



Elements of Fiction Writing

Judy Pomeranz

Thursday, September 11 & 18, 2025 - 6:45 p.m. to 8:15 p.m. ET

WRITING EXERCISES

- Write a story inspired by a vivid dream you've had.
- Look at opening paragraphs of books you have handy. Consider why you think they are good, bad, or indifferent.
- Imagine a character and describe, in detail, that person eating a meal alone in a fine restaurant. (You can choose whether they are there by choice or by default.)
- Imagine two female characters, both physically abused wives. One kills her husband; the other stays in the marriage and puts up with the abuse. Prepare character sketches of each, including detailed biographical and background information: consider what aspects of each character's background might have motivated her to act as she did.
- Describe a landscape as seen by an old woman whose disgusting and detestable old husband has just died. Do not mention the husband or death. (Taken from John Gardner's THE ART OF FICTION.) Describe a lake as seen by a young man who has just committed murder. Do not mention the murder.
- Describe a sunset as seen by a person with a fatal illness.
- Write a story entirely consisting of diary entries or letters.
- Write a story using the style and voice of a writer you admire...or one you don't.
- Write a story inspired by a work of art or a piece of music.
- Write a story that features a hair on a pillow. Or one high-heeled shoe lying in a gutter.
- Write a story that features characters from another writer's fiction or from TV, politics, cartoons, or Hollywood. They can be principal characters, minor ones, or even folks making cameo appearances in your story.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS FOR FICTION WRITERS

Books on Craft:

- WRITING IN GENERAL AND THE SHORT STORY IN PARTICULAR, by Rust Hills
- THE ART OF FICTION: NOTES ON CRAFT FOR YOUNG WRITERS, by John Gardner
- THE ART OF FICTION: A GUIDE FOR WRITERS AND READERS, by Ayn Rand
- REVISING FICTION: A HANDBOOK FOR WRITERS, by David Madden
- THE ELEMENTS OF STYLE, by William Strunk, Jr and E.B. White
- SIN AND SYNTAX: HOW TO CRAFT WICKEDLY EFFECTIVE PROSE, by Constance Hale

Books on Craft, Inspiration and the Writing Life:

- BIRD BY BIRD: SOME INSTRUCTIONS ON WRITING AND LIFE, by Anne Lamott
- WILD MIND: LIVING THE WRITER'S LIFE, by Natalie Goldberg
- WRITING DOWN THE BONES: FREEING THE WRITER WITHIN, by Natalie Goldberg
- THE WRITING LIFE: WRITERS ON HOW THEY THINK AND WORK, edited by Maria Arana (Collected columns from The Washington Post Book World.
- WRITERS ON WRITING, VOLUMES I AND II (Collected Essays from the New York Times)