



Creative Writing Course

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Lesson 4

Please use this workbook to write down your ideas for your story's Setting (Time and Place).

Course Notes

Part 4 – Choosing Your Novels Setting

Now you've started working on the story idea, you've chosen the central characters and you've worked out which point of view serves your story best. You now need to decide on where and when the story happens.

Of course, while choosing your idea, you may have already decided on the setting. Perhaps, it was the setting that intrigued you enough in the first place and prompted your story idea. Maybe it's a strange little town that you visited once, and you wanted to explore the local myths surrounding the old castle in the centre. Maybe you discovered a history about your town, or a recent excavation uncovered a hidden temple somewhere in Mexico. In this case, the location of the story matters a lot, and your story will revolve around that setting as much as it does about the characters.

If we go by the bank robbery example we covered in the previous section, your story will most likely be set in a city, and the bank will be on a high street or in a business district. It might be a real place that exists in the present or in history, or it might be an imaginary place that you made up completely. You can also set your novel somewhere in between, such as a fictitious small town within a real country, with some elements based on reality and some elements being fictional.

If you were writing in a genre such as fantasy or sci-fi, your story could be set in a very different place, such as another planet, an alternate reality. In historical fiction, your story's location might be real, but you can choose to set in in a specific time in history such as the old Wild West, ancient Egypt, during the First World War, or a time period outside of recorded history (the future, the Stone Age, etc). Or if you were writing an urban fantasy, you have the option of injecting imaginary elements into the present day, real world.

With real places, research is of paramount importance. You'll need to discover and include specific details about the place and time period in your novel. You should be able to describe the places in your novel well enough that the story will seem authentic to someone who lives there now.

Most of my stories are set in real places, usually places that I've been to, places I've visited, lived at or worked in. Sometimes I've had to write about a different city, and that usually

required me to do research into the place so that I can weave elements of the setting into the story. Sometimes I add fictional things to a real place, or if it's a story where the setting is not of paramount importance, for example, a scene indoors, I can completely make it up to suit the character's needs.

If you're writing historical fiction, the setting in the past must ring true to a reader who has also studied the period. Even imaginary places must be just as detailed, but you have the luxury of inventing some of the details rather than researching them. (Of course, you may need to respect the conventions of your genre. For instance, in hard core science fiction, you generally cannot break known rules of physics, but you can in fantasy.)

As you research, you may find new ideas for the characters and plot or make a discovery that completely changes your initial premise. You as the author have freedom to change your story to fit in with your research.

Whichever path you take, your finished novel should take place within a clearly defined world. And that world should be defined by enough specific details to seem believable, consistent, and intriguing to the reader, to make the characters' actions and choices understandable within it, and to help the plot make sense.

Nothing Comes Close was set in London, Milton Keynes and Lagos. I've lived in both Lagos and London, but I've only visited Milton Keynes once. So I had to research the city to be able to write some of the scenes in the book. Research was necessary for me to be able to describe the roundabouts, the journey to the M1 (the motorway), the police station and some other places. For the scenes set in London, I could describe Lola's journey from her office to the underground station based on my own experience of working in Central London. I could talk about the coffee shops, the noise of traffic, the newspaper vendors and those other things that make a scene in London rush hour seem very realistic to the reader.

Think about the setting for your story. Now let's go to the workbook.

Workbook 4 – Choosing Your Novel’s Setting

So far you’ve started working on the story idea, you’ve chosen the central characters and you’ve worked out which point of view serves your story best. You now need to decide on where and when the story happens.

Place and Time Period:

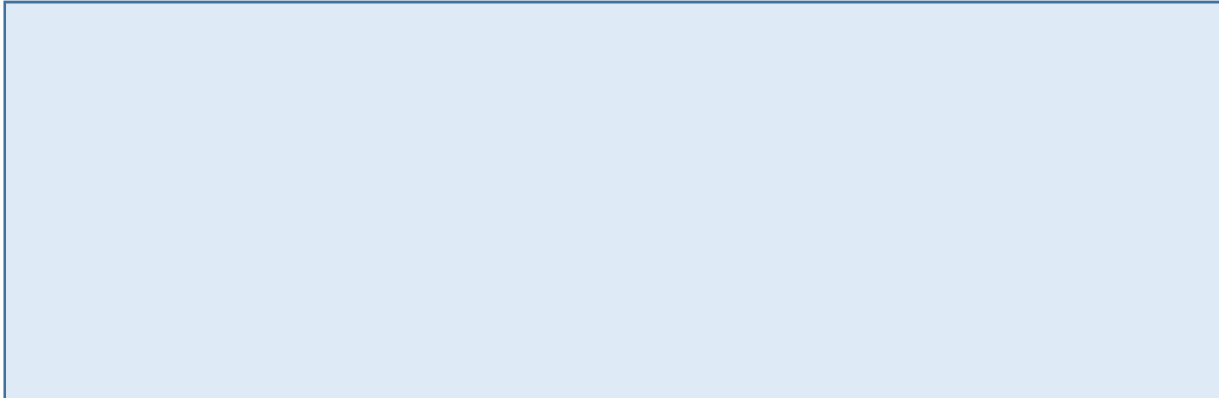
Do you already have a place in mind where your story is set? If yes, write the setting(s) below:

Is this a real place or a fictional place? Or is it a real place, with some aspects fictionalised?

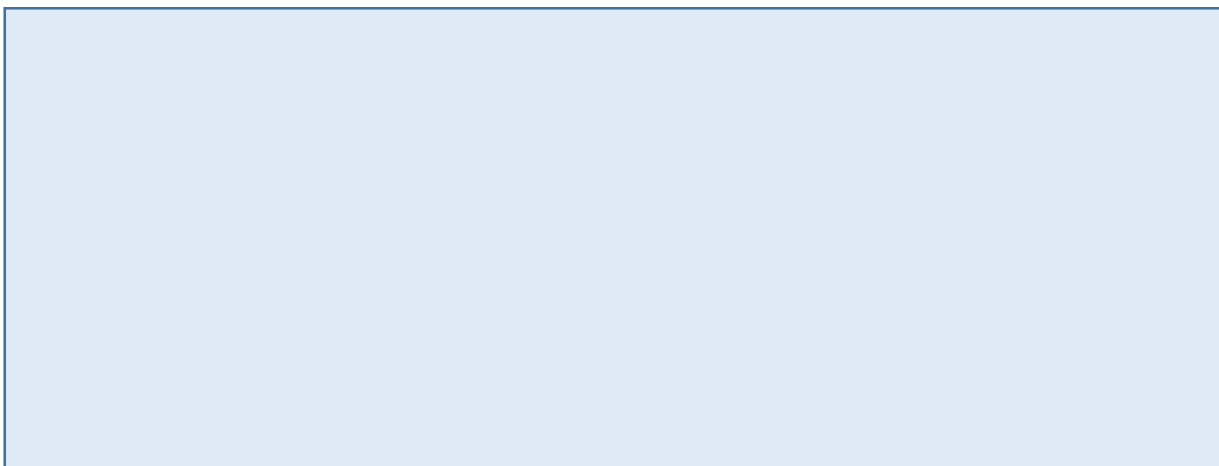
What about the time period where your story takes place?

Is it a contemporary story, or does it take place in the past or the future?

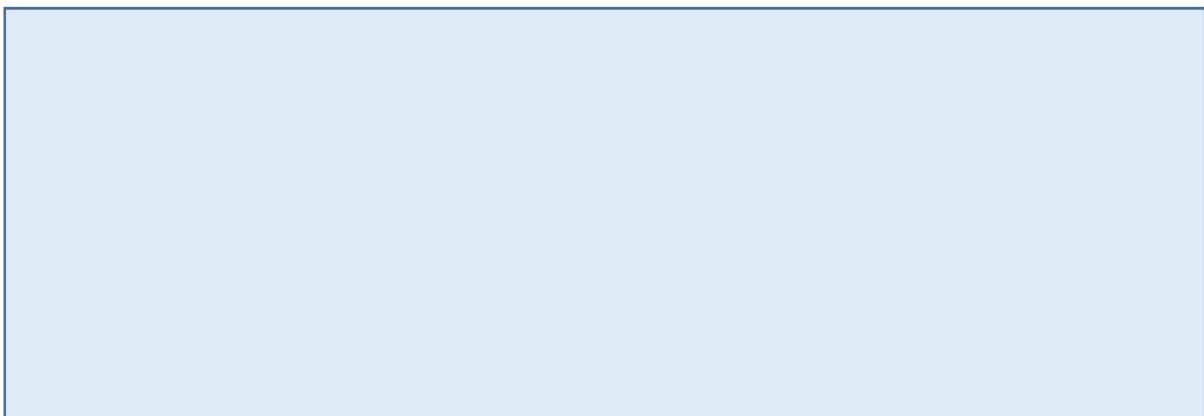
If your story is set in a real town or city, what aspects of that environment would you need to include when you're writing the story? Think about the sights, the sounds, modes of transportation, street names, places of interest, the weather, local food, etc.



If your story is set in a real place, what aspects do you have to research, to ensure accuracy?



If your story is set in the past, how will you portray that time period? Think about things like: customs of the past, the technology available, the popular historical figures of that era, music, jobs available (there were no bloggers in 1870!), different clothing



If your story is set in the future, or contains elements of fantasy, write down some of the things that will help you create a believable world for your characters. Examples could be time travel, teleportation, intelligent robots doing things like house chores, etc.



Think about how your characters will be interacting with their setting. Write down the things that they would need in their everyday lives that you must include. Example, if your character is a banker in the city in 1997, would he have a car or would he take the train to work? If your character is a teacher in the 1950s, what would her school and classroom look like?

