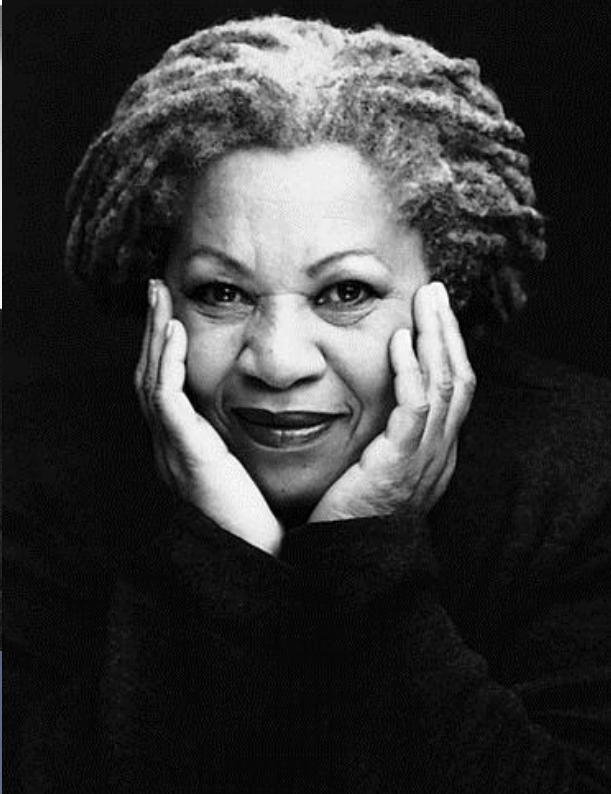
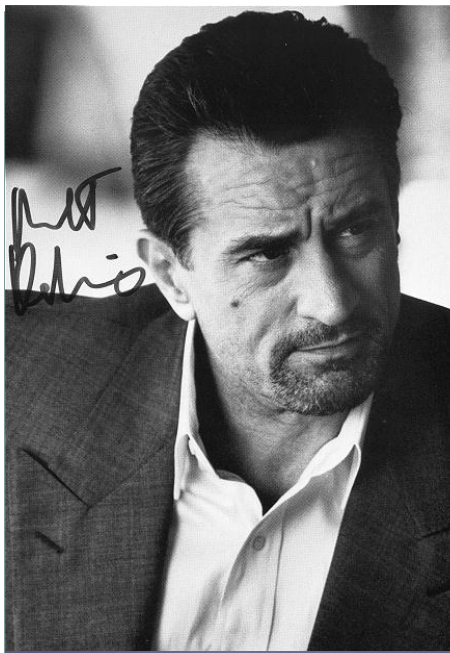


...to the more popular,  
contemporary, glamorous



“... a profile is a biographical piece—a concise rendering of a life through anecdote, incident, interview, and description (or some ineffable combination thereof)—...” —David Remnick, from *Life Stories: Profiles from The New Yorker*.

# Characterization



Usually our favorite part of reading stories is whether we can identify with a character and his/her experiences, emotions, actions, dialogue. This is generally referred to as empathy or vicarious experience. Most of us can probably remember influential characters from books and movies we've read/watched in the past.

# Character



When writing, ask yourself: How can I draw the reader into my character and his or her experiences? What is significant about the way my character is introduced to the reader? Should I use descriptive detail that the reader can relate to? Should I introduce my character via action? Should I build expectations about how my character responded to certain situations in her/his life? How is his or her personality similar to my own or anyone else I know who I might be able to include?



# Character



Does my character possess hero qualities and, if so, what are they? Can I relate to/identify with a character that is not like me? For instance, one that represents a difference in gender, race, ethnicity, culture, age group, religion? How do I check my own preconceived notions at the door and write in a neutral way OR leverage those notions that all readers may have?



Christiane Amanpour  
(ABC News)

# Character



How does my character change or undergo metamorphosis in the course of the story I'm going to write about her/him? What causes change? An event? There is significant change and transition in everyone's life that influences/changes their outlook and behavior. How can I capture it and prevent my character from coming off as flat and immutable? How can I make my character exciting and interesting and curious and memorable?

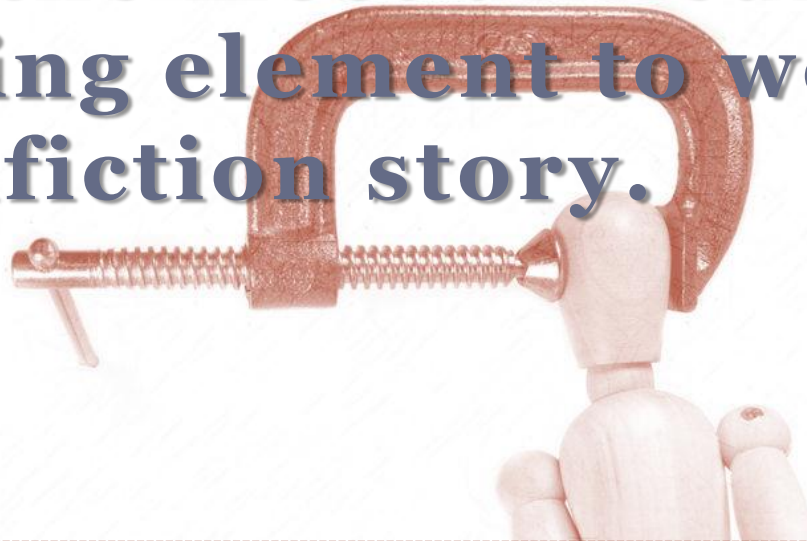
“One morning, as Gregor Samsa was waking up from anxious dreams, he discovered that in his bed he had been changed into a monstrous verminous bug.” – Franz Kafka, *Metamorphosis*



# Dramatic Tension



**Perhaps the most difficult and challenging element to work into your nonfiction story.**



# Dramatic Tension



What techniques do I want to employ to build and shape the story? Through the action of the story? How should I select and arrange words, sentences, paragraphs, chapters, and parts/sections to enhance tension?

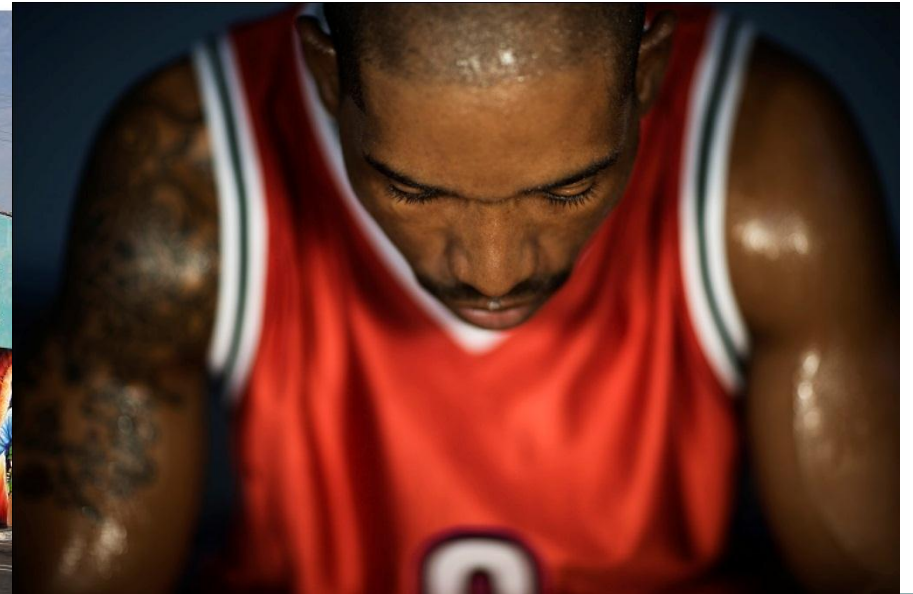


# Dramatic Tension



Will I write my action so it rises to a **climax**, a **denouement**, then fall? How and where will this happen in my story? Should it happen more than once? In my story will there be a series of **rising and falling actions** that are part of a grand scheme of rising and falling action? How will I create tension? How will I game the reader's anticipation? Build and suspend his/her judgment and feelings of fulfillment?

## Revelation to Nations Street Art







# Structure/Plot

“Plotting must be the first and foremost concern of the writer.”

—John Gardner



How do I want to structure or plot my story? There are some differences between structure and plot. Do I want to follow a traditional linear pattern or is the beginning, middle, and end juxtaposed in an unorthodox way? Sometimes when this is done there is still a strong sense of linearity and sequence.



# Structure/Plot

A former Russian school of **Formalism** developed a narrative theory that distinguished between plot and story. “**Syuzhet**” (**the plot**) refers to the order and manner events are actually presented to the reader. “**Fabula**” (**the story**) refers to the chronological sequence of events.



# Structure/Plot

Many writers, story tellers, literary journalists use non-linear patterns for structuring their tales.

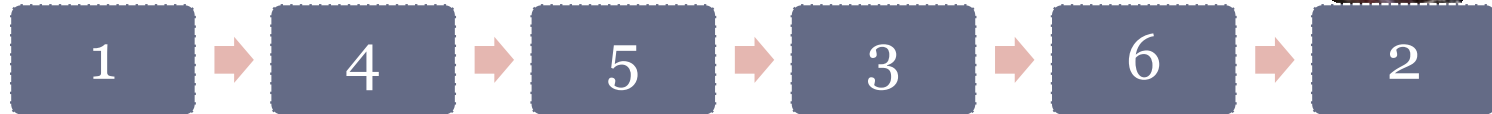


“Traditional,” linearly patterned/sequenced story.

# Structure/Plot



Many writers, story tellers, literary journalists use non-linear patterns for structuring their tales.



Story is sequenced in a non-linear manner, “jumps around,” but still projects the “illusion” of linearity. A good cinematic example is the film, *Pulp Fiction*. Even though “scenes” jump around in time, there is still an interconnectedness.

# Dramatic Tension



Some of the scenes overlap, some have space between them.



# Imagery



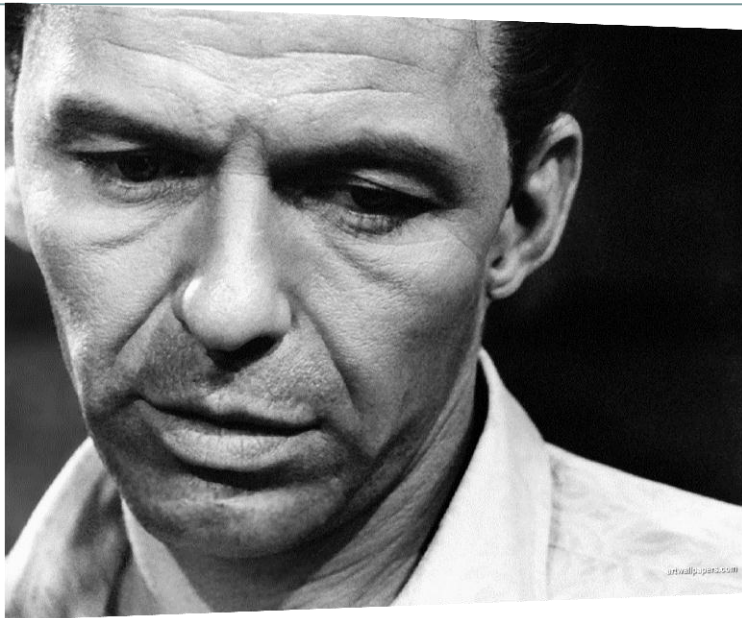
**Imagery can be simply defined as descriptive language. The intent is to appeal to the senses. Sometimes imagery is embedded in figurative or inferential language, the use of metaphor or simile, for instance. Writers must be careful not to overuse imagery. Too much and not well-placed can create an imbalance.**

“The dead and pieces of the dead turn up in El Salvador everywhere, every day, taken for granted as in a nightmare or a horror movie. Vultures of course suggest the presence of a body. A knot of children on the street suggests the presence of a body. Bodies turn up in the brush of vacant lots, in the garbage thrown down ravines in the richest districts, in public restrooms, in bus stations. Some are dropped in Lake Hopango, a few miles east of the city, and wash up near the lakeside cottages and clubs frequented by what remains in San Salvador of the sporting bourgeoisie. Some will turn up at El Playon, the lunar lava field of rotting human flesh visible at one time or another on every television screen in America but characterized in June of 1982 in the *El Salvador News Gazette*, an English-language weekly edited by an American named Mario Rosenthal, as an ‘uncorroborated story ... dredged up from the lies of leftist propaganda.’”



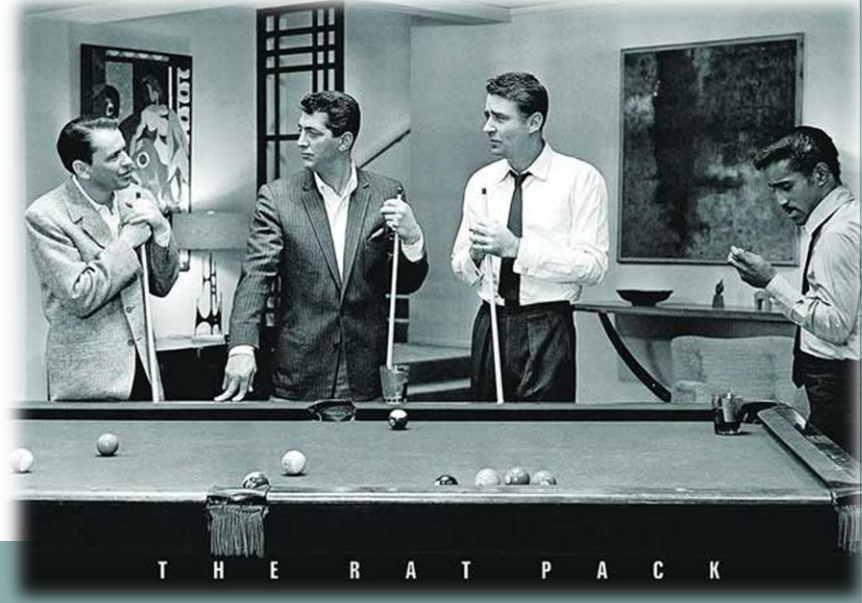
Imagery

Joan Didion, *Salvador*



“Now Sinatra says a few words to the blondes. Then he turned from the bar and began to walk toward the poolroom. One of Sinatra’s other men friends moved in to keep the girls company. Brad Dexter, who had been standing in the corner talking to some other people, now followed Sinatra. ¶ The room cracked with the clack of billiard balls. There were about a dozen spectators in the room, most of them young men who were

watching Leo Durocher shoot against two other aspiring hustlers who were not very good. This private drinking club has among its membership many actors, directors, writers, models, nearly all of them a good deal younger than Sinatra or Durocher and much more casual in the way they dress for the evening. Many of the young women, their long hair flowing loosely below their shoulders, wore tight, fanny-fitting Jax pants and very expensive sweaters; and a few of the young men wore blue or green velour shirts with high collars, and narrow tight pants and Italian loafers.”





# Setting



“The intent of a façade is exoteric but there are obvious problems with that. While in St. Petersburg, for instance, I stayed for several days at the

Moscow hotel. That particular exterior does the work of a façade, presenting a warren of windows so relentlessly uniform the eye is baffled and ultimately rejected; From a distance you can't quite locate the entrance. But, if from the outside, you can't find a way in, from inside, especially



walking down the hallways, you can't imagine a way out. The interior space is made of incredibly long, horrid corridors lined on either side with black doors, like answers to a question you'd long ago forgotten.”

—*Orphans*, Charles D'Ambrosio

# Setting



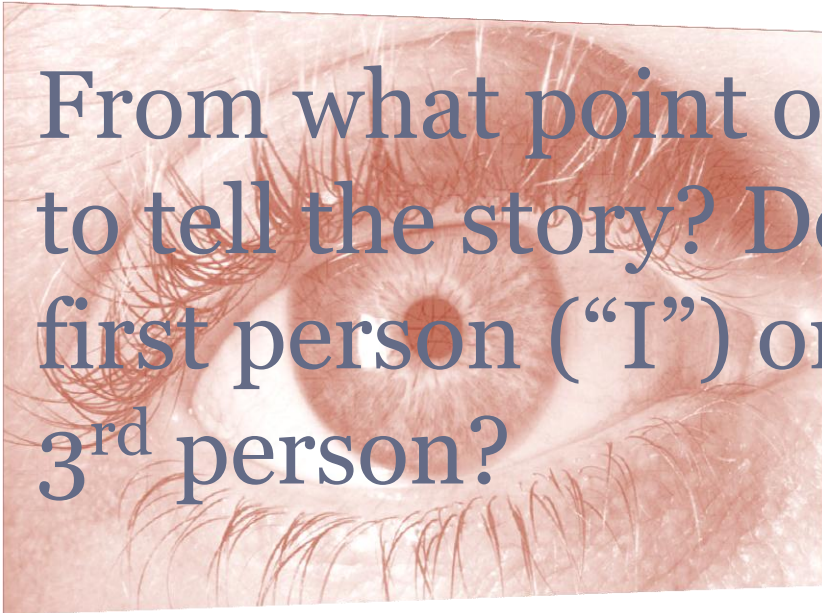
You can see how describing setting can also cross over to affect elements of tone, imagery, theme, style, etc ...



# Narrative Point of View



From what point of view do I want to tell the story? Do I want to use first person (“I”) or tell the story in 3<sup>rd</sup> person?



# Point of View

# “I”

“More than money, what I needed was rest, at the very least to quell the misgivings I had been having about my role as a writer. On the transatlantic leg of the flight I had sketched out a bunch of alternatives: I mulled over writing in the urgent voice of a liberal reformer, or expressing a stoic world-weariness, or getting riled up and angry in an expose, or working toward a generous-spirited puff piece. These were all stories I thought about telling. And then on the plane from Frankfurt to St. Petersburg I was fated to sit beside a couple from Cleveland who’d come to Russia to adopt an eight-year-old girl.”

—*Orphans*, Charles D’Ambrosio



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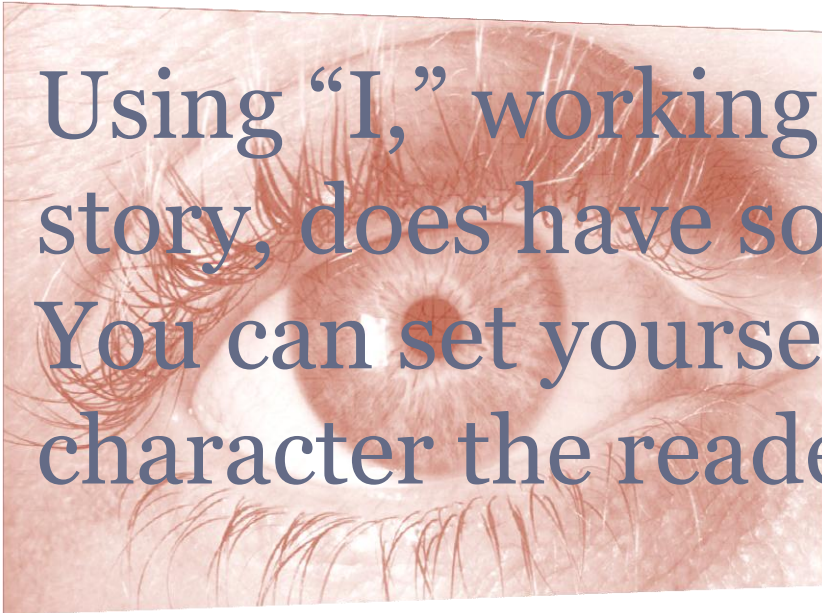


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# Narrative Point of View



Using “I,” working yourself into the story, does have some advantages. You can set yourself up as another character the reader can relate to.





## Point of View

“3rd”



“Norton Townshend Dodge, born in Oklahoma City in 1927, first presented his curriculum vitae to officials of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in the early spring of 1955. They let him in for thirty days. His stated purpose was to travel with his father (a retired college president) and assist him in a study of Soviet education. Norton did not reveal his real mission.”



—*The Ransom of Russian Art*, John McPhee

Notice dramatic tension.



## Point of View

# “3<sup>rd</sup>”

### **Travel Warning U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE Bureau of Consular Affairs Colombia**

**November 10, 2010**

The Department of State warns U.S. citizens of the dangers of travel to Colombia. While security in Colombia has improved significantly in recent years, violence by narco-terrorist groups continues to affect some rural areas as well as large cities. The potential for violence by terrorists and other criminal elements continues to exist in all parts of the country. This updates and replaces the Travel Warning for Colombia issued on March 5, 2010 to update information on recent security incidents and criminal activity.

“She looked over her shoulder before getting into the car to be sure no one was following her. It was 7:05 in the evening in Bogota. It had been dark for an hour, the Parque Nacional was not well lit, and the silhouettes of leafless trees against a sad, overcast sky seemed ghostly, but nothing appeared to be threatening. Despite her position, Maruja sat behind the driver because she always thought it was the most comfortable seat. Beatriz climbed in through the other door and sat to her right.”

**—*News of a Kidnapping,*  
Gabriel Garcia Marquez**

Nietzsche said all language is music



**How do I want my story to “sound?” Is your narrative loud or soft? Deep or superficial? Punchy or contemplative? Should there be an adaption of tone/sound that is contingent on how you interpret the “character” of my subject? How would you describe someone’s or some place’s “personality” and then adapt a conducive narrative style?**



# Tone



**“DURING the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country; and at length found myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher.”**

**Edgar Allan Poe**

# Style



All of this adds up to a matter of style, yours specifically. Finding your voice or what makes you unique as a writer will be a struggle. It's supposed to be. There will be some "EUREKA" moments along the way, but the journey will be ongoing. It's supposed to be. Find what works for you, but don't become locked in—ornate or plain? direct or figurative?—the more you write, the more you will discover yourself as a writer, the more you will learn, the more you will be surprised at the many ways you emerge on the proverbial page.



# On Being and Becoming a Writer



If you're serious, don't get too caught up with books on technique, but a few good ones:

John Gardner's, *The Art of Fiction*;

Milan Kundera's, *The Art of the Novel*; and

Charles Baxter's, *Burning Down the House*.

