



Fiction Exercises

Here are some of Marcy's oldies-but-goodies writing exercises in case you need something to jump-start your writing each week. Use these as the beginnings to something longer. See where they lead. Feel free to alter them to suit your own purposes.



This is a wonderful description exercise from John Gardner's book *The Art of Fiction*. Describe someone whose wretched, terrible spouse of fifty years has just died. Without mentioning the death, have your main character go outside and describe the landscape that she/he sees.



Describe the kitchen you grew up in. Include in your description something green in the oven, and something dead. You cannot be in this description, but put in some female relative (not Mom) who walks into the scene in the middle of your description.



Find a photo of a room. Write a scene in which a stranger views the room, making judgments and conclusions about who must live in it based on the physical items presents. Then describe the moment that they discover they have jumped to the wrong conclusions.



Write a conversation between family relatives where no one is listening to anyone else. Then, choose one person in the family and write the conversation from his/her point of view, revealing what is not being said.



Write an exchange of letters between two people that tells a story. The date is 1878. The place is Dakota. The season is winter. The first writer is feeling a strong emotion.



Describe a character musing on the “path not taken” in his/her life. As he or she ruminates on past choices, reveal a conflict that he or she is currently facing. Allow the rumination to lead them to some action or resolution of that current conflict.



Write a conversation in which someone who has been silenced speaks for the first time.



Describe a character who is the black sheep of a family, who has been excluded or abandoned because of something she/he did. Write from the point of view of the black sheep or the primary family member who excluded.



Follow #6 with a scene of the black sheep coming back to confront the family.



Write a description of someone who is stereotyped in some way, describing him or her in third person. Now write from the person’s point of view, opening up the stereotype of who he or she really is.



Choose a photograph that you like (from a magazine, an old family photo or from the newspaper). Write a scene that occurs just before or just after the photo is taken between the photographer and someone in the photo. What truths of the moment are left out of the photo?



Part I: Write a scene in which a character struggles with a secret passion or temptation and then successfully resists it. Part II: Write a scene in which your character’s secret passion is revealed and is then given to him/her.



Choose a famous tale (mythic, fairytale, Biblical or historical) and pick a moment that is usually left out or overlooked. Write the story of that moment.



Write three diary entries in the journal of a mad person, someone who experiences a different reality than most people.



Describe a scene in which someone is “caught in the act.” You decide just precisely what that phrase means.



Describe someone undertaking a strenuous physical action, but describe it in second person, using “you” rather than “she” or “I.”



The following delightful sentences come from a book called Pullet Surprises, a collection of goofs by high school English students. I don't find these little ditties to be mistakes. I see them as the inspirations for wonderful stories.

Choose one and use it somewhere in a story.

- A) Grandmother gave her air looms to the Hysterical Society.
- B) It was only a surface scratch, but already information had set in.
- C) One nation under God, with levity and justice for all.
- D) By the time the police found him, metamorphosis had set in.
- E) Mr. Graham is our local weather procrastinator.
- F) Every state is permitted to send two centaurs to Congress.
- G) The banker's money was well infested.
- H) My aunt's diabolic condition worries the family.
- I) She puts on airs but she's always making social plunders.