



Creative Writing Course

by
Tolulope Popoola
Author, Publisher and Writing Coach

www.accomplishpress.com

Lesson 7

**Please use this workbook to write down your ideas
on Narration, Description and Dialogue.**

Course Notes

Part 7 – Narration, Description and Dialogue

At this point, you should have made a lot of progress with writing your first draft.

When you're writing a work of prose, for example a novel or a short story, you will be using these three elements: Narration, Description and Dialogue.

Description: We use description to help our readers form a picture in their mind as they read. When you use description effectively, you can help a reader form a picture of what your characters look like, what they are wearing, what their environment looks and feels like, the world they inhabit, how they are feeling, and so on. Description also helps to bring your setting (time and place) to life.

Dialogue: In a dialogue, at least two people are talking. They exchange information, ask questions, answer them, comment, fight, tease, etc. The way they interact with each other says a whole lot about their relationship. A teenage girl will speak and act differently when she talks to her best friend, her teacher or her little sister or her mom. When you're writing, pay attention to the words your character is using. The way people speak and interact in a conversation says a whole lot about them. The words a character chooses can and should expose the character's background, personality, and emotional status. The CEO of a multibillion-dollar company would choose different words than a military general, a stay-at-home mom, or a teenage girl.

Narration: The narration is what you, as the author, reveal to your reader, in between the other elements. This is where your Point of View comes in, as your narrator will either be you, as the omniscient author, or the limited perspective of one of your characters. Narration can be used to explain the thoughts of your character, and reveal things that the dialogue cannot.

As writers, we use these elements in our story to do the following:

- Describe scenes for your reader
- Explain what is happening in a scene
- Highlight aspects of your character's personality
- Reveal what your character is thinking
- Explore the relationships between your characters
- Drive the story forward

And so on.

Most of the time, you'll need to balance the scenes you're writing by blending these elements effectively. This is one reason you should put your protagonist in a scene with other characters as often as possible. Scenes that weave together these three elements engage the reader at an emotional level much more effectively than scenes that are only dialogue, only narrative or only description.

Example: Please read this excerpt from my novel, *Nothing Comes Close*. It contains all three elements of writing prose.

I had to admit I was enjoying myself, and I was glad I made the choice to hang out with Kene this Saturday. We were just leaving the album launch. Kene had behaved outrageously, flirting with all the pretty girls, posing for every camera and drinking free alcohol. I stayed sober, just in case I was going to end up being the designated driver by the end of the night. We stepped out of the bar and got into Kene's car that was parked just around the corner and started heading to the birthday party.

"Who's the celebrant?" I asked. "Anyone I know?"

"I don't think you know her. Her name is Titi and I met her through another girl who recently joined our label."

"Is she also in the music business?"

"I can't remember. I don't think so."

The party was already in full swing when we arrived. The house was full of people, many of whom were standing around eating, and talking. A few brave ones had taken to the dance floor in the open space living room. A mixture of the smell of perfume, food and drink filled the air. It reminded me of the house parties Kene and our friends used to throw when we were at university. These were usually parties that happened for no reason at all. When we were in a good mood or Kene wanted to get some girl's attention, we'd just throw a feel good party. And he was good at that; especially when it came to seducing a girl. Once his mind was made up, there was no stopping him.

"Let me find Titi," Kene said to me, his voice raised above the music.

"Sure," I replied.

Kene went through the house, greeting some of the guests while I went to the garden to wait for him. Within minutes, I was accosted by a lady wearing a dress that showed off her curvy body.

"Hi," she said as she approached, smiling. "I'm the celebrant's friend. Have you just arrived?"

"Hello. Yes I've just come in with a friend."

"My name is Funmi," she said, "I'll get you something to drink. There's a buffet in the kitchen if you're hungry, okay?"

"Thanks."

She went off and a moment later another girl with the most striking eyes I'd ever seen approached me. I was immediately drawn to her, and, judging from that bold yellow dress she was wearing, I concluded that she must be a really confident person.

"Funmi wasn't sure what drink to offer you, so let me give you the options. My name is Lola, by the way."

"My name is Wole."

"We've got juice, white wine, beer, punch and –"

"I'll have the wine, please."

"Okay, I'll be right back." She disappeared through the glass doors and Kene reappeared at that minute with a girl who looked vaguely familiar.

"This is Titi," he said. "Titi, this is my friend Wole, he's the one I was telling you about."

Titi smiled at me and said, "Thank you for coming. You look a little familiar."

"I think we may have met before." I agreed. "I can't remember where though."

"Well, imagine that." Kene said, raising an eyebrow in surprise. "It is a small world."

"Yes it is," Titi said, giving me another quizzical look. "Well, enjoy the party guys, and I'll catch up with you again before you leave, huh?"

"Okay, we will." Kene said.

When she was out of earshot, Kene leaned closer to me and said, "Man, isn't she something! Shame she's got some dude hanging around her already."

"Hmm." I said, not really listening. I was trying to figure out how I knew Titi.

"Well, maybe she can hook me up with one of her friends instead." Kene continued. "I've already seen some interesting prospects."

Lola reappeared with a glass of wine.

"Here's your drink Wole."

"Thank you. This is my friend, Kene."

"Hi Kene," she said.

"Nice to meet you...?"

"Lola."

"Cool."

She went away again, and my eyes followed her into the house, the kitchen and back into the living room, where she started dancing. I was so focused on watching Lola that I didn't hear what Kene said, until he tapped me.

"Go get her, tiger."

"What?"

"You're captivated by that Lola chick. Go and talk to her, and let me find someone interesting to talk to."

I laughed, but I didn't hesitate. I left Kene in the garden and went into the living room to join Lola on the dance floor.

She seemed surprised but she didn't object when I started dancing next to her. We found a rhythm and began to move in tandem. She was a great dancer, anticipating my moves and stepping to the music. I enjoyed the dance until the music changed and she wanted to get a drink. I followed her to the kitchen so that we could talk. We had to raise our voices to be heard above the music, but I didn't mind. Eventually I got some finger food and we went to sit in the garden. I was fascinated with the way she smiled and gestured with her hands when she talked. Soon we forgot about the rest of the party and chatted for a long time. Occasionally, Lola had to play hostess, but I followed her around and didn't let her out of my sight. Usually, I'm the one who has to drag Kene out of functions, but this time was different. He was the one ready to leave when I wasn't.

I got up to leave, reluctantly.

"It was nice meeting you, Lola," I said.

"Same here," she replied.

"I would love to continue this conversation." I said. "Can I have your number?"

"Sure," she said, getting up from the garden bench. "Let me get my phone so that I can save yours."

I watched her go upstairs. I loved the fact that she was direct, and didn't do unnecessary *shakara* like many ladies.

She came back and said, "Let me have your number, so I can call you."

I gave her my number and she called my phone.

"There, now you have mine." She said. "The ball is firmly in your court."

"I'll be in touch," I said, catching a glimpse of Kene looking for me. "Got to go now."

“Okay, let me go and re-join my friends inside. I expect we’ll start clearing up soon. Bye Wole.”

Kene gave me a curious look when I joined him in the car.

“I thought you weren’t looking to meet anyone?”

I shrugged.

“You can’t plan these things. She was nice, so we’ll see.”

“Well I was on the prowl tonight and I met a tasty one.”

“This guy, when will you change?”

“Hopefully never.”

Kene thankfully wasn’t drunk and he dropped me off at home around four in the morning. I was expecting to be tired and fall asleep immediately but thirty minutes later, I was still lying on my bed fully alert. I tossed and turned for a bit. When I still couldn’t sleep, I got up to search for a blue folder that I kept away from all the other documents in my home office. This one contained stuff that I didn’t want prying eyes to see.

Striking a Balance

As you write, you’ll need to strike a balance between these three elements. There are no hard-and-fast rules about when and when not to blend dialogue, description and narrative. You’ll find your ideal rhythm as you weave your story together.

But there are a few questions you can ask yourself about your story, especially when you are rewriting the first draft, and editing. These questions can help you know which elements are most effective for a particular scene, and which might be better used elsewhere.

- Is the story moving a little too slowly, and do I need to speed things up? (Use dialogue to speed things up.)
- Is it time to give the reader some background on the characters so they’re more sympathetic? (Use narrative, dialogue or a combination of the two.)
- Do I have too many dialogue scenes in a row? (Use description or narrative.)

- Are my characters constantly confiding in others about things they should only be pondering in their minds? (Use narrative.)
- Likewise, are my characters alone in their heads when my characters in conversation would be more effective and lively? (Use dialogue.)
- Is my story top-heavy in any way at all—too much dialogue, too much narrative or too much description? (Insert more of the elements that are missing.)
- Are my characters providing too many background details as they're talking to each other? (Use narrative.)

Whether we're using dialogue, description or narrative to move the story forward, any or all three of these elements are doing double duty by revealing our characters' motives. And to understand a character's motive is to understand the character.

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

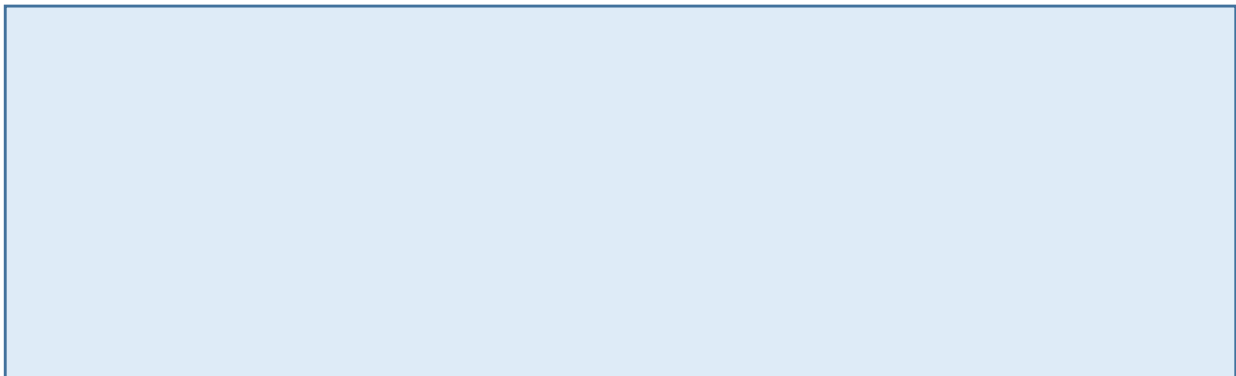
Workbook 7 – Writing Narration, Description and Dialogue

Use the excerpt from *Nothing Comes Close*, in the section above. If you have a highlighter or a pen, mark out which areas are Dialogue, Narration and Description.

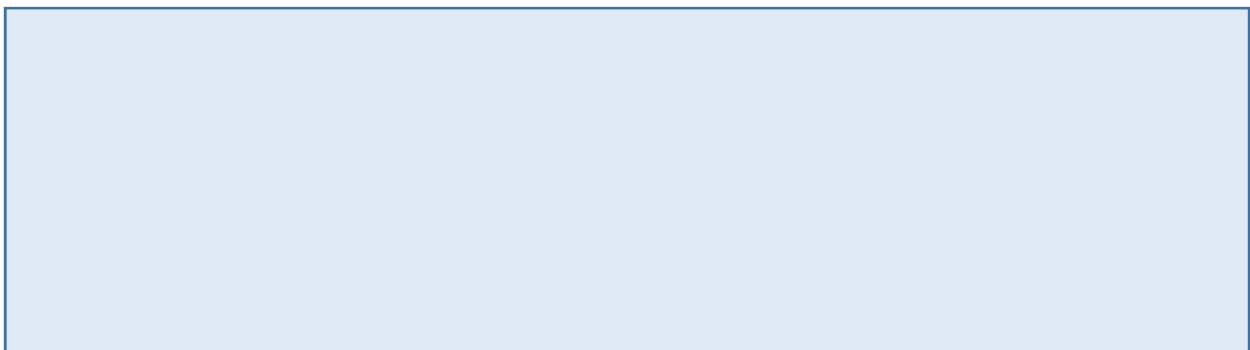


Most writers have one strong point when they are writing with these elements. Personally, I find dialogue comes to me easily, while description is my weakest point. That means I have to make a deliberate effort when I'm writing, or editing to describe my characters and my scenes effectively.

Which one do you think is your strongest point?



Which element do you think is your weakest point?



How can you ensure, when you're writing, that you've got the balance right with each of the elements?

