

WRITING A LIFE: TEACHING MEMOIR TO SHAPE MEANING, SHARPEN INSIGHT, and TRIUMPH OVER TESTS

**ACTIVITIES FOR READING LIKE WRITERS IN ORDER TO CRAFT
MEMOIR and NARRATIVES**

[Note: The work of all these stages can intermix and overlap.]

STAGE	MODEL TEXTS	YOUR WRITING
GENERATING	List the topic or theme of 5 different first-person narratives.	Make a list of your own topics or themes that these books reminded you of.
	Make a character map for the main character. For each fact or trait, list how you know that. Use specific quotes from text.	Make a character map of your main character—YOU!! List ways you can show those traits in the story.
	Read 5 first-person narratives. List what they all have in common (dialogue, main character...)	Make a list or a web of these same features that your story will contain and write for a while about each item.
CRAFTING	Study the opening paragraphs of 5 mentor texts. List what the author does (dialogue, present tense, jumps into action, character's thoughts, frames a theme...).	Imitate 3 different ways to open your story in your writer's notebook. Write how each different lead changes the rest of the story.
	Highlight in colored pen places where the character is thinking.	Find places in your story to insert your character's internal thinking.
	Highlight places that describe character's gestures.	Find places in your story to give your character some physical gestures.
	Highlight places that describe the physical environment (furniture, colors, temperature, background noise, sky...)	Find places in your story to "paint" the physical environment.
<i>and</i>	Mark the 1 st place you are aware that something is going to happen.	Find places early in your story to hint that something is going to happen.
DRAFTING	Mark the place where the story "comes to a boil." (a possible turning point)	Figure out where your most dramatic moment—a turning point—will happen.
	Mark the places where things seem to settle down after the turning point.	Figure out how your drama will resolve itself. Ask: What happened after that?
REVISION	For 3 model texts, decide what the author might have wanted us to know. What is the heart of the story? Why	Find the heart of your story by asking, "Why am I telling this story?" Or fill in this statement: "What I want you to

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REVISION	did he/she tell this story?	know about me is _____." Is the heart of your story evident?
	Study the ending paragraphs of 5 mentor texts. List what the author does (looks into future, asks a question, repeats a line from story...).	Imitate 3 different ways to end your story in your writer's notebook. Write how each ending changes what came before it in the story.
	Make a timeline, chart, or graph of how TIME goes in 2 model texts (in sequence, present to past, present with flashbacks...).	Make a timeline, chart, or graph of 2 different ways that TIME can go in your story.
	Analyze 2 of your favorite scenes. What is the balance of dialogue, summary writing, action, character's internal thinking?	1.) Draw a box around each of your scenes. 2.) Look at 1 scene at a time: revise by adding details or cutting out unnecessary information to create a similar amount of dialogue, summary writing, action, thinking.
EDITING	Put a star next to the most important moments in a model text. Study how the author made you realize these were important moments (action gets slowed down to tiny step-by-step, builds up tension by describing the surroundings before something happens...)	Put a star next to the most important moments in your story. Imitate how the author stretched out those moments in the model text. Slow down the action, add dialogue, describe surroundings or character's thoughts and feelings.
	Study how 2 model texts make paragraphs (new idea or time, new person talking...).	Chunk material in your writing with boxes or paragraph symbol.
	Choose 3 favorite sentences and copy them into your notebook. Write why you like them (length, tone, rhythm, surprising language, specific sound or meaning of words...).	Rewrite 3 sentences from your story. Rewrite them to imitate these 3 model sentences in length, style, tone, rhythm, word choice.