



Creative Writing Course

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Lesson 6

Please use this workbook to write down your ideas as we discuss the genre you're writing.

Course Notes

Part 6 – What Genre Are You Writing?

If someone was to ask you about your current work-in-progress and ask specifically, “what genre is it?” would you know how to respond? When deciding which genre to write in, most new writers start with the one they’re most familiar with, and the one they enjoy reading. Some may decide to learn the styles and rules in a particular genre that appeal to them before they start writing.

Broadly speaking, genre may fall under one of two categories: **Fiction and Nonfiction**.

Any genre can be either: a work of **Fiction**, which narrates nonfactual descriptions and events invented by the author or a work of **Nonfiction**, which portrays experiences, events and facts that are true. Each genre is a different, complex type of story with its own peculiarities. Since this course is mainly for writers who want to write a novel, we will focus on **Fiction**.

If you’re writing fiction, essentially, while initially developing a story in your mind, you should be aware of who your protagonist is and what they are trying to achieve. If your story is mainly about a character finding love, then you’re writing in the Romance genre. If your story is about a character trying to solve a crime, then your story could fit into Mystery or Crime/Detective genre. If your story is about a setting with magical or supernatural themes, then your genre is most likely Fantasy.

For this part of the course, we’ll be discussing a few of the most prominent **Fiction genres**.

Romance - Romance is one of the most popular genre of fiction. A romance novel is the one in which a love relationship between a man and a woman is the main idea of the plot. The story is either told from the viewpoint of the hero or the heroine. Conventionally the story starts with the lovers’ encounter and moves forward with their falling into love and intimacy. Like any other genre, romance writers also add a lot of tension and conflict into the plot in order to make the story captivating. The reader often wonders if the hero or heroine will achieve the love they seek. The resolution is usually the union of the lovers after having faced many social, psychological and emotional hardships. Most Romance novels have a happy ending where the main characters are in love and their future together is optimistic.

Romance has many sub-genres including fantasy, historical, science fiction and paranormal.

Science Fiction - Science fiction is a speculative genre in which the element of science and technology play the main part throughout the plot. The plot is usually set in future, where the prevailing scientific facts and technology witness a hypothetical, futuristic application.

The story goal revolves around science and technology and its effect on people. Most of the themes in science fiction deal with ground-breaking experiments, space travel, extra-terrestrial life, time-travel or the existence of a parallel universe. This is one of the most creative genres of fiction and it requires a lot of research and first-hand knowledge to craft a flawless science fiction.

Fantasy - Fantasy is a genre that usually comprises of magic, super natural elements, mythological and neo-mythological beings and imaginary worlds. There are some overlaps with science fiction in Fantasy, but unlike science fiction, science and technology are not the main catalysts of the story. Fantasy also involves the suspension of reality and disbelief. The writer who wants to write in the Fantasy genre must be able to craft a world where strange things happen, such as animals speaking or people flying, but the reader experiences this as normal. Sometimes the plot contains a normal setting with just a few magical elements, and in some stories, the entire setting is fictional and unreal.

Thriller - Thriller is a broad genre of literature, which relies heavily on stimulating the reader's moods, giving them heightened feelings of suspense, excitement, surprise, anticipation and anxiety. Stories in this genre keep the reader on the "edge of their seats" as the plot builds towards a climax. A thriller is usually a villain-driven plot, whereby he or she presents obstacles that the protagonist must overcome. The villain could be a person, a situation or even a government organization that is a threat to the main protagonist.

Plots in a thriller novel are usually based on illegal or violent activities such as kidnappings, murders, stalking, acts of terrorism, false accusations and political sabotage. Grief, false hope, heartaches, anxiety and near-death experiences are a few important elements of an outstanding thriller. Like Romance, there are many sub-genres of thriller such as legal thriller, spy thriller, action-adventure thriller, medical thriller, police thriller and historical thriller. Most thrillers are fast-paced, with a lot of action to keep the reader going.

Horror - Horror fiction is a genre of literature, which is intended to frighten, scare, or startle their readers by inducing feelings of horror and terror. It creates an eerie and frightening atmosphere. Horror is frequently supernatural, though it can be non-supernatural

Historically, the horror genre has origins in folklore and religious traditions, focusing on death, the afterlife, evil, and demonic beings such as witches, vampires, werewolves, zombies and ghosts. Modern horror also includes these elements and some stories incorporate psychological and social menaces. One of the best-known contemporary horror writers is Stephen King, known for writing books like *Carrie*, *The Shining*, *It*, *Misery* and many others.

Mystery - Mystery fiction is a genre usually involving a mysterious death or a crime to be solved. And a closed circle of suspects. Each of the suspects must have a credible motive and a reasonable opportunity for committing the crime. The central character is usually a detective or officer of the law who eventually solves the mystery by logical deduction from facts fairly presented to the reader. Sometimes mystery books are nonfictional or based on a retelling of true crimes that happened and have been resolved.

There are some elements of Thriller in this genre, but the emphasis in Mystery is on the puzzle or suspense element and its logical solution. Sometimes these stories are labelled “whodunit” because that is the main question the protagonist is trying to resolve. The Sherlock Holmes series is one of the most popular examples of a Mystery novel.

Historical Fiction - Historical fiction is used to describe novels set in a specific period in history, such as the French Revolution, Ancient Rome, the First World War, the Gold Rush, Ancient Egypt, etc. An essential element of historical fiction is that it is set in the past and pays attention to the manners, social conditions speech, clothing, modes of transport and other details of the period depicted. The Historical Novel Society defines the genre as works “written at least fifty years after the events described”.

Writing historical fiction often involves a lot of research on the part of the writer, so as to accurately portray and how life was at a point in the past. Tolstoy’s War and Peace offers an example of 19th-century historical fiction used to critique contemporary history. The novel is set 60 years before it was composed, and alongside researching the war through primary and secondary sources, he spoke with people who had lived through war during the French invasion of Russia in 1812.

Not all stories fit neatly into these well-defined genres, and some stories may have elements of more than one genre. The next categories of fiction are less about the genre and more about the target market that they appeal to.

Young Adult

Young-adult fiction or young adult literature, often abbreviated as YA, is fiction written, published, or marketed to adolescents and young adults. Authors and readers of YA novels often define the category as literature written for ages ranging from sixteen years to the early twenties, while Teen Fiction is written for the ages of ten to fifteen. Young Adult as a category started in the early 1950s and gained popularity through the 1960s and 1970s. In the 80s and 90s they continued to grow, as publishers and bookstore owners started publishing and shelving YA books under different sections from Children’s books and books marketed to adults.

The themes and story lines of the YA category are typically consistent with the age and experience of the main character, but YA spans different genres. YA stories that focus on the specific challenges of youth are sometimes referred to as problem novels or coming-of-age novels. The protagonist is always of that age, as are most of the characters. A variety

of issues that young people can deal with such as friendships, getting into trouble, interest in the opposite sex, money, divorce, remarriage, problems with parents, grandparents, younger siblings, concern over grades/school, popularity, puberty, race, etc. can be dealt with in a YA novel.

Children's Fiction

This is a wide category of fiction that is well defined by its own name. The stories and books are for young children, from toddlers on up to about eleven years of age. Children's fiction is often divided by age or school grade, such as nursery rhymes, songs and poems for very young children, fables that teach morals and adventure stories for older primary school age children. The books usually feature characters that belong to the same age group that they targets as readers. Children's book often include colourful illustrations of the story and the main characters. There's usually a lot of imagery, with simple dialogues and themes.

There are six categories of children's literature (with some significant subgenres):

(i) Picture books that teach the alphabet or counting for example, pattern books, and wordless books (ii) Traditional literature, including folktales, myths, fables, legends, and fairy tales (iii) children's fiction, including fantasy, realistic fiction, and historical fiction (iv) Non-fiction (v) Biography and autobiography (vi) Poetry and verse.

Literary Fiction

Literary fiction refers to a type of novel or work of prose where the story focuses more on a complex character's internal issues, a political commentary or the mastery of the language and less on the plot. Literary fiction often aims to do more than just tell a story. The author may be trying to do something unprecedented with language, style or structure.

Many people believe that the main difference between literary fiction and mainstream genre fiction is that literary fiction stories are more 'character driven' as opposed to 'plot driven'. They don't have a concrete plot, or a happy ending. The character may or may not be a good person. Literary fiction tends to be unpredictable, because the story usually doesn't have a specific format like in genre fiction.

Now let's move on to the workbook for this topic.

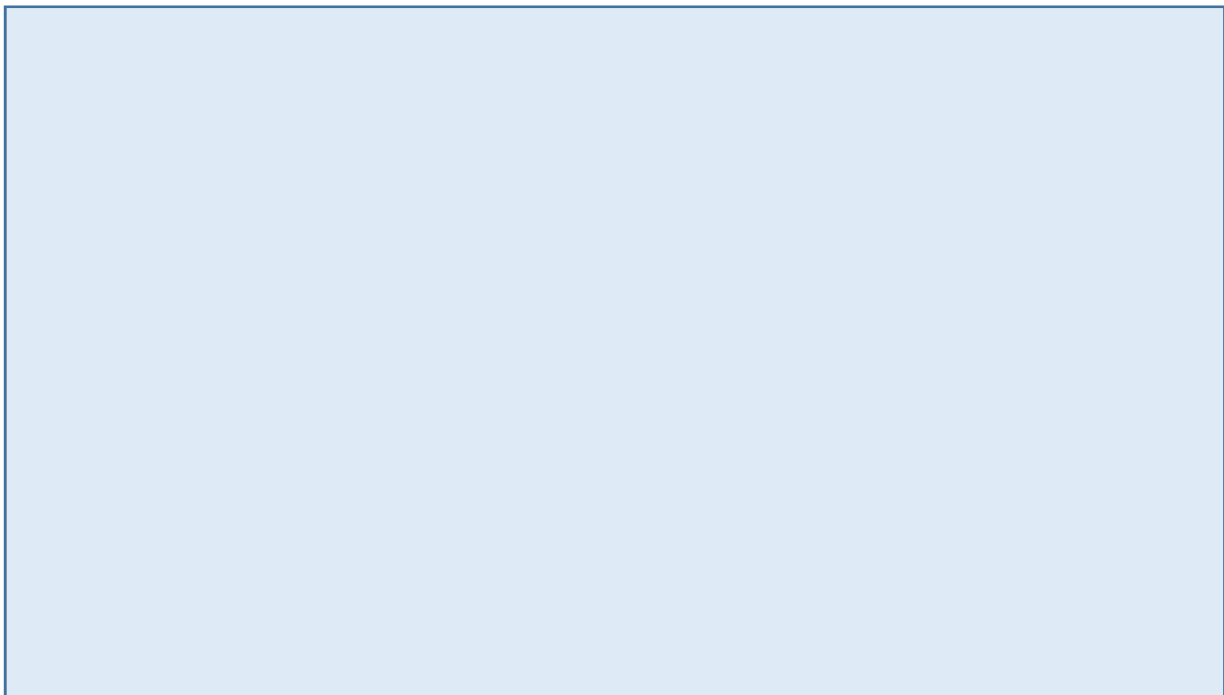
Workbook 6 – What Genre Are You Writing?

Knowing the genre your story falls into will help you with applying the rules while you're writing. It will also help you with attracting the right readers, and categorising your book when you finish writing, and you're ready to publish it.

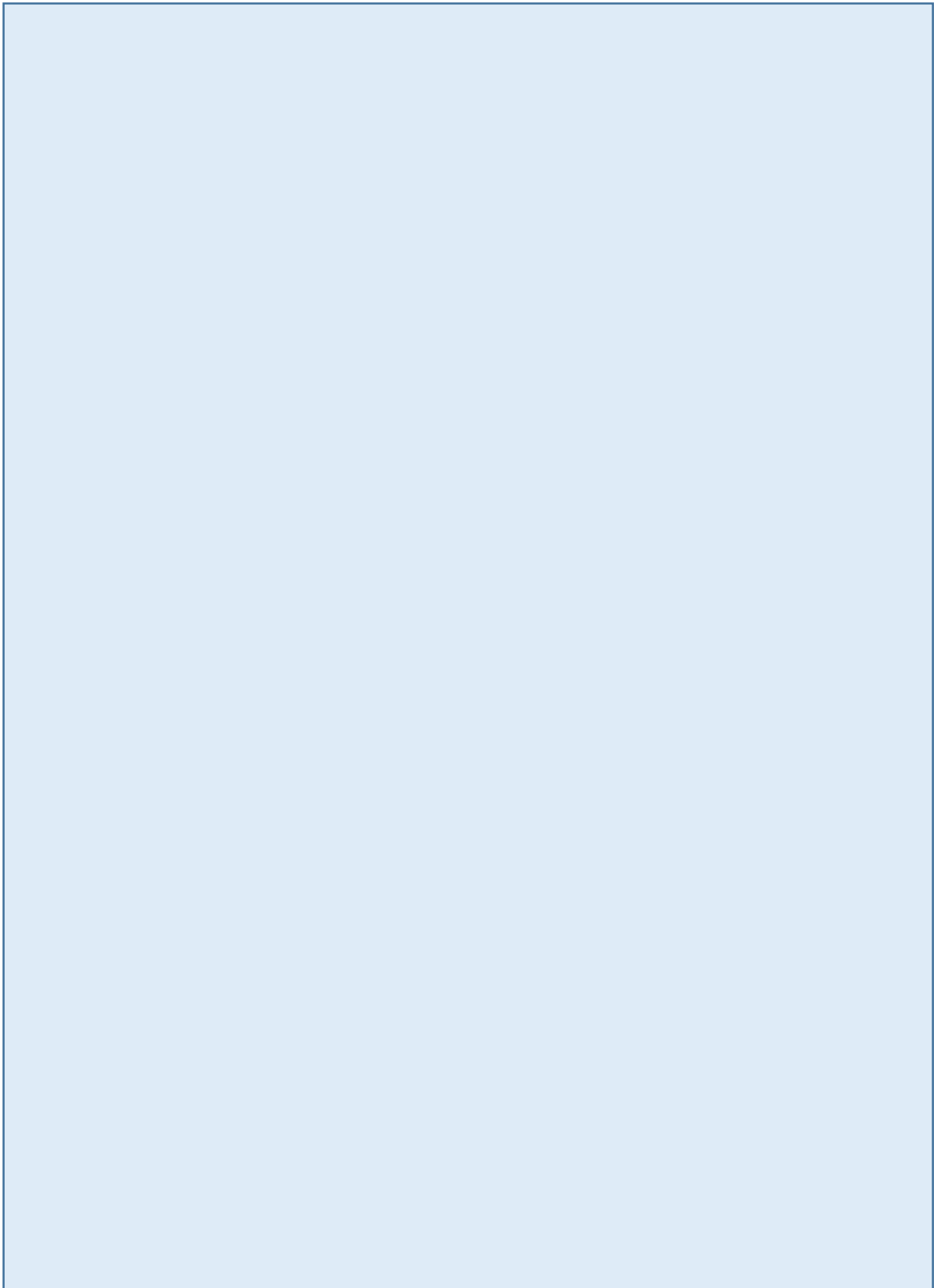
Based on the Story Goal, and what your protagonist wants to achieve, what's the Genre for your story?



If your story is Literary Fiction, or it doesn't fit neatly into any of the genres discussed above, how best can you describe it?

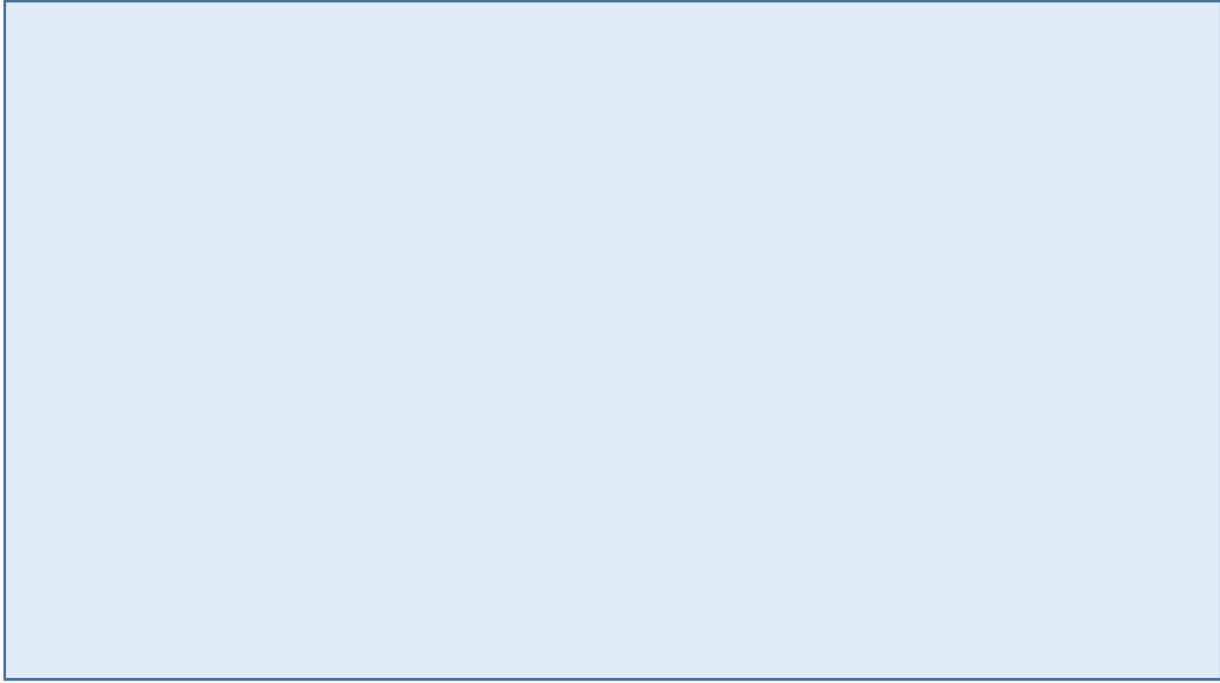


What are the rules of the genre you're writing? For example, if you're writing Romance, there is usually a set pattern where the protagonist finds a love interest, and the story usually ends happily. Write down the rules of your genre here:



As a writer, you can decide to break some of the rules of a genre, but do so with caution! If you plan to change some of the rules that apply to your story, think carefully about the expectations of your readers. For example, most Romance novels end happily. If you want to write an unhappy ending, there must be a compelling reason.

Write down how you plan to change the rules of your genre.



Your reader will be expecting to know the genre of the book they are reading upfront. This means your first chapter must set the tone for what's to happen throughout the book. For example, in Romance, the first chapter introduces the female protagonist, and she meets the male protagonist. Write down how you will structure or change your first chapter based on this genre expectation:

