral? Insight into human nature? Why did the author write this narrative? What do we walk away with that we didn't know before?

We determine the why by looking at what the author included and what elements were put together or juxtaposed to create certain images. Some themes occur so often they are considered ARCHETYPES by those who study the psychological elements of narrative prose.

An ARCHETYPE is a certain basic, repeated pattern of plot, character or theme. The evil stepmother is an archetype. The hero cycle of initiation or epiphany is an archetype. The term comes from Carl Jung, the Swiss psychoanalyst who thought people had a "collective unconscious" memory and that they respond to certain "primordial images" based on repeated, shared experiences of our ancestors.

EPIPHANY: A sudden revelation either experienced by the character or that reveals an essential truth about the character, situation or experience.

INITIATION: A young character moves from innocence toward maturity, because of his/her experiences.

How : Point of View : Perspective

How the author tells a story varies depending upon the specific techniques the author uses for a given effect or purpose. --including symbolism, irony, tone, mood, atmosphere--as well as the writing style, including figurative language, sentence type, diction, rhetorical devices and effects.

DICTION: Diction is the choice and use of words in speech or writing, and refers to the degree of clarity and distinctness of those words. One aspect of diction is the level of formality of the chosen words. Levels include:

FORMAL — Language that might be used in a courtroom, an official government meeting, in a church

INFORMAL — Language that is used to communicate clearly with your friends and peers

CASUAL — Language that is used with your family and friends, people who know you and understand you and for whom a great deal of clarity is not necessary

SLANG — Words or phrases that are used in a specific occupation or social group, sometimes to prevent others from understanding what they are talking about

DIALECT — Writing which captures the actual sounds of a speaker's words, such as a regional accent or way of speaking

ARCHAIC — Words or phrases which are no longer in current usage

DESCRIPTION & DIALOGUE:

The use of sight, sound, taste, touch and smell to create sensory images

EMOTIONS AND ATTITUDES:

TONE: the author's attitude toward what he is presenting—humorous, ironic, loving, sympathetic, satirical

MOOD: the character's attitude toward what is happening: sadness, fear, happiness, hope

ATMOSPHERE: the general emotional effect of the story on the reader : gloomy, horror, happiness

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE:

ALLITERATION: Repetition of sounds or syllables, especially initial consonants.

ASSONANCE: Repeating identical vowel sounds.

CONSONANCE: Repeating consonant sounds.

IRONY: A contrast or discrepancy between appearance and reality. There are three types of irony:

- *VERBAL: when what is said is the opposite of what is meant.*
- *SITUATIONAL (circumstantial): when what happens is the opposite of what we'd normally anticipate.*
- *DRAMATIC: the reader knows something the character does not, and the character says or does things that reveal that ignorance.*
- *Irony is frequently used in:*
 - *SATIRE (which exposes something bad and ways to correct it)*
 - *PARODY (imitating another form of writing to make fun or point out its flaws) or*
 - *PUN (a wordplay where two meanings appear or one word, or in two words of identical sound)*

METAPHOR: Comparing two things by juxtaposition, without Like or as. "She whispered down the stairs with the delicate determination of a full-blown dandelion"

ONOMATOPOEIA: Words that imitate the sound of the object or action expressed—buzz, hiss, clack, bang, twitter.

PERSONIFICATION: Giving something non-human the characteristics of a person. "Here is a tall, bold slugger set vivid against the soft, little cities...bragging and laughing"

SYMBOLISM: A person, object or action in a story which stands for something else, usually some abstract meaning. In Russia, France, Britain and the United States, many authors in the early 20th Century who rejected Realism turned to heavy use of symbols to convey the meaning of their work.

- *CONVENTIONAL: Symbols established through tradition in a society, for example a flag, a skull and crossbones, an engagement ring*
 - *CREATED: The author invents a symbol, through context and connotation.*
- SIMILE: comparing two things, using like or as. "Like a black crow flying" "as small as the world, as large as alone"*

SYNECDOCHE: A figure of speech where part of the phrase represents the whole phrase Saying "fifty head" for "fifty head of cattle" or "all hands" to mean "all working men" This is very similar to Metonymy, where you might say "the throne" when you meant the king who occupies it, or "Capital Hill" when you mean the U.S. Congress.

RHETORICAL DEVICES AND EFFECTS:

ANTITHESIS: contrast opposite words or ideas

APOSTROPHE: shift to direct address, talking to the audience

RHETORICAL QUESTION: no reply expected, said for emphasis.

CHIASMAS: phrases that are syntactically parallel but with reversed elements

PERIPHRASIS: extra, unneeded words, circumlocution

REPETITION: making a point of certain features or key elements by presenting them over and over

SENTENCE TYPES:

SIMPLE (single subject/verb, an independent clause): **He saw** the girl.

COMPOUND (two independent clauses, linked with a conjunction): **He saw** the girl and **he smiled** at her.

COMPLEX (a dependent and an independent clause): *When he saw the girl,* **he smiled** at her.

COMPOUND-COMPLEX (two or more linked independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses): *When he saw the girl* **he was happy,** so **he smiled** at her and **she smiled** back.

FRAGMENT (missing either a subject or a verb, or is a dependent clause): *When he saw the girl. Smiling at her.*

Bold=Subject, Bold Italic=Verb, Italic=Clause, Underline=Conjunction

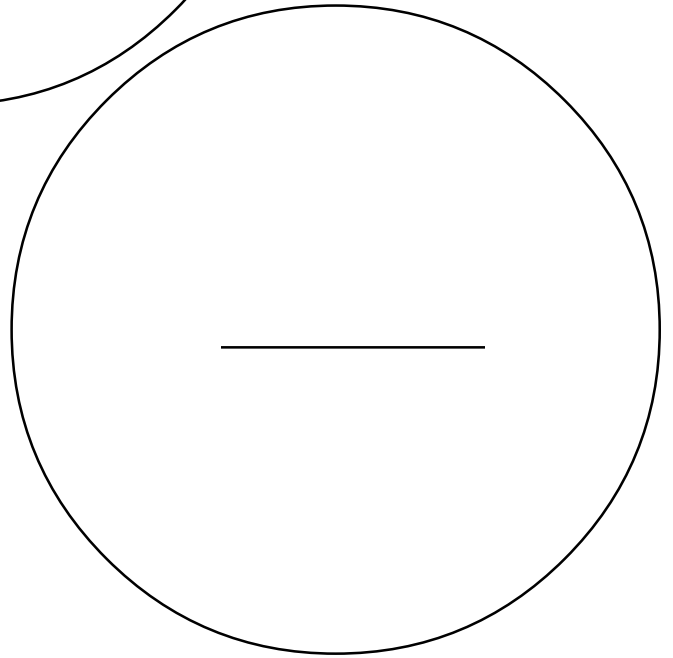
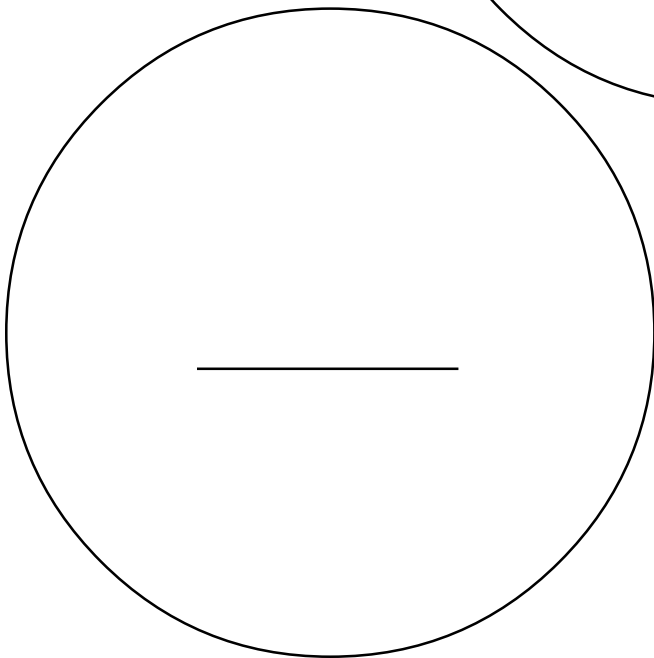
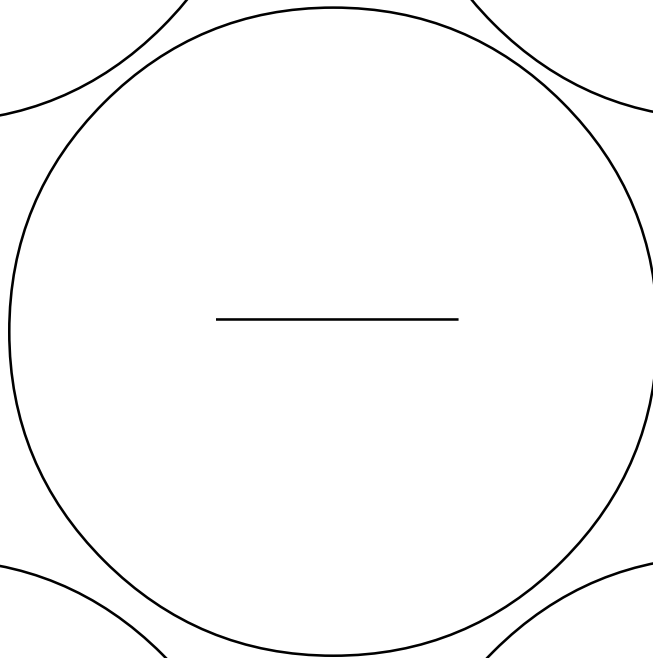
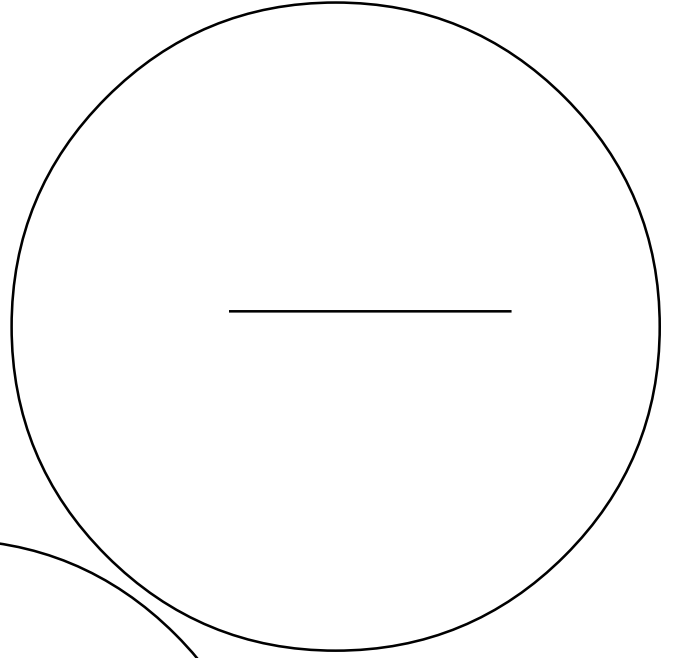
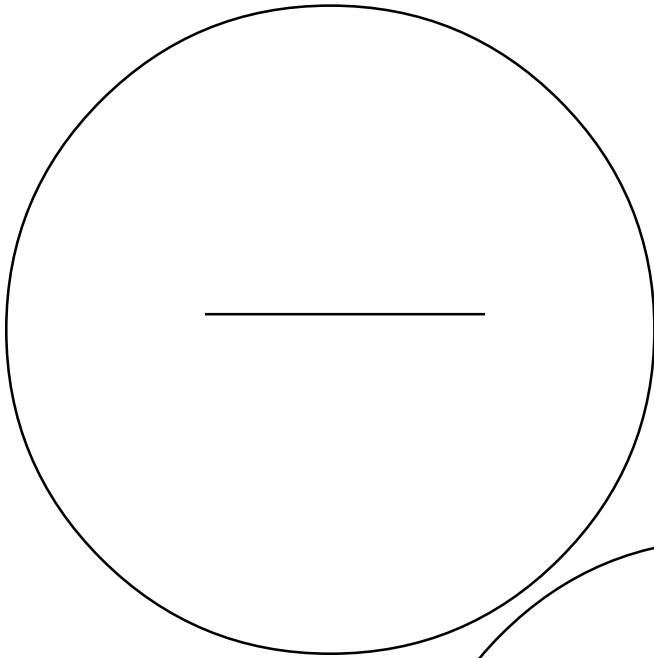
Questions to ask yourself while reading a story:

1. **Who** are the characters? What are their dominant traits? Who tells the story?
2. **What** does the character want that he/she cannot have right now? Who prevents the character from getting what he/she wants? What is the basic type of conflict? How is the conflict resolved?
3. **When** does it take place? How much time elapses in the story?
4. **Where** does the story take place? What is the significance of the setting, if any?
5. **Why** did the author write the story? What is the theme or meaning of the story?
6. **How** did the writer craft the story? Does the author use symbolism? How? Of what significance is the title?

Elements of Fiction

VOCABULARY GROUPS

DIRECTIONS: Put words together in the circles that are alike in some way. Then, label the circles with a name.



Setting	Metaphor	Point
Theme	Meaning	Tone
Antagonist	Invented symbols	Man vs. Fate
Characters	Time	Symbol
Third person	Man vs. Nature	Situational irony
Plot	Figurative language	Conclusion
Formal	Point of view	Informal
First person	Omniscient	Irony
Mood	Conflict	Second person
Place	Perspective	When
Direct	Third person limited	Dialog
Indirect	Man vs. machine	Description
Where	Simile	Characters
Man vs. Man	Dramatic	Man vs. Himself
Objective	Personification	Climax
Universal	Protagonist	Casual
Atmosphere	Complication	Where
People		