

# Step One

UNDERSTANDING THE NARRATIVE

I am going to read you a  
story...

- Page 8-9—What makes each story better?

# *Something*

- **SOMETHING** happens, it is all in finding the something and highlighting and framing it.
- Which direction are you going to send your story in? Romance? Comedy? Tragedy?

# Making Choices

- The “writing as sculpting” and “writing as a sauce-maker” metaphors.
- Killing your babies—you ONLY have 250-500 words, you cannot tell your entire life story, it must be a snapshot.

# A narrative is...

- “The Once,” “The Ordinary vs. The Extraordinary,” “Tension and Conflict,” and “The Point.”
- What makes a good story teller? p. 11-12

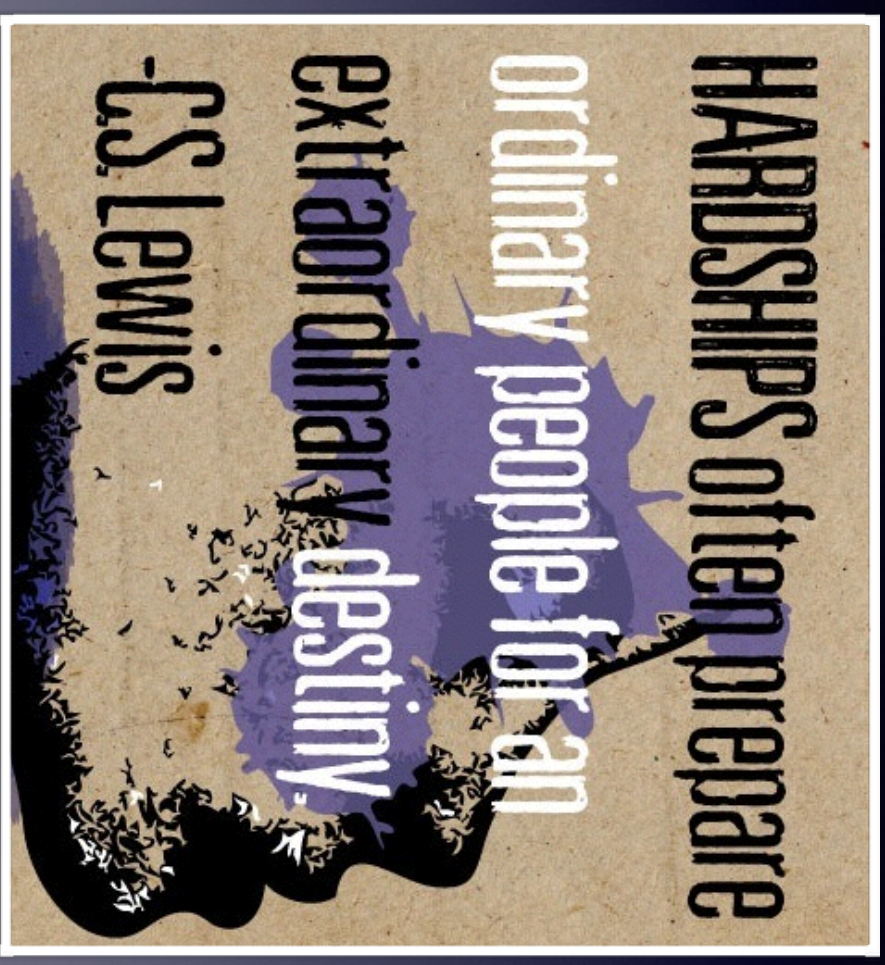
# “The Once”

- Where is your story going to take place in space and time?
- You want to start your story *with* the conflict.
- Start with what matters. (examples on p. 14)



# The Ordinary vs. The Extraordinary

- What is the extraordinary thing that is going on in your narrative?
- With a limited space, you cannot waste time with the ordinary.



# Tension and Conflict

- Tension and Conflict create your story.
- Interpersonal, Individual vs. Society, Individual vs. Nature, and an Individual vs. Self
- The Point—Why are you writing? Why are we reading?





# Today...

- Brainstorm for the following: Your point, your once, your conflict and tension.
- These should be written in your notebook along with your notes from today.

# Step Two

Finding your topic

# Why college essays fail...

- They're predictable
- They're overly sentimental
- Poorly told
- Too self-promoting



# Why do people write?

- To connect with other people.
- To come to terms with something in the past
- To project into the future
- To better understand something in nature
- To amuse
- To arouse
- To preserve a tradition or folkway
- To explore a value or reinforce a moral standard
- To alarm a reader or otherwise a cautionary tale
- To confess
- To forgive

# Start by asking yourself some questions...

- What has been the hardest thing in your life?
- What has been difficult for you to accomplish?
- At what points have you felt inadequate, and how did you deal with those feelings?
- If you had to quickly replay your life, which two or three moments would jump out ahead of all the others?
- What do you regard as your greatest victory?
- Have you ever made a discovery that thrilled you?
- What has held you back from realizing your ambitions?
- What fills you with pride?
- What was the toughest problem that you managed to figure out?
- What have you done that “they” say couldn’t be done?
- What object holds the most meaning for you?
- Which personal weakness have you worked on the hardest?
- Which experience really pulled you out of your comfort zone?

# Other helpful hints

- Present yourself as a good person, not a flawless one.
- Keep in mind the limitations...you are not allowed to recreate your entire life.
- Ask yourself probing questions to act as “prompts” for your essay writing.
- Your essay should revolve around conflict and offer resolution.
- Everyone has a story to tell. It’s just a matter of discovering what that story is. (p. 36)

# For Next Class...

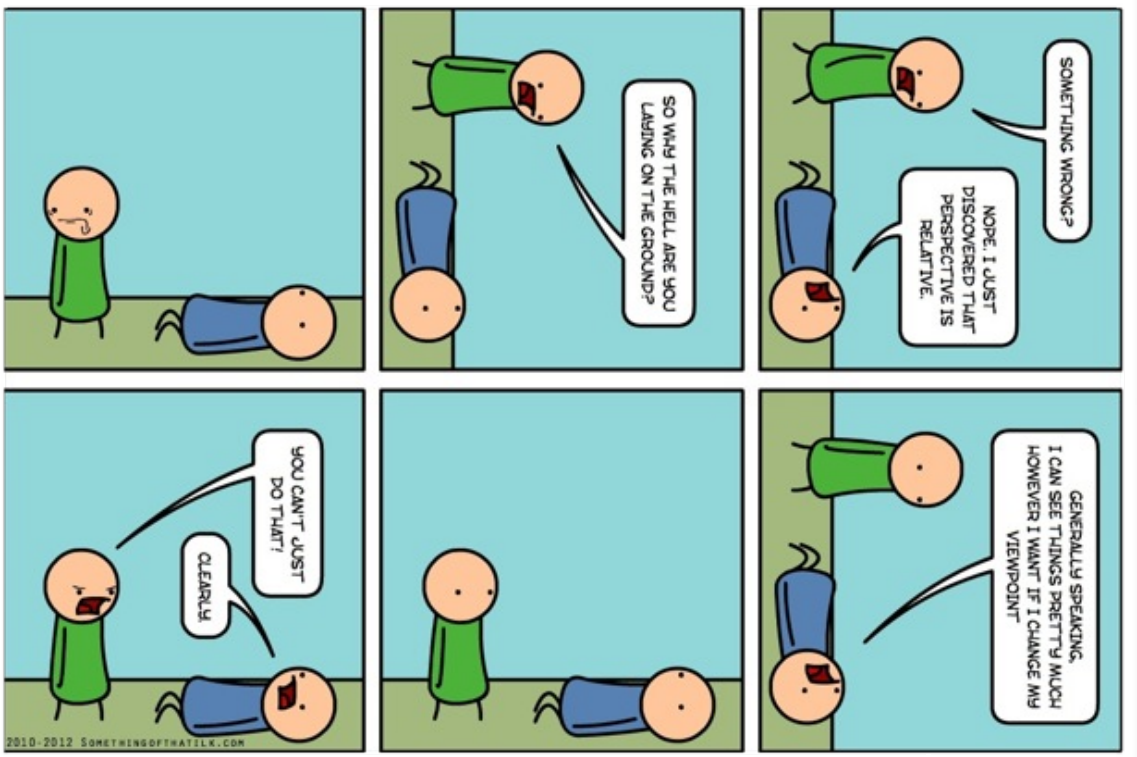
- Review your questions, answers, and brainstorm; with those, what do you want to write about?
- Write the following: What is your conflict? What is your resolution? How does it showcase you as a “good person”?

# Step Three

Point of View



# Point of View is...



- the vantage point from which the writer passes the narrative to the reader...
- In your college essay... which is the best point of view?

# The persons...

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- First Person**—the “I” form. Think Holden Caulfield p.43
- Second Person**—an interesting...but completely impossible thing to use. If you really want to torture yourself, ask me about it.
- Third Person**—Omniscient narrator. Example on p. 45

# Tense

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- Past, Present, and Future.
- You will most likely write in the Past or the Present Tense.

# **In medias res...**

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- You will want to start in the middle of things to save time and activate your readers.**

## **For next class...**

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- At this point, you should have your topic, have made a decision on writing style (perspective, tense), and have started to map out your essay.**



# Step Four

*Getting it down...*

# Should your writing be perfect?

- ♡ In short, no.
- ♡ Your writing will NEVER be perfect.
- ♡ Writing a story is about finding the tension between vision and execution.

# Drafts

- ❧ Drafting are completely necessary.
- ❧ You should plan on at least three drafts and a polish for your college essay.





# Freewriting

- Freewriting is writing without any rules for a proscribed period of time.
- This is a great limbering exercise that gets your creative flowing.
- Try it now: Take your topic and write for it for ten minutes. Do not worry about punctuation, do not cross anything out. Do not THINK, just WRITE.

# Procrastinating

- This can occur because of a fear of failure, the realization that there is a lot at stake, and the resistance that comes with writing about deeply personal issues.
- If you are ever stuck, try writing your essay in the form as a letter to a friend of an email.
- Try setting a quota of a certain amount of words per day to stimulate your writing output. Reward yourself when you hit your quota.
- I am going to be a jerk here: Your first draft *will* fall short of your expectations. Congratulate yourself for the work you've done, suspend judgment, get other readings if you wish, and hold *nothing* sacred.

# For next class...

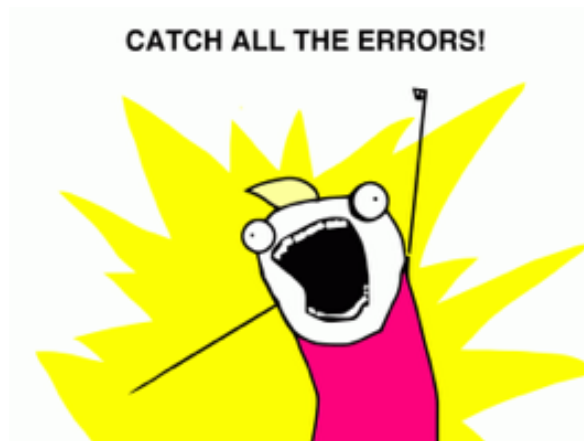
- ♡ You must have a first draft. It will not be perfect, it may even be pretty bad, but you are coming back to class to edit.

# STEP FIVE

“BIG PICTURE” Editing

# COMMON ERRORS

- \* Here are some of the following common errors that can hurt your initial draft and you will want to tackle in “BIG PICTURE” Editing.



# Concept

- \* If your concept falls flat, it's okay.
- \* You TRIED something and it didn't work.
- \* Chalk it up to the old “college try” and start again.



# Presentation

- \* The treatment falls flat.
- \* Language tight and stilted.
- \* Relying on clichés to carry your piece.
- \* Overboard with description.
- \* Oozing metaphors.
- \* Read and change it yourself or with someone you trust.

# Structure

- \* Did you spend too much time setting up the situation only to rush towards the close?
- \* Your piece must feel balanced and rush your reader along.



# Tone

- \* Don't try to impress your reader with fancy 10-letter words.
- \* Being flip or sarcastic where openness and honesty are best.
- \* Let's look at two pieces of tone in writing.

# Right or wrong?

- \* “If you want to know how a person can screw himself up, ask yours truly.”
- \* “Little did I know that my birthday was going to turn out to be a nightmare in living color.”
- \* “Gazing down upon Elmo’s limp, lifeless carcass felt the life drain out of me and knew in the deepest recesses of my soul that life as I had known it would never be the same.”

# Right or wrong?

- \* “As president of the Student Union, an office I have held for three straight years, possibly accomplishing more of my agenda than any other student that has held this post in our school’s history, I was shocked to find that the administration was not going to replace the broken soda machine in the cafeteria.”

# How to approach tone

- \* Essay as conversation.
- \* Imagine you are at a party sitting on a couch talking to someone you don't know.
- \* Don't try to be too impressive, don't spill every heart wrenching detail about your life, and don't come off as an inauthentic jerk.

## How do you check for all of these potential errors?

- \* Read it out loud.
- \* Better yet, RECORD yourself reading it and play it back to yourself.
- \* How does it sound? Mark the errors.

# Does your paper absolutely stink?

- \* It's all part of the process.
- \* First draft=getting it down on paper to figure out what (doesn't) work.
- \* By the time you reach your third draft, focus on style and voice.
- \* After those three or more drafts and you have the style, tone, and voice figured out; THEN you should look at grammar and all of that fun stuff.

# How to work through the first draft

- \* Check for style, tone, and voice.
- \* Read your first draft out loud and listen for (lack of) rhythm.
- \* Look for the CONFLICT... it's got to be there somewhere.
- \* The point is usually how you resolve your conflicts.
- \* Knowing your point is a way to be respectful of the reader, don't waste his/her time.

# For next class...

- \* Read your draft **OUT LOUD** and **RECORD** yourself doing it.
- \* Mark your first draft and bring it in.
- \* In your journals, write a sentence outlining the following:
  - \* Does your problem relate to concept? Start rewriting!
  - \* Presentation? (too many metaphors, etc.)
  - \* Structure?
  - \* Tone?
  - \* Rhythm?
  - \* Conflict?
  - \* Getting to the point?
- \* **YOU CAN DO THIS!**







# STEP SIX

The Second Draft

# Status Check

- o At the end of your first draft...ask yourself these questions.
  - o Are you afraid?
  - o Are you good enough?
  - o Can you get it right?
  - o Have you failed? Do you believe the next time will be better?



## Structure and Flow

- o Can't see the forest through the trees.
- o Merit of story can only show when the structure is examined and the flow is corrected. P.87
- o Others can check for things that are inhibiting structure/flow. Also, do you get "bored" or "zone out" during reading certain parts? Then change them!
- o The three act analogy.
  - o First act—set up action and intro conflict.
  - o Second act—plays out the action and examines it.
  - o Third act—finishes off action and resolves it.

## While I am at it...

- o How long is your writing?
- o 500 words?
- o 600 words?
- o 800 words?
- o 1200 words?
- o You are NEVER going to get this right...
- o KIDDING! Drafts are supposed to come in long!

# Get out your scalpels...

- o Focus, focus, focus!
  - o You don't need your ENTIRE backstory. A couple well worded sentences will do.
  - o p.91 examples



# Bad Beginnings

- o Best place to take lop off words? The beginning.
- o Writing openers is jumping into cold water.
- o Are you setting us up for what you are going to say? Then ditch it.
- o Superfluous Openings (apologetic, sarcastic, maudlin, smarmy, overdramatic, been there/ done that) p.95

# Egregious Endings

- o Don't overcompensate...p.96
- o ...or fizzle out...
- o ...or do THIS
  
- o Find your conflict, resolve it, then end it.

# Playing with Time

- o Playing as in manipulating
  - o Try having your ending be your opener
- o “In medias res” or “In the action” as opener
- o Skip some parts that are not exciting
  - o “I left and came back the next day”
- o Extend others
  - o In climax, you may want to give moment-by-moment accounts





# For tomorrow...

- o STOP PROCRASTINATING! YOUR ESSAY WILL BE OKAY!
- o Start to perform radical surgery on YOUR essay. Take pieces and cut them, move them around, or expand upon them.
- o Show me considerable growth.
- o Write 3 sentences in your journal outlining your work performed.

The background of the slide features a repeating pattern of light green hexagons on a darker green gradient. A white rectangular box is positioned on the right side, containing the main text. At the top of this white box is a solid dark brown horizontal bar. A thin, bright green horizontal line is located at the bottom of the white box.

# Step Seven

Self-Editing

## At this point...

- You have written your second draft.
- Picture it as the framing of a house.
  - Is it strong enough to continue building on?
  - Will it blow over in a strong wind?
- If it is the latter, you may need to get out your bulldozer and knock it down.
- I know this is sad, but it happens to EVERY writer.

## Edit Thyself

- You have to come to a place of real ownership of your work.
- The *Authentic Voice*
  - Expresses your individuality.
  - Needs to come from YOU.
- Stamp your material with your own *personal style*



# Metaphors

- If your essay is an outfit, metaphors are the jewelry.
  - Bright, shiny; they can attract your reader's attention.
  - However, you do not want to have hoop earrings, bracelets up to your elbows, and TWO CHAINZ!
- Use metaphors, just don't overuse them.



## Metaphor Mistakes

- A good rule of thumb (cliché) is that if you've heard them before, never use them again. Avoid them like the plague (cliché).
- What does a good metaphor sound like?
  - Scratching at the window with claws of pine, the wind wants in.
  - My grandfather had the sleek bone structure of an eagle with flinty eyes and a rosy glow.



I just feel like such a cliché

# Proportion and Rhythm

- If metaphors are jewelry, then bad proportion in an essay are a shirt that is too long, pants that are too short, and sleeves that are mismatched.
- If it *sounds* good, then it *is* good.
  - Make sure it doesn't only sound good to you.
  - Because you may be reading wrong.
  - Or you just might be weird.
  - Very, very weird.



## Tone—Formality vs. Informality

- What is the difference between these two sentences?
- To protect the environment, it would be better for there to be more government regulation.
- More government regulation would protect the environment.
- Stop being so stuffy! Be yourself?
- But when is being yourself just too much?
- I was chillin' with my friends when a car pulled up.
- Jen came down the stairs, looking so hot. She's my bae.
- But isn't that my authentic voice?
- Yes, RIGHT NOW! But your language might also alienate you.
- Finding the middle ground.



## For next class...

- Read your work out loud again and RECORD it.
- Mark your draft for the following metaphor mistakes, proportion, and TONE.
- Make the changes necessary.
- Keep working!

