

CREATIVE WRITING THAT PUTS YOU
IN THEIR
SANDALS



PREFACE

Dear Student,

Can you imagine what it must have been like to be at the stable the night Christ was born? Or to see Him feed thousands of people with just a few loaves and fish? What would we have seen if we had sailed with Jonah on his trip to Tarshish, or walked with Joseph, beaten and bound, on the dusty road to Egypt?

God gave us His Word as a window to His glory. As we read and meditate on what we find there—the stories and the teaching, the encouragement and the correction, the songs and the prayers—God will give us a better understanding of Himself. He will show us how His character and work impacts our lives, how His principles apply to our behavior, and how He can conform us to the image of His Son.

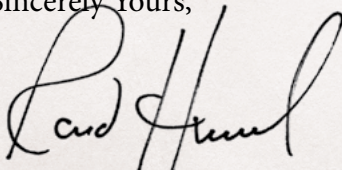
This study encourages you to dig deep into the Bible by reading Scripture and meditating on its meaning. You will learn how God reveals Himself through His Word, and how to communicate what you've found through creative writing.

By the end of this study, you will have written eight fictional stories based on Scripture, each of which will offer a glimpse of the truth you've learned. This exercise in creative meditation does not attempt to detract from or add to the Bible. We know that God's Word, which He has preserved through the ages, is totally sufficient to encourage, teach, and reprove. This study simply challenges you to consider the messages of Scripture and communicate the same truth in your own writing.

Along the way, you will learn skills and disciplines necessary for good writing. If you are to share truth with others, you should make every effort to do so well.

I trust this study will encourage you in your walk with the Lord. I pray that you will learn to love Him more and cherish the Word He's given you. May God bless you as you meditate on Him.

Sincerely Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rand Hummel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Rand" and last name "Hummel" clearly distinguishable.

Rand Hummel

TO THE TEACHER

This study combines creative writing and Bible study to encourage students to meditate on God in His Word. As students learn more about Him, they will also pick up skills and disciplines that will help them become effective writers.

Before beginning the study, please read with your students the Preface and the Introduction. There you'll find instructions, objectives, and a suggested weekly schedule. This book includes eight lessons, each of which represents a writing project derived from Scripture. The first seven projects are outlined by the study, and the last one is chosen by the student.

We trust *In Their Sandals* will help you and your students grow closer to God through His Word. If you have any questions or comments about using this study, please send us an email at info@positiveaction.org, or call us at (800) 688-3008. We'd love to hear from you!

By His Grace,

The Positive Action Family

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INTRODUCTION

By the end of this study, you should . . .

- Write eight stories based on events and characters from Scripture
- Read Scripture meditatively, with a mind to seek God's majesty in His Word, then share Him with others
- Research the historical and cultural context behind well-known Bible stories
- Approach writing systematically, with appropriate research, preparation, drafting, and revision
- Practice the disciplines of a good writer
- Build a basic literary vocabulary
- Understand the importance and use of certain grammar structures

For each lesson, you will be tasked with writing a story based on a particular passage from the Bible. You will write the story in your own words, but you'll find a good deal of background information and writing prompts to help you along. This study will teach you how to break large writing projects into much smaller, bite-size chunks. That's not to say that writing won't be hard work—it is for even the most experienced writers—but you shouldn't find each project overwhelming.

To guide you through the writing process, every lesson includes five sections that include writing exercises and study activities, as well as a composition skills review that can improve your writing and grammar. You can complete a single lesson in one week of intensive study, or in two weeks of lighter work.

Suggested Schedule—One Week per Lesson

	Section	Description	Estimated Time
Day 1	Research	Read the assigned Scripture. Gather all essential information.	60 minutes
Day 2	Rough	Outline the story and draft descriptions of important elements.	60 minutes
Day 3	Write	Compose the first draft.	90 minutes
Day 4	Apply	Dig deeper into the Word.	45 minutes
Day 5	Revise	Revise and rewrite your story to produce a finished draft. Apply suggestions from the Tools of Grammar section.	60 minutes

Suggested Schedule—Two Weeks per Lesson

Week 1

	Section	Description	Estimated Time
Day 1	Research	Read the assigned Scripture. Gather all essential information.	40 minutes
Day 2	Research	Continue meditating and gathering information.	40 minutes
Day 3	Rough	Outline the story and draft descriptions of important elements.	40 minutes
Day 4	Rough	Continue preparing notes and descriptions for the first draft.	40 minutes
Day 5	Write	Compose the first draft.	90 minutes

Week 2

	Section	Description	Estimated Time
Day 1	Apply	Dig deeper into the Word.	45 minutes
Day 2	Apply	Review and discuss thoughts on the Apply section.	30 minutes
Day 3	Vocabulary, Grammar, and Extra Assignments	Review the lesson's featured vocabulary and the grammar structure. Begin any Extra Exercises.	30 minutes
Day 4	Revise	Revise and rewrite your story to produce a finished draft. Apply suggestions from the Tools of Grammar section.	60 minutes
Day 5	Review	Share your story with other students, if applicable. Review and discuss important concepts from the lesson. Complete any Extra Exercises.	60 minutes

If you use this book to supplement other curriculum, you may choose to complete the lesson content over an even longer period of time, perhaps by spending only an hour or two in the book each week.

~Part 1: Research~

The first part of each lesson is spent researching background information for your story. After reading the passage that serves as your primary source of information, you will answer six key questions for your narrative:

- What happens in your story? Write out a short summary of the most important event.
- Who was involved? Who are your characters?
- When did this happen? What is the context, historical or otherwise?
- Where does your story occur? How does the location and setting add meaning to the narrative?
- How did this happen? What was the cause? How did the events play out?
- Why did this happen? What is the primary *theme* of your story—the message you want to leave with your readers? What was the purpose of all this? What can we learn from this?

You will search the Bible and other sources to address these questions, and when necessary, you will use your best judgment to fill in any that are unanswered.

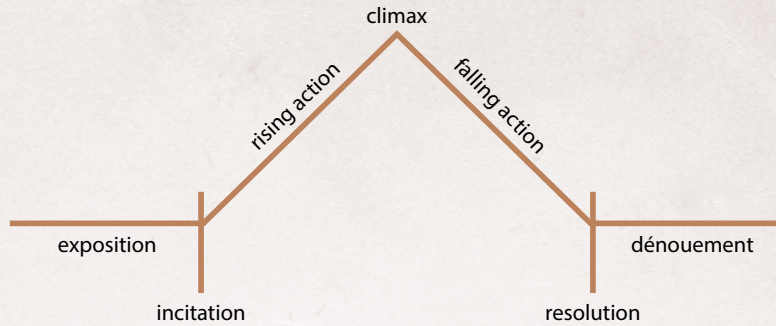
At the end of Part 1, you will reread your primary passage, searching for any missed details. Take this time to meditate on the Word, asking God to show you some glimpse of His character in the passage, so you can better reflect Him to others.

~Part 2: Rough~

You will spend the second part of each lesson roughing out the structure of your story, then working ahead on descriptions and themes that you will include in your first draft.

Outline

For the outline of your story, you will use Freytag's Pyramid as a template. Gustav Freytag (1816–1895), a German novelist and playwright, argued that most stories followed a similar structure. To help others understand, He devised a picture of what he believed was the average story.



Conflict

This isn't necessarily part of the pyramid, but it helps to determine the primary *conflict* in your story before you create much of an outline.

It's the nature of our fallen, imperfect world that every story or journey includes some form of conflict. There is the *protagonist*, your main character, and there is the *antagonist*, which stands in opposition. Which side prevails—and how—is the question most stories try to answer.

For these, we often think of *external conflict*, in which a character strives against some outside foe, whether that be a villain, the extremes of nature, or a looming assignment deadline.

But many stories feature *internal conflict*, which takes place in the mind and heart of a character. Through the course of the story, characters might grapple with fear, bitterness, anger, ignorance, or other inner enemies that might destroy them.

Perhaps the best stories include both types of conflict, with the external mirroring the internal. And as we understand from our walk with God, we must often gain victory over internal conflicts before we can begin the external.

So for each lesson, decide which conflict will drive your narrative. It can be subtle, or hidden, or even unresolved by the story's end, but your audience will expect some sort of tension.

Exposition

We'll talk a little more about the term *exposition* in Lesson Five, but in Freytag's Pyramid, this word means the start of the story—the place where you introduce your key characters and give some background information to help the reader begin to picture your world.

Incitation

And this is the point that gets your story moving. This event *incites*, or stirs up, the action and conflict. Your readers know that whatever follows might be out of the ordinary.

Rising Action

The *rising action* is the series of events that occur following the *incitation*. Your readers get to see how your characters react to new and possibly dangerous circumstances.

Climax

Your readers then arrive to perhaps the most important part of your story. The climax is the turning point, the height of conflict and tension. This is where your protagonist may resolve some internal struggle or determine a course to follow for the rest of the story.

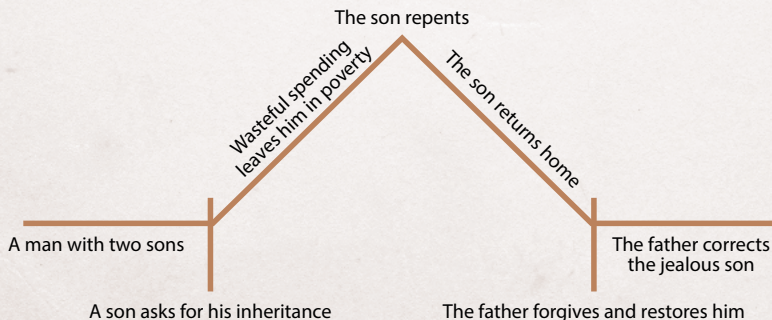
Falling Action

The *falling action* is the series of events after the climax. Readers might notice a change in the way the characters react to their circumstances. The story's pace will often accelerate toward its conclusion.

Resolution and Denouement

In Freytag's pyramid, the *resolution* is the event that resolves the majority of conflict in the story. The villain is defeated, the mountain conquered, the deadline reached. The *denouement*, which comes from the French word meaning “untying,” is simply the end of the story's rope, so to speak. The author might use this section to wrap up any loose ends and give the reader a picture of what the world looks like under a different light.

To give an example of how this structure might apply to a story, let's look at the parable Christ told about the prodigal son. If you're not familiar with the tale, read Luke 15:11–32.



Christ begins the story with a brief exposition, followed by incitation—the jarring request from the son to have his future wealth ripped out of his father’s estate. The son’s actions drive him toward his fall, where at a climax, he realizes his mistake and resolves to return, even if it means that he spends the rest of his life as a servant. He returns home, where his father resolves the conflict by restoring him to the family. The story continues with the other son’s jealousy, which gives the father an opportunity to share the beauty of forgiveness.

The story is a flawless representation of God’s mercy and grace, as told by the Architect of the gospel Himself. The parable draws from universally understood themes of family love and rejection, using a simple yet striking narrative to flow into a surprising picture of undeserved forgiveness. Some listeners would be shocked that the father would so quickly welcome his son back, so Christ mirrors their expectations with the jealous son, to whom the father explains a grace found only in the gospel.

Once you understand how to use the parts of Freytag’s Pyramid, readers will find your stories clearer, more driven, and more satisfying in the end.

Of course, not all stories stick close to this structure. Many writers today like to toy with audience expectations by omitting or changing different parts of the average story. You might start the action with little or no exposition. You may have a protagonist that undergoes no perceivable change at all. You might even end the story just before the conflict is resolved. Sometimes the message of your story can be enhanced by a surprise twist of the standard narrative.

Nevertheless, most of your readers will expect something close to Freytag’s pyramid—something with a beginning, a middle, and an end. It’s fine to surprise them now and then, but you must first learn the rules before you can break them well.

Descriptions

After you outline your story, you will draft some descriptive text that will ease the drafting process in Part 3. Here you’ll consider several elements of the story and jot down your immediate thoughts. These are the smaller, bite-size chunks of writing that, once put to paper, will give you a good head start on your first draft.

Setting

Describe any settings or locations in your story. Paint a postcard picture in words. Refer back to your research from Part 1 for any details you might have dug up.

Characters

Describe each of the important characters in your story. What do they look like? What are their attitudes? When the story is over, how might they have changed?

Events

Describe some of the major events in your story. What do they look like from the perspective of your main characters?

Thoughts and Reactions

Describe what your characters think of events, places, and other characters in your story. How are they affected by what happens?

Examples of the above categories will be included throughout this study.

Part 3: Write

Few things intimidate a writer more than a blank sheet of paper. Thankfully, you've done quite a bit of work already, which should make your first draft easier to write.

Your tools will include your notes and pre-draft material, as well as your brain and a healthy portion of wisdom and grace. Prayer is the only way to request the last two. Don't forget a notebook and pencil, or a reliable word processing program.

Once equipped, you will hide yourself away for at least an hour and force yourself to assemble a first draft of your story—no matter how flawed, ragged, or ugly it might be. *Just get it down.* You'll find it far easier to revise and edit your text later than it would be to continue a half-written story.

Part 4: Apply

On Part 4 you will read your assigned Scripture again more slowly, completing a short Bible study that will encourage you to open your heart to God's Word. You must do more than learn facts from Scripture—you must ask God to use His message to shape you into the image of His Son, Jesus.

For each of your primary source passages, ask two questions:

1. What can I see of God's character here?
2. How can this help me grow closer to Him?

Ask God to show you His majesty in His Word.

Part 5: Revise

No story is finished when first written. After you've had at least a day to focus on other things, you can revise with a clear mind. Edit your story for the following:

Revise for Economy

Cut out any sections you feel distract from the point of your story. Combine sentences where you can. Smooth over any passages that slow down the action. If you have another person reading your story, ask if there are any parts that seem boring.

Revise for Variety

Look at your sentence structures and ask yourself if there's too much repetition. Mix things up a little, with short sentences and long sentences, with lots of active verbs and clear detail. Read your entire story out loud twice, and adjust whatever strikes you as unnatural.

Revise for Clarity

Did you make your point well? Did you maintain a consistent tone and voice? Are there any inconsistencies in your story—any gaps in the narrative or unexplained events? Is your paper free of spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors? Proofread your story carefully, and ask your reader if he or she found anything awkward, as well.

Be honest with yourself—merciless in a nice way. When your reader gives you feedback or suggestions, accept any criticism with gratitude, realizing that your writing can always improve—or at least speak more clearly to a particular audience.

Tools of Grammar

Each lesson will also include a description of a grammar structure that, when used correctly, can improve your writing. You will likely recall most of this material from English class, but a review can help you revise and tighten your story's prose. Over time you'll learn more than what is correct and what is incorrect—time and experience can teach you what is okay, what is better, and what is *best*.

This section isn't meant to give you an exhaustive lesson on any one grammar structure, but rather a few tips on using it well. The suggestions given in this section can help you tighten your prose stylistically, but they will not give you a complete understanding of the concepts they address.

Extra Exercises

Your teacher will assign you these shorter exercises as he or she sees fit—or you can tackle them for fun. You will find yourself applying your writing skills to unique situations, all of which will require you study and communicate truth from God's Word.

~Quotations~

As you read through this book, you will find quotations taken from various writers about their craft. Not all of these writers are friendly to the truths found in the Bible—some, in fact, spent their lives promoting ideas with which you or I may disagree. Their thoughts on writing are included to help you become a better communicator. If you explore the works of these and other writers, ask God for wisdom and discretion to evaluate their philosophy.

The Seven Habits of a Good Writer

1. A good writer reads.

The better writing you put in, the better you'll put out. Consume the best writing you can find—fiction, nonfiction, newsprint, speeches, poetry—and learn what entertains, informs, and inspires people.

2. A good writer writes.

Devote a regular time and place to writing. Write anything, so long as you write often. Train your brain to write on command, and learn to finish your projects.

3. A good writer prepares.

Good writing features detail, texture, and depth. These qualities will not simply appear in your writing—you must constantly look at the world around you for useful images and concepts. Take a notebook with you wherever you go, and write down your thoughts as they come to you. Think, research, and outline before you ever begin a first draft.

4. A good writer studies the reader.

Write with your audience in mind. Learn as much as you can about them, and shape your writing to reflect their knowledge, needs, and sensibilities. Don't talk down to them, but don't talk over their heads.

5. A good writer says something.

Write because you want to communicate a message to your readers. You may be required to write because of school or church or work, but do not write just because you have to. Find something you want to say, and say it. Without a central message, your writing will lack direction, organization, and clarity.

6. A good writer edits.

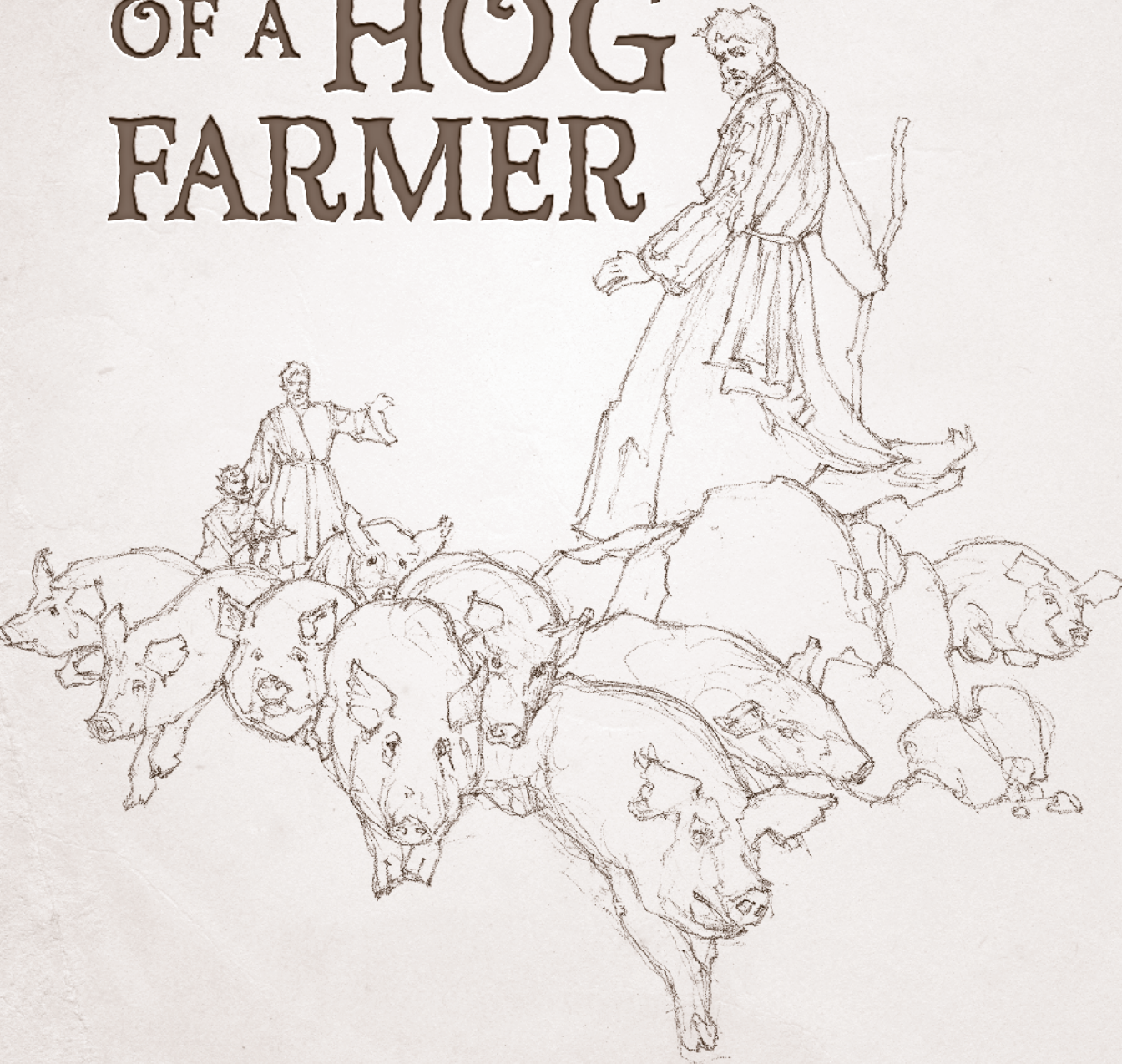
Be merciless with your writing. Never accept your first draft as complete. Find ways to be clearer, more concise, surprising the reader with variety and new insight. And as hard as it may be, remove anything from your writing that does not in some way support your purpose.

7. A good writer stretches.

To be a writer is to be vulnerable. Whenever you put pen to paper, you give others a window into your thoughts, your values, your weaknesses—and that can be scary. But the good writer presses on, sharing truth and love in spite of the discomfort or reprisal that might bring. So stretch yourself. Find new ways and new opportunities to write. Discover what makes you uncomfortable, and hone your craft regardless.

L E S S O N O N E

TROUBLES OF A HOG FARMER



~Part 1: Research~

In Mark 5:1–20, you’ll find an amazing story of Christ’s grace. Whether you’re already familiar with it or not, read the passage now, taking time to appreciate the narrative and its message.

Got it? For your first writing project, you will tell this story as if you were one of the hog farmers whose herd drowned in the sea. You’ve returned to your town, and your master, the man who owns the pigs, has asked you where his property went. You, still dazed by what you saw, tell your story.

No one can write decently who is distrustful of the reader’s intelligence, or whose attitude is patronizing.

—E.B. White

Naturally, the hog farmer will relate to Christ’s actions a bit differently than Mark did, but that’s fine. Most of what we call creative writing simply describes something familiar from a unique perspective. For this lesson, your perspective is right next to a herd of stampeding, demon-possessed pigs.

Today you’ll start your project by performing some research. You’ve already read the account in Mark 5, but go ahead and read the same story as told in Luke 8:26–39.

Are there any extra details in Luke’s account? Any additional observations?

Now that you’ve read your primary sources, it’s time to focus your attention by asking some basic questions.

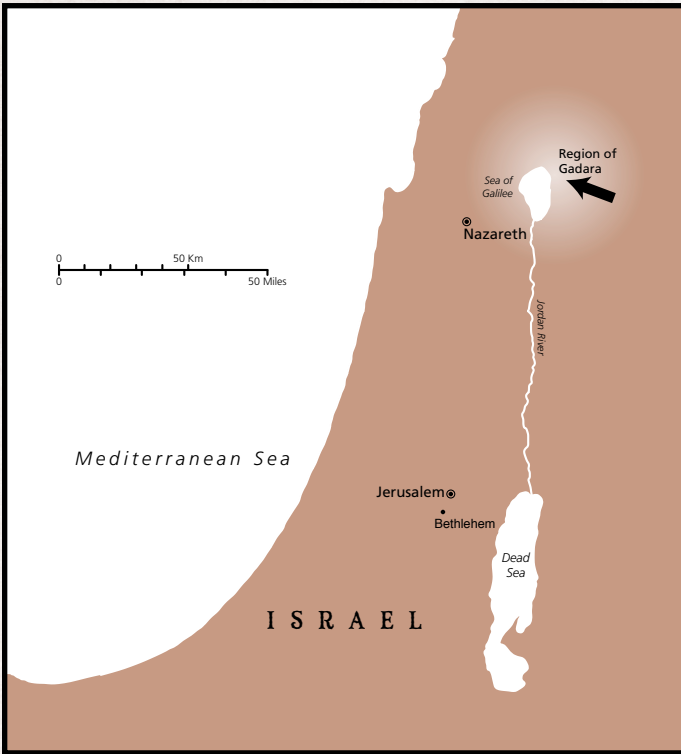
What?

What happened here? Summarize the entire story in just a sentence or two below. Imagine you’re writing a brief snippet for a news ticker—what is the essential information?

Who?

Who did this? Who caused this to happen? To whom did it happen? What other people were involved?

Where?



I'll give you a little help on this one. Mark tells us that this story takes place in the land of the Gedarenes—the name varies slightly by Bible version—which lay on the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee. The name for the area probably comes from the city of Gadara, which was part of the Decapolis, a league of ten Greek cities that banded together around 60 BC to promote trade and fight off marauders. The people of Decapolis, even if they had to acknowledge Roman rule, didn't like outsiders, including Jews like Christ and His disciples. But they shared the Sea of

Galilee with everyone else, gaining much from it—like trade, information, a ton of fish, and in this story, a certain Man who could drive away evil spirits.

You'll also notice that both Mark and Luke mention tombs. These were natural limestone caverns and rock-chambers that crept deep into the ridges and mountains facing the sea. Many people buried their dead there, and if that wasn't creepy enough, the place was also home to criminals, rebels, and other outcasts afraid of the government. Christ's disciples might have known they landed on the wrong side of town, so to speak, but their Master brought them there anyway.

What other details can you gather about the location of the story? Use your Bible and, if available, a commentary, Bible atlas, or other trustworthy source.

When?

The events at the end of Mark 4 occurred in the evening, so we can surmise that this story took place either late at night or early in the morning. Jesus and His disciples probably reached land while it was still dark—which could only make the location that much creepier.

Can you find any other details about when this story took place? If not, keep moving.

How?

How did Christ accomplish this work? How did He make it happen? What does that tell us about His power?

Why?

For this story, we'll divide the *why* into two parts. First, write from the hog farmer's perspective. Why do you, a proud citizen of the Decapolis, think this Jew cured the demoniac and sent your pigs into the sea?

Now from your perspective: why do you think Christ did what He did? What do you want the reader to come away from the story thinking about Him?

Sometimes writers will employ what they call *unreliable narrators*, fictional storytellers who believe something that isn't true. For instance, you could write a story from the perspective of a soccer player who got benched by her coach the day before a big tournament. The player might say it was because she was the best person on the team, which made the coach's daughter, also on the team, look bad. But you, the writer, could include hints in the story to let your readers know what really happened—the soccer player simply missed one too many practices.

Consider making your hog farmer an unreliable narrator in your story. Include the details you find relevant, but let the farmer come to his own conclusions, and the readers to theirs.

Of course, you want your readers to come away from the story with something good and edifying. But you will not want to spend the majority of the narrative writing with a *didactic* tone—that is, writing which teaches factual or moral lessons explicitly. It's the moral at the end of the story, the explanation at the end of the parable. The majority of this book is didactic, but a story that includes only lessons and platitudes—without plot or characters or conflict—can seem too preachy and boring.

Meditation

Now that you've gotten most of your raw data together, read Mark 5:1–20 one more time, slowly, asking God to show you Himself through the work of His Son.

Finally, if you have any unanswered questions that pertain to your story, research them and jot your notes below.

~Part 2: Rough~

The best way to become acquainted with a subject is to write about it.

—Benjamin Disraeli

Today you'll rough out a basic outline to your story, using Freytag's pyramid as a starting point. If you haven't already read the overview of the pyramid in this book's introduction, do so now.

After you've completed your outline, you'll write a few small blurbs that will make your first draft easier tomorrow.

Outline

Conflict

What is the primary conflict in your story? What forces create tension for the hog farmer?

Exposition

Where does the story start? What is your hog farmer doing as the narrative begins?

Incitation

What moment starts the real action? When does the hog farmer realize this won't be a normal day?

Rising Action

List briefly the events that lead up to the most important point in the story.

Climax

What moment does this story revolve around? What is the most important work Christ performs?

Falling Action

What's the fallout from Christ's actions? List the events that happen next.

Resolution and Denouement

What does the hog farmer think of all this? Where does he go from here? What's the last thing the readers hear from him?

Descriptions

Now let's add some detail to your story—even though it isn't written yet. If you can put some good prose onto paper today, all you'll need to do for your draft tomorrow is link it all together. For the questions below, refer to your research as necessary.

Setting

We'll start with your setting, the place where your story occurs. Paint your readers a backdrop for the day's events.

Describe the shore on which Christ and His disciples landed. Paint with light, sound, scent, and feeling. Describe the caves overlooking the water, and what might be hiding in them.

Tell the readers about your pig herd. What did they look like, smell like, sound like? How were they behaving when the story begins?

Characters

Who was this fearsome man that no one could bind? Why was he this way? Describe his features. Describe his reputation.

Who was this Jew followed by twelve students? To a hog farmer who had never before heard of the Messiah, what was He like?

What about you and your fellow pig herders? How would you describe yourselves?

Describe any other characters you might include.

Events

Relate the conversation between Jesus and the demoniac. Use your own words and paraphrase if necessary, but include the essential details.

What happened when Christ finished his conversation? Describe the pigs fleeing, jumping, and crashing into the sea. What did it look like? Where were you when all this occurred?

Thoughts and Reactions

What did you think when this Jesus told the demons they could go possess your pigs?

You're a simple man with one job—watch over the pigs. How do you feel after losing perhaps your only livelihood?

Who will you blame this on? Why did this happen?

If you have any additional snippets or blurbs that you think might fit into your story, write them down here before you forget.

When you draft your story tomorrow, use what you've roughed out today to help. You might only include half of the snippets you wrote today, and you may have to edit most of what you do use, but you'll find that the first draft moves along a lot easier when you have more material to work with.

Important Tips for Tomorrow

Reserve at least an hour of quiet time to write, preferably after you've eaten a good meal and before your brain is too tired to think. Find a place you can be at least somewhat alone, and make sure you have any writing tools that might be required—pencils, paper, computer, or whatever else. Include snacks, if necessary. Before drafting, silence your phone, disable your internet connection, and do whatever it takes—short of locking your family out of the house—to remove all distractions. This will be the hardest part of the writing process—the actual writing part.

~Part 3: Write~

As the hog farmer, inform your master what happened to his pigs. Unlike the original hog farmers, you can use a notepad or a word processing program. No minimum or maximum word count needed for this project. Write as much as you feel is necessary. Also, don't worry about making each sentence perfect. Turn off your inner critic and just get the story down—you'll have every chance to go back and revise later.

Pray for God's wisdom and grace, even in a simple project like this, and begin.

After you've completed the first draft, go do something fun. Take a short walk, throw a ball around with your sibling, play a video game, chat with a friend, make a puzzle—anything that doesn't require a great deal of concentration. Recharge your brain for a little while, and then get on with your day.

~Part 4: Apply~

For today, take a break from your writing project and let the story age a little. Tomorrow you'll look at it with fresh eyes.

Mark 5 gives us a glimpse of what spiritual warfare looked like in Christ's day. Let's examine a few other passages in the New Testament that can expand our understanding of this topic.

In Ephesians 6:10–20, how does Paul describe our struggle with the devil's schemes? Are our enemies physical or spiritual?

What is our primary duty in this spiritual battle, as stated in verses 11 and 13?

Starting with verse 13 and going through verse 18, list what we must do to prepare ourselves against spiritual assault. What are our tools?

God asks us to guard ourselves against assault—from forces on the outside and from our own weaknesses. Only by relying on His strength and grace can we stand.

According to Revelation 20:8–10, who exercises ultimate authority over Satan?

In Luke 10, Jesus used the ministry of around seventy disciples to heal the sick, cast out demons, and teach others about the coming of His spiritual kingdom. When the disciples returned, they were excited about all they had seen—especially the power Christ gave them to cast out demons.

But in verses 17–20, Jesus told them that they hadn’t seen anything terribly special—especially compared to the demonstrations of power He had witnessed as God’s Son. Instead, the disciples should have been excited about something far more amazing. What was it?

If you have accepted Christ’s forgiveness for your sins, you have a much greater gift than the power to identify and push back satanic activity. You have a Father in heaven that loves you, that will protect you from darkness, and that will one day banish all evil.

In Mark 5, the former demoniac was excited about the radical change in his life. What was the difference from before? What did he do now?

What has God done for you? How can you show your excitement about His love?

~Part 5: Revise~

Now that your story has settled in the back of your mind, reread it and revise as you feel necessary. Ask someone you trust to read it and give you feedback.

Revise for Economy

Cut out any sections you feel distract from the point of your story. Combine sentences where you can. Smooth over any passages that slow down the action. If you have another person reading your story, ask if there are any parts that seem boring.

Revise for Variety

Look at your sentence structures and ask yourself if there’s too much repetition. Mix things up a little, with short sentences and long sentences, with lots of active verbs and clear detail. Read your entire story out loud twice, and adjust whatever strikes you as unnatural.

Revise for Clarity

Did you make your point well? Did you maintain a consistent tone and voice? Are there any inconsistencies in your story—any gaps in the narrative or unexplained events? Is your paper free of spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors? Proofread your story carefully, and ask your reader if he or she found anything awkward, as well.

Tools of Grammar

Be-Verbs, Active Verbs, and Passive Verbs

In this first Tools of Grammar section, note the difference between three general types of verbs.


Be-Verbs

Be-verbs link a noun to a certain state, position, or quality. They do not necessarily show action—they just connect a subject to a predicate.

Some *be-verbs* are part of a larger category called *linking verbs*, which express equality between the subject and another word in the sentence, as in the example below:

Be-Verb Forms

be	is
am	are
was	were
been	being

Richard **is** a police officer.

Be-verbs can also be used as *auxiliary verbs*. These add meaning to other verbs, like voice, tense, and mood. An auxiliary *be-verb* can change a verb to its passive form—more on that later—or it can show continuing action, as seen in the example below:

He **was** running down the street.

And sometimes, a *be-verb* simply means “to exist.”

And Jesus said, “I **am**.”

Active Verbs

Active verbs show a noun performing an action.

Richard **squinted** at his notes, wondering how anyone ever read his handwriting. Fingers clenched tight around her bat, Therese **smacks** the ball up over the far fence.

Passive Verbs

Passive verbs show a noun being acted upon. Sentences with passive verbs involve a *be*-verb followed by a past participle form of another verb.

Richard's notes **were read** aloud by his teacher.

The ball **is returned** by an amused passerby.

Revising with Stronger Verbs

Beginning writers often rely heavily on sentences with *be*-verbs and passive verbs, since active verbs can be more difficult to construct. But clear English prose depends on strong, active verbs. Notice the difference between the two paragraphs below. The second one is much clearer.

With Be-Verbs and Passive Verbs

Therese was struggling to keep her excitement to herself. She walked the bases. Her teammates were held back by the umpire, who was smiling at her as she was stepping onto home plate. The game was called by the announcer. There were screams, hugs, and a shiny gold trophy, but Therese didn't notice. She was hungry.

With Active Verbs

Struggling to keep her excitement to herself, Therese walked the bases. Her teammates crowded behind the umpire, who smiled at her as she stepped onto home plate. The announcer called the game. Screams, hugs, and a shiny gold trophy barely caught Therese's attention—she was hungry.

That's not to say you should never use *be*-verbs or passive verbs. Sometimes your paragraph's context and flow will dictate that you use a non-active verb form. Read the paragraph below.

Rachel was excited. She thought about all the things she and her friends would do tomorrow up on Bluestone Mountain. The place was known for its scenic hiking and biking trails.

The paragraph features all three types of verbs. The first sentence, a short one with a *be*-verb, introduces the paragraph's topic. The second sentence, which supports and explains the first, includes a simple active verb. The third sentence is passive, but only so it can pick up where the second sentence left off with "Bluestone Mountain." "The place" refers back to the mountain, so the writer keeps the reader's focus steady from one sentence to the next.

As you revise your story, look for ways you can change some of your *be*-verbs and passive verbs into active ones. Fill your prose with clear, strong, active verbs that drive your reader along. And wherever you rely on passive verbs, make sure they improve the flow of your text.

For more information on different types of verbs, consult the index or table of contents in your grammar textbook.

L E S S O N T W O

PASSOVER

AT THE TEMPLE



~Part 1: Research~

For this lesson you'll write another report—this time, about what Christ did at the Temple during Passover. You will adopt the perspective of a sheep merchant who was thrown out of the Temple's court, and once again, you'll need to explain the disappearance of your animals.

There's an account of this incident in each of the four Gospels. Read every passage listed below, and then answer the following questions.

- Matthew 21:10–13
- Mark 11:15–18
- Luke 19:45–48
- John 2:13–25

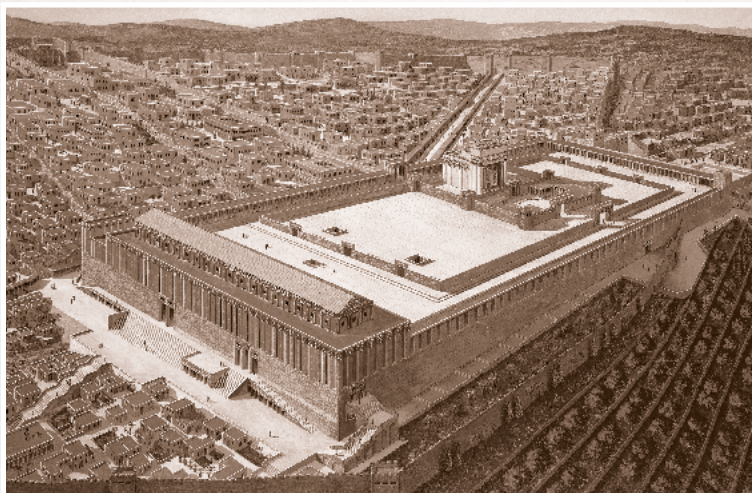
What?

What's the headline? What happened, and how did it affect your sheep salesperson?

Who?

Who caused all this? Who reacted to the event? Name any other actors in the story.

Where?



Temple image courtesy of The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc. Bellmawr, NJ

King Herod built a new Temple in Jerusalem around 20 BC, replacing the one constructed by the Jews who escaped exile in Babylon four hundred years earlier. His Temple was to be larger and more elaborate, one like the original Temple built by King Solomon. The

construction took only a few years for the interior buildings, including the Holy of Holies, but work continued on the outer courts and walls for decades. The Jews were understandably proud of their work, and Herod reaped all the political benefits of jumpstarting the project.

The Temple's designers envisioned three main sections to hold worshippers—the Court of Priests, the Court of Israel, and the Court of the Gentiles. Archaeologists have discovered a stone tablet clearly warning Gentiles to stay in their assigned section. They could defy that rule to their peril—in Acts 21:27–33, you can see what happened when worshippers thought someone had violated their Temple.

It was in the Gentiles' Court that this story occurred. Imagine a large marble-paved plaza surrounding a gleaming sanctuary, and you'll get the idea.

How does the significance of this place color Christ's actions?

When?

During what important festival did all this happen? What was the significance of this holy day?

How?

How did Christ accomplish this work, and how did He communicate His message during and afterward?

Why?

Why did this need to happen? What clues does Christ give us about His reasoning? What emotion and what argument drove His actions?

A note on the merchants and moneychangers: these weren't innocent bystanders. Every year these men would set up shop in and around the Temple in Jerusalem, taking advantage of the Jews' efforts to maintain their place of worship.

The trouble arose partly because of a rule established by the Temple priests years before. Back when the Temple was originally proposed, Herod and the Jews funded the construction in part by using currency minted in Tyre, a Phoenician city built on a peninsula jutting out from what is now Syria. The Tyrian shekel therefore became one of the most popular coins in Israel—and the sole currency accepted by the Temple for its maintenance tax. Every adult Jewish male, barring poverty or extenuating circumstances, was expected to pay one half-shekel. Many found the Temple's preferred currency ironic, since it carried the image of Melqart, the Tyrian variation of the ancient demigod Ba'al, against whom so many of God's prophets had preached.

So the moneychangers offered to exchange currencies, levying outrageous fees, especially within the Temple itself, where worshippers had little choice but to comply. The Jews had to pay the Temple priests, as well as the merchants who sold animals for sacrifice, not to mention the official examiners who inspected the animals to make sure they were good enough to sacrifice.

Jesus never preached against a man or woman putting in a hard day's work for a fair reward. He believed a worker was worthy of wages (Luke 10:7), and many of His parables emphasized the reward due to those that serve (Matt. 25:14–30). Jesus might not even have minded the common use of the Tyrian shekel, since He offered one as Temple tax for Himself and Peter (Matt. 17:27).

But all this bustle and commercialism had infected His *Father's house*. What was once a quiet place to join the worship of God had become a crowded marketplace, filled with stalls and animals, tax collectors and moneychangers, liars and thieves.

Meditation

You have your primary source information on paper, so read each passage one more time, making sure you didn't leave anything out. Ask God to teach you something about His Son.

In the space below, record any additional thoughts you might have on your story, including any unanswered questions.

~Part 2: Rough~

What is written without effort is in general read without pleasure.

—Samuel Johnson

It's time to outline your story. This time, there's not much in the way of storyline from your primary sources. You may need to come up with additional events and detail to fill out your narrative. Remember, your perspective as a sheep merchant is probably a lot different than the disciples'.

Note also that your story's outline doesn't have to match the outline presented in Scripture. The cleansing of the Temple could just as easily be your Incitation as your Climax. Your sheep merchant's story is a subplot to a larger narrative, so you may need to use some imagination.

Outline

Conflict

What is the primary conflict in your story?

Exposition

Where do you want to begin the story for the sheep merchant? What is he doing?

Incitation

When does the action start? What's the spark?

Rising Action

List briefly the events that lead up to the most important point in the story.

Climax

What is the height of emotion, tension, and action in this story?

Falling Action

What is the aftermath of the climax? List the important events.

Resolution and Denouement

What's left for the sheep merchant? How do you end the story?

Descriptions

Now draft some of the roughage that will go into your story. Again, refer to your research as necessary.

Setting

Describe the Court of the Gentiles. What was it like in a marketplace during the Passover? What was the mood of the crowd? What could you see from your market stall? If you need additional detail, consult a Bible commentary or other reputable source.

Will you include other places in your story? If so, paint a picture of them below.

Characters

Describe Jesus as you might see Him through the Temple crowd. Can you make out much detail? What was He like when He walked into the Temple, as He cleansed the Temple, as He taught the people afterward?

Describe a group of moneychangers and merchants—your fellow desecrators. Do you make them endearing to the reader, at first? Or are they clearly corrupt from the beginning?

Include detail on the kinds of animals in the Temple Court. What did they look like?

Draft some descriptions of Jewish priests, worshippers, and observing Gentiles. What were they wearing? What was their attitude toward all this commercialized pseudo-worship? Were some genuine?

Describe any additional characters for your story below.

Events

What happened when Jesus cleansed the Temple? What did he do?

If you include this in your story, what was it like to see Christ teach the people? Relate any conversations between Jesus and the people.

Thoughts and Reactions

Consider a quote that many people attribute to Leo Tolstoy, the Russian novelist who wrote *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace*: “All great literature is one of two stories: a man goes on a journey, or a stranger comes to town.”

We don’t know for sure if Tolstoy was the first person to make that observation, but it’s true, nonetheless. Every story, to have any sort of plot, must feature *dynamic characters* and *static characters*. Dynamic characters change somehow over the course of the story—they go on a journey—while static characters just stay the same.

So if you write the story from the perspective of the person on a journey, you move your character from point A to point B. The character might never walk a single step in your story, but the events of your narrative may very well shake him to his core. He’s a dynamic character.

Or your character might stay static, only witnessing the journey of someone else. You, the writer, use this perspective to shape your readers’ view of the stranger who comes to town.

This is all called *developing* your characters—the act of changing and molding your characters through the plot and other devices.

Of course, some writers of modern fiction don’t believe that people really change. Therefore no one goes on a journey and no one new comes to town. The writers fill pages and pages with descriptions of setting and atmosphere and mood. Many readers are surprised to find that most so-called literary fiction contains very little plot at all.

But that's not a story, and while it does have value as literature, it's not what we're writing today.

For this story, try making one of your characters exhibit a change somewhere between the beginning and the end. Include enough hints or outright explanation to show your readers how the character's beliefs or feelings developed over the course of the story.

So focus on your dynamic character. What is he or she like at the beginning of the story? At the end? What causes the change?

How do the various groups at the Temple react to Christ's actions and teaching? Include at least the worshippers and the chief priests.

And if you have any additional ideas that you want to record before drafting, write them below.

Important Tips for Tomorrow

Just like before, reserve an hour to write tomorrow. Gather all the tools you'll need, and be prepared to silence all distractions. If something kept bothering you last time, do what you can today to prevent the problem.

—Part 3: Write—

You are a sheep merchant, and you've just arrived back home after spending the Passover in Jerusalem. You weren't able to sell all your sheep, and someone asks you why. You tell your story.

Spend a moment praying for clarity, and begin.

Congrats on your second first draft. Take a short break to recharge.

I don't wait for moods. You accomplish nothing if you do that. Your mind must know it has got to get down to work.

—Pearl S. Buck

~Part 4: Apply~

Reread all four passages that talk about Jesus cleansing the Temple—Matthew 21:10–13; Mark 11:15–18; Luke 19:45–48; John 2:13–25—and answer the questions below.

How is Jesus described in Matthew 12:15–21? Focus on verse 20, which comes from Isaiah 42:3.

What does Christ offer to those who come to Him, according to Matthew 11:28?

How does Paul describe Christ's character in 2 Corinthians 10:1?

But this same Jesus threw hundreds—perhaps thousands—of people and animals out of the Temple. How could someone call Him gentle after that?

Looking at the passage in John 2, verse 17 describes Christ's motivation—a zeal for His Father's house. Some Bible versions translate zeal as passion or love. Would you describe Christ's emotion as anger?

According to verse 15, how did Jesus remove the sheep and oxen from the Temple?

In verse 16, how did He remove the doves?

Notice the difference in method. If Christ showed anger in this passage, it must have been under control. He didn't cause a stampede that would hurt the animals. He didn't just throw dove cages down to be trampled. He used the exact amount of force necessary to accomplish His mission.

Jesus had a goal in mind. According to Luke 19:47, what did He do after cleansing the Temple?

Once purified, the Temple again became a place to learn about God. Its condition was a symbol of the people's respect for Him. And while we no longer offer sacrifices in the Temple (John 4:21–24), we Christians today must still guard our place of worship from sin (1 Cor. 6:19–20).

In only one other passage do we find Christ clearly showing anger. Read Mark 3:1–5, and describe the cause of Christ's anger and what He did about it.

There was no rage—only love, compassion, and truth. Any time Christ showed anger, it resulted in action—and importantly, only action that would reflect His perfect character.

But what cautions do you find on anger in James 1:19–20 and Ephesians 4:25–27?

Based on all of these passages, what do you believe anger is actually good for? What should anger be directed toward? Does anger give us any excuse to sin?

Ask God to help you be like Christ, to show love and truth no matter what the circumstances. And wherever you and God meet, keep it sacred, holy, and pure.

—Part 5: Revise—

Begin the revision process with a fresh mind. Have you thought of any additional details or color to add to your story? What sections of the story now seem tedious?

Revise for Economy

Cut out any sections you feel distract from the point of your story. Combine sentences where you can. Smooth over any passages that slow down the action. If you have another person reading your story for you, ask if there are any parts that seem boring.

Revise for Variety

Look at your sentence structures and ask yourself if there's too much repetition. Mix things up a little, with short sentences and long sentences, with lots of active verbs and clear detail. Read your entire story out loud twice, and adjust whatever strikes you as unnatural.

Revise for Clarity

Did you make your point well? Did you maintain a consistent tone and voice? Are there any inconsistencies in your story—any gaps in the narrative or unexplained events? Is your paper free of spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors? Proofread your story carefully, and ask your reader if he or she found anything awkward, as well.

—Tools of Grammar—

Participles

Participles are verbs that have been changed to modify a noun, much like an adjective or adverb. The phrase that contains the participle is called a *participial phrase*. There are two types:

A *past participle*, which uses the past tense form of the verb, often ending in **-ed**

Blasted with a water balloon, Tristan fell off the tree branch and onto the trampoline.

A *present participle*, which uses the **-ing** form of the verb

He looked around for his would-be assassin, **trembling with fury**.

Participial phrases can add fantastic levels of detail to your prose. In both preceding sentences, the participles helped paint a clearer picture of Tristan. Since good English depends on strong action verbs, you'll find your writing greatly improved when you use participles often.

You can use participles to suggest a variety of things. First, you can demonstrate a causal relationship between two ideas:

Without participle

Cheryl was elated by the B+ on her history final, so she shredded her notes. That night, she wondered where her chemistry study sheet might be.

With participle

Elated by her B+ in history, Cheryl shredded her notes, only to wonder that night where her chemistry study sheet might be.

You can also describe a sequence of events.

Without participle

Dan pedaled his bike up the hill. Then he swerved when a car met him at the top.

With participle

Dan pedaled his bike up the hill, **swerving to miss the car that met him at the top.**

You can also stack participial phrases together to add detail and motion.

Erica refinished the dresser carefully, **stripping off the old paint, sanding the edges, applying three coats of red enamel, and replacing the drawer knobs.**

Jordan, **confused, bewildered, and shaken by the talk with his teacher,** resolved to study harder for his next test.

Note in the last sentence that “shaken” is neither an **-ed** or **-ing** form of a verb. That's because some verbs have unique past participle forms—like *shaken* for shake, or *flung* for fling.

You can place participial phrases in one of the following places:

At the beginning of a sentence

Clutching her flashlight, Melanie tip-toed up the stairs.

At the end of a sentence

Melanie tip-toed up the stairs, **clutching her flashlight**.

Right after the noun it modifies

Melanie, **clutching her flashlight**, tip-toed up the stairs.

Where you decide to place your participial phrase will depend on the flow of your paragraph and what you want to emphasize in your sentence. More on this in Lesson Seven.

Just be careful not to place the participial right before a noun it isn't supposed to modify. The following is called a *dangling participle*:

Walking up the stairs, the silence became more oppressive than ever.

The sentence, as written above, suggests that the "silence" literally walked up stairs, instead of the unseen narrator. The participle is called *dangling* because it lacks a correct noun to modify. A correct version is below:

Walking up the stairs, I found the silence more oppressive than ever.

Read over your story again, looking for ways to include participial phrases in your prose. They can tighten up your story and add helpful detail.

For more information on using participles and participial phrases, check the index or table of contents in your grammar textbook.