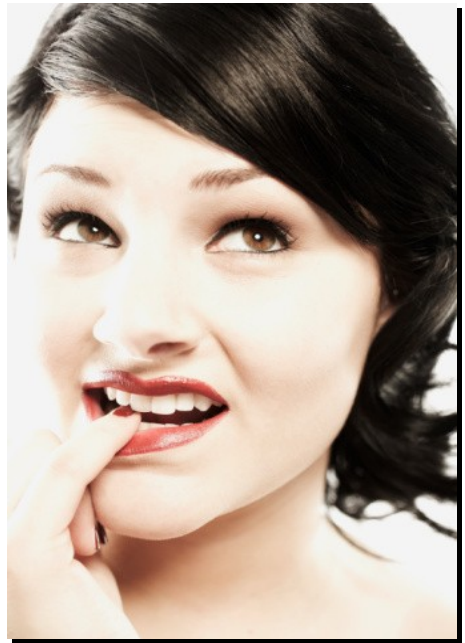


Three Narrative Dilemmas

The craft of writing fiction can be approached, at least at first, by learning some basic “moves.” For this assignment, we will be practicing these basic moves by dealing with some fiction-writing “dilemmas” or challenges. In other words, there are problems we face when writing a story—problems that we need to solve by using our craft as writers. To have some fun, then, and to lay some groundwork toward our first major story project, I’d like to complete three challenges as outlined below. If you choose to accept this challenge, keep reading....



Dilemma #1: Introducing a Character

How do you introduce a major character to readers for the first time? How do you make that moment memorable, and how do you make that moment do the most possible to set up and move other pieces of the story forward? For Dilemma #1, you need to: **Introduce a character to your readers.** But you need to do so in a way that doesn’t come off like a resume—that doesn’t put the story on hold, so to speak, in order to dish out a sketch or a static description of the character.

As you work out a response to the challenge, please remember the following:

- The 250 to 500 words (1-2 pages) of writing you submit should feel like an excerpt from your story. It’s not a sketch of a character. The reason for this is that I want you to be more selective with the details you choose to include. Having a sense of story will help you make decisions about what to include.
- Feel free to experiment in other ways, for instance by setting up your piece with a narrator who isn’t really the main “actor.”
- Try to consider how your setting choices can play a role. Use setting details to reveal character, too. For example, what can we learn about a person from the state of his or her bedroom, or desk, or refrigerator?

Dilemma #2: Blending Setting with Character and Action

How do you provide and maintain an immediate sense of place for your reader without putting the story on hold? Long-winded exposition had its place in fiction of the 19th century, but it has long since fallen out of fashion. Contemporary readers expect movement in a story from the outset with conflict introduced right away allowing the action of the story to unfold. But how do you write setting into your story without creating self-indulgent description or flowery, inflated language? How do you “season” your story with concrete setting details that are important towards revealing character, driving motivation, evoking emotional reaction, or creating empathy with the reader? For Dilemma #2, you need to: **Create a compelling sense of place.** But you need to do so subtly in a way that continues to advance the story by blending character, action, and place.

As you work out a response to the challenge, please remember the following:

- The 250 to 500 words (1-2 pages) of writing you create in response to this first dilemma should feel like an excerpt from your story. It’s not a sketch of a setting and, of course, it should not be pure exposition. Having a sense of story will help you make decisions about how to selectively reveal important aspects of the setting.
- Play with the relationship between setting, character, and action. Remember, don’t stop the story from developing as you develop and maintain the physical context of your story.



Dilemma #3: Using Object Details to Advance a Story

Objects in a story are not mere background clutter. Like in real life, an object can be *read* for significant detail. Stuff reveals. Objects have stories to tell and often speak of a great deal of those who possess them. Collect some stuff—from your pockets, bag, room—perhaps objects from your travels (trinkets, coins, masks, dolls, stones, postcards, etc.)—or perhaps talismanic objects you have carried around for a long time—or just some ordinary stuff you find laying around. Put it all in front of you. Touch, turn, examine the objects. For Dilemma #3: **Make significant use of an object.** Like the first two dilemmas, you have to find a way to capture the obvious and the not-so-obvious details of the object without putting the story on hold. Where might you find the object? What stories might the object hold? Where has it been? What has it seen? Who owned it? What might the object reveal about its owner? Go with it. See what happens.

As you work out a response to the challenge, please remember the following:

- The 250 to 500 words (1-2 pages) of writing you create in response to this first dilemma again should feel like an excerpt from your story. It's not a mere sketch of an object or a static description. Rather, find a way to blend the presence of the significant object into a slice of narrative. Consider how it furthers the story.
- Feel free to play with the relationship between character, setting, and object. Remember, don't stop the story from developing as you introduce and describe the object.

Assessment for this Overall Assignment

First of all, remember that this assignment (as with any assignment in this course) will not be assessed in a traditional letter-grade-fashion; however, as an initial draft that will be reviewed by members of the class and will form the basis for work that is to come in future projects, completing it on time is essential to stay on track toward at least a B in this course. Refer to the grading contract on the syllabus for more information about the importance of meeting all deadlines, and for general information on what makes for exemplary writing in this course.

Due Dates

This work with responses to all three dilemmas must be posted to the course "Scribbler" site and categorized properly as "work for review" by the scheduled due date. If you are having technical challenges with this, it is your responsibility to seek assistance from the instructor as soon as possible. Be sure also to keep your own electronic copy of your draft, so that you can easily return to it for revision at a later time. Consult the schedule for a complete list of due dates.