

Creative Writing Exercises

Exercise 1 (Poem)

Write a poem using one of the following as the speaker:

1. A cat carrying its prey into the house
2. Tupac, in hiding
3. Someone ashamed of a sexual encounter
4. Someone sneaking a cigarette in a bathroom

Length: 1 p

Exercise 2 (Poem)

Write a sonnet using rhyme words you start with, or those suggested below. The scheme below is for the English (or Shakesperean) sonnet; the letters represent rhymes:

a Drift
b Leave
a Shift
b Weave
c Rack
d Cigarette
c Attack
d Forget
e Slight
f Loathed
e Tight
f Clothe

g Plot
g Lot

Let the starting words be guide ropes, but by no means feel bound to them. If something really appealing shows up, go for it.

Length: 1 p

Exercise 3 (Poem)

Below are the opening sentences from short stories, novels, and essays. Take one that pricks your interest and use it a building block for a poem of your own.

1. All this happened, more or less.
2. My sister's voice was like mountain water in a silver pitcher.
3. For forty-two years, Lewis and Benjamin Jones slept side by side in their parents' bed.
4. It was inevitable: the scent of bitter almonds always reminded him of the fate of unrequired love.
5. My mother died at the moment I was born, so for my whole life there was nothing standing between myself and eternity.
6. Lightning, and a woman breaks in two.
7. I am a student of low-affect living edged with self-deprecating irony.
8. My high school friends have begun to suspect I haven't told them the full story of my life.
9. *One winter morning in the long-ago, four-year-old days of my life* I found myself standing before a fireplace, warming my hands over a mound of glowing coals, listening to the wind whistle past the house outside.
10. The first time I died went something like this.

Length: 1-2 pp

Exercise 4 (Fiction)

You're taking a shower in your house or apartment. You are not expecting anyone and the front door is locked (the bathroom door is not). You hear a strange noise in a room beyond the bathroom. Now, take it from there for no more than two pages. This can be in either the third or the first person. Don't spend any time getting into the shower; you're there when the action begins.

Length: 1.5-3 pp

Exercise 5 (Fiction)

Begin a story from random elements such as two characters, a place, two objects, an adjective, and an abstract word. Make up a random list. Then everyone must use these elements in the first two pages of a story.

The words you chose in class are:

2 Characters:

1 Place:

2 Objects

1 Adjective:

1 Abstract word:

Length: 3-7 pp

Exercise 6 (Fiction)

Imagine some deceit growing out of control. Your character borrows something without asking, and now it's lost or broken; the babysitter was distracted on the phone, and now one of the kids is missing; a character told a lie that seemed harmless. The little lie is now big; it has come back to haunt him or her.

Now crank things up another notch: The lost item is irreplaceable; the missing child has a medical condition, etc. How might this trouble be related to the character's desire? He was desperate to impress others; she was fixated on getting into medical school. Take the situation and go with it.

Length: A few paragraphs

Exercise 7 (Fiction)

This is an exercise in learning to find creative solutions or how to write yourself out of a corner. There is a man sitting in a tree, and he is wearing a tutu. What happened?

Length: A few paragraphs

Exercise 8 (Fiction)

Set a scene in a hospital waiting room. Two characters talk about anything except illness, accident, or death.

Length: 1-7 pp.

Exercise 9 (Drama)

Sit in total silence for five minutes and observe the things around you. Write a soliloquy about the sense of awareness this brings you.

Length: 1 paragraph

Exercise 10 (Drama)

Write a one-act play about something ugly — war, fear, hate, cruelty, etc. —but find the beauty (silver lining) in it or something good that comes out of it.