

Identity Project Suggestions

FOR ALL GENRES

- Show, don't tell. This is an old adage in writing which basically means that it is more interesting and original to portray an emotion or thought than to tell your reader. For example, notice the difference between these two sentences:

She was very sad.

Her bottom lip quivered as she tried to hold back tears.

The first sentence makes the point, but without any visual picture. What does "sad" look like for this person? The second sentence achieves the same goal, but much more vividly.

Another example:

I was so angry that I punched my fist through the wall.

"Damn it!" I yelled, plunging my fist through the wall.

Both sentences show anger, but the second is more sophisticated, because it does not use the word angry; there's no need for it. Clearly, anyone who yells like that and plunges his fist through the wall is angry.

- Be specific with your details. Don't say "bird," say "pigeon" or "crow" or "parrot." Don't say "flowers," say "pink roses," or "marigolds," or "petunias." Let your reader really see what you're talking about.
- Avoid clichés. A cliché is an overused, unoriginal, and sometimes corny expression. Examples:

I ran *like a bat out of hell*.

She goes to the theatre *once in a blue moon*.

I *gave it my all*.

We played *like there was no tomorrow*.

For Non-fiction (essays, vignettes, cd liner notes, magazine articles, etc.)

- Examine your beginning. It should catch the reader's attention. Try beginning with a vivid description, a quote, an anecdote, a question, or a startling statement. Avoid dry beginnings like, "The most interesting thing I ever did was..."
- Read some examples of your genre to understand the style in which your piece should be written. For example, if you are writing an interview, get the latest copy of *Rolling Stone* and see how they do it.

For Fiction

- Make your beginning grabbing. Use a piece of dialogue, a vivid description, or a startling statement. Pull the reader in.
- Use dialogue correctly. Remember that with each new speaker you need a new paragraph. If you're confused, pick up a novel and look at how dialogue is written.
- Make sure you have a plot arc: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution. This doesn't mean that it has to be an action adventure story; even a story about someone waiting for a bus can have these elements.
- Don't take on too much! This is a short story, not a novel. Keep your story simple so that it can resolve itself in a few pages.

For Poetry

- A poem is an *image + an idea*. Make sure there is some vivid imagery in the poem as well as some main point or idea you wish to get across.
- DON'T RHYME. If you want to write one rhyming poem, fine, but rhyme is not the essence of poetry. New poets who attempt to use rhyme usually spend all their time trying to find rhyming words and lose the meaning of the poem.
- Choose your words carefully, and use your words sparingly. No one wants to read wordy poetry. Words should be specific and meaningful.
- Remember that you don't have to use full sentences. Grammar rules don't apply.
- Consider the use of line breaks for emphasis.
- Read some poems by one of your favorite poets and examine the style in which his/her poetry is written. This will help you in writing your own verse.