

## MODULE 4 PROSE FICTION

Unit 1	The Short Story
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## UNIT 1 THE SHORT STORY

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### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

So far we have tried to write or have written a poem and a playlet. However, I believe that some of you wrote full length plays. In this unit, you will try to write a short story. Make sure you write along with me.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- develop a short story.

### HOW TO STUDY THE UNIT

- Read this unit as diligently as possible.
- Find meaning of unfamiliar words in the unit using your dictionary.
- As you read, put major points down in a piece of paper or jotter.

- d. Do not go to the next section until you have fully understood the section you are reading now.
- e. Do all the Self-Assessment exercises in the unit as honestly as you can. In some areas where it is not feasible to provide answers to Self-Assessment exercises, go to the relevant sections of the unit to derive the answers.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 What is a Short Story?**

As the name implies, the short story is a story that is very short. It develops around a central character. It is presented in a prose narrative form like the novel but shorter in length than the novel. It is so short that it is expected to be read at a sitting. This means that you could start and conclude a short story in less than an hour. However, the actual length is determined by the individual author's preference submission guidelines relevant to the story's actual market. Guidelines vary greatly among publishers. You may have known that there are many literary competitions especially in short story writing. In many cases, the organizers of such competitions stipulate the required length. Apart from such guidelines, usually, a short story should have one dominant impression, and unified effect. You should choose your words carefully to ensure that every word counts and adds to the meaning in the story. Every incident leads consistently to the central idea and character.

The central idea must be obvious so that the reader does not miss it. Your characters, situations setting and action must be related to the central idea or your message. Although it is short, it must have a beginning, middle and an end, with its attendant conflicts, climax and resolution. Unlike the novel where the writer has more time and space to explore more ideas, the short story concentrates on one idea and compresses the characters and incidents to give an immediate impression which the novel cannot give.

The short story begins as close as possible to the conclusion. So, once you start, you should not waste time on copious descriptions of landscapes, environments and characters. Try to arrest the readers' attention from the first line and move at a racy pace to the conclusion.

There is no fixed length for a short story. A short story could be between three (about 750 to 1500 words) to 20 pages (about 4000 – 7000 words) or slightly more. The short story should be so short that it could be read within a very short time not one or two lines. So “stories less than 200 words are close to anecdotes; a story that exceeds 10,000 words is approaching the category of a novella or short novel”(Maxwell-Mahon, 1984:2).

The essential element in short story is brevity of expression. You must strive for economy in the use of words. You should therefore leave out all descriptions and comments that do not meaningfully advance your theme, reveal your characters or propel your plot.

### **3.2 The Characters**

The short story's limitation on length does not allow for use of many characters. Structure your story around one character. Do not include any characters that do not relate with this character or contribute to the central idea. Try to develop your character fully as soon as they are presented to the reader. However some other aspects of their personalities could be disclosed as the plot unfolds.

In choosing your characters, you should also decide on your point of view. Who is your narrator? You have learnt all you need to know about the strengths and weaknesses of various points of views. The use of the first person, "I" helps you to produce direct impressions and first hand emotions which boost the authenticity of your account. The omniscient narrative helps you to explore and reach out more effectively.

Remember to use dialogue when necessary irrespective of the point view you have chosen. In prose narratives, dialogue is usually more effective in producing, immediate effects in your story than indirect speech.

You can choose a realistic or imaginary setting where your characters can interact. In doing this, try to choose an environment you are familiar with. It is easier for you to write a convincing story based on a locality you know very well. If for instance, you have been hearing of the Tinapa in Calabar, the Obudu ranch in Obudu, the Game Research in Bauchi or the Wildlife Park or Shere Hills in Jos but you have never visited any of them, you can never write an authentic convincing story based on what you read or heard.

### **3.3 The First Paragraph**

Are you ready? By now you must have known what to write. Let us try to write the first paragraph of a story that will not be more than three pages.

"This is my house" and if you utter another word, I kick you out of this house", Okeke, bellowed. You know me very well, I am not emotional and..., Tessy his wife murmured, "There is a world outside this house", and sneaked away through the backdoor. Tessy, a pretty young lady, intelligent, hardworking but very humble, sits outside sobbing. As the tears flowed freely, her twenty years of marriage flooded back. "What am I still doing in this hell?" she ruminates.

Have you written your first paragraph? Is it catchy? Did you create suspense? The story I am about to write here is a very simple one based on domestic affairs. You may or may not be able to guess what follows. In the middle of the story we will get the main story.

### 3.4 Continuing

“I can’t take it any longer”, she concluded. She got into her room and packed a few dresses in a small bag. As she is about to leave her room, her youngest child, Dede who is five years old embraced her. “Mummy where are you going?” he asked. Tessy fought back the tears that welled up in her eyes, patted him and asked him to go and watch the television. “I will be back soon”. She promised. “Buy biscuits for me”, he said and ran off.

Tessy left the house, uncertain of her next action. She walked aimlessly for a while; at last, she went to the church, knelt there and cried herself to sleep. When she woke, she determined not to go back, children or no children. She decided to go to her friend’s house where she was welcomed with open arms. Her friend is also married but left her husband when he married another wife because she had only three girls. She left with her three girls.

Her friend Mono, prepared supper and they ate. She said, “I have always told you that you tell people, through your conduct, how to treat you. The Bible asked you to submit to your husband but you submitted to the point of stupidity. Meanwhile you forget that the same Bible asked men to love their, wives. Since you got married, what signs of love has he shown you? “My sister none! He reminds me every time that he is not emotional, he is not sentimental”, Tessy replied.

Throughout her married life, Tessy cannot recall any kind word or action from her husband. No birthdays, no anniversaries. She recalls her first year of marriage when she bought a birthday card for him; he scolded her for wasting money and on a Valentine day, she got another card; he gave her a severe warning not to waste their hard earned resources on frivolities.

Meanwhile, this is a graduate, a lawyer by profession who claims to know everything. She works in an oil company and has a reasonable salary but each time she buys a new dress, she is in trouble. Once she collects her salary her husband ensures that he collects at least seventy percent of that money which he claims is for project. He threatens to kick her out of the house they built together. Meanwhile, she finds it difficult to maintain her car. He talks to her as if she is his maid and sometimes hits her in the presence of her children. She endured all these because she is afraid of what people might say. She is afraid that she may be excommunicated since the church does not allow divorce. She is afraid of what might happen to her two lovely boys. She had internalized the hurts and the result is that she has plunged into self-pity and an erosion of self-worth. She may have

become a psychiatric case if she did not meet Mono who helped to revive her self-confidence and inculcated in her, the necessity for her to live. She could not train her children the way she wanted because each time she corrects them for wrong doing her husband intervenes and tells her that she had no justification to scold the children since she herself is disobedient and lazy. She therefore has no regrets in leaving them for him to bring them up the way he likes.

After she left, her husband shouted from his bedroom as usual “Te-ss-y! Te-ss-e-y”! When he did not get any response, he sent one of his sons to call their mother; the younger one informed him that she went out. “What! he bellowed. “And without my permission”. Enraged beyond imaginable limits he locked their main gate.

After some hours and it was getting dark, the children were hungry and kept on telling him so. He called his wife on phone and as usual shouted orders to her. She took the insults, abuses and threats calmly. When he finally orders her to comeback immediately, she replied. “I have decided not to wait for you to kick me out of the house but have left “YOUR HOUSE FOR YOU” and she switched off the phone. He could not get through to her again that night.

Okeke could not believe what he heard. He went to his wife’s room, everything seemed untouched. He went outside, her car was packed there. He felt that she may be joking. He tried in vain to reach her through the phone. Meanwhile, the children are crying that they are hungry. He was forced to go to the kitchen. He did not know where to start but luckily he found soup in the fridge, warmed the soup, prepared garri and bathed the children. As they sat to eat, they reminded him that they ate garri in the afternoon so preferred rice or spaghetti. He shouted at them, but did not succeed in forcing them to eat. Later they settled for tea and bread.

The following morning, he woke up late managed to bathe the children. By the time he was through with breakfast, the children were late for school. The school bus left them so he had to drop them off. They reminded him of their snacks, he bought biscuits for them but they insisted that they needed the cake, meat pie, or even fried fish which mummy used to prepare for them. He snapped at them and drove off. This continued for about a week. He could not answer their queries on their mother’s whereabouts. The kitchen was smelling. The bathroom was something else. All his corrections and instructions on the things that were not done well in the kitchen... “you did not cover this pot properly”, “I will not eat that food”... “you did not sweep the kitchen”... “I can’t eat the same soup twice in a day”... “you put only two pieces of meat for me”... you this you that... “I will deal with you...you do not know me...ask people... I don’t care, even if the Pope comes here I will still do what I want to do...”. He could not carry out any of his previous instructions, directions and orders.

He decided to get a house help. He literally drove all the house helps his wife had because of his over-bearing, dictatorial and violent nature. He has tried several times to reach his wife.

He could not reach her on phone and has not been allowed to go to her office. Each time he gets to the gate, they will call her and she tells them that she does not wish to see anybody.

Initially, he refused to tell anybody. But who would he tell? He does not have friends. He does not believe in friendship because according to him they do not contribute anything to his growth. He could not call his parents-in-law because he drove his mother-in-law from his house and gave a standing order that he does not want any of them in his house. Later, he told one of his neighbours who expressed shock but could not help him. He registered with agencies but has not been successful in getting a maid that appealed to him. The dirty clothes have piled up and he could not remember the last time he washed clothes. He used to tell his wife that he could not “soak” his hands in water. The teachers send letters to him that his children are becoming very dirty, unkempt and moody in the class.

One day, he resolves to end it all. He goes to the Chevron office where his wife works; as usual he was refused access.

### **3.5 Concluding**

He resolved before he left his house that he must be heard. He could not understand what education has done to the women. He recalled that whenever his father entered their house everyone scampered to safety. Even when he beat their mother, she did not raise her voice. She will only sob quietly and still do his bidding. He recalled also, that at meals, his mother used to fill his father’s plate with meat, fish, stockfish or whatever delicacies in the soup or stew and they got just bits, bones and pieces of the leftover. Sometimes, special meals were prepared for his father alone. Unfortunately for him now, his wife has insisted that the children need protein more than adult and has stubbornly refused to give him meat/fish as much as he desired. She has also insisted that she does not have the time to cook special meals for him. The most annoying part is that even when he desires pepper soup, she must ensure that every member of the family partakes of it as if he she does not realize that children must not eat every meal prepared in the home. Instead, she calls him a bush man with primitive ideas about marriage. Okeke could not comprehend his wife’s claim that it is a marriage of equals. She used to say that he sees marriage as enslavement. “But a man and a woman can never be equal” he pondered. He is the head of the family, so must dictate what should be done in his house but his wife sees it as interference.

He gets to the Chevron Gate and as usual, they barred him from entering. He started shouting. “I am a lawyer, I must see my wife”. He caused a lot of stir and

as the security men are about to force him out of the premises, one of the Directors in his car intervened. He listened to his case but insisted that the establishment cannot force its staff to see a person she does not want to see. He however promised to intervene in the case. Reluctantly, Okeke went home to meet the dirty dishes, dirty clothes, stinking bathrooms/toilets and sobbing children.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

In simple terms, the short story is seen as a miniature novel. The writer tells his/her story using any point of view that she/he likes. However, because the time and space available to the writer is limited, the characters are few, though well-developed in most cases. The writer also cuts down on description of incidents, events and characters. Brevity in the use of words is the watchword for you if you intend to focus on that type of prose fiction.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, we have tried to write a short story. I hope that while reading the short story written here you have been able to write your own, which will serve as your TMA.

#### **6.0 TUTOR- MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Submit your short story to your facilitator.

#### **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

Achebe, Chinua (1977). *Girls at War and Other Stories*. London: Heinemann.

Ajayi, Tolu (1991). *Eyes of the Night*. Lagos: Granny Fatima.

Ekwensi, Cyprain (1975). *Restless City and Christmas Gold*. Ibadan: Heinemann.

Ezeigbo, Akachi (2003). *Echoes in the Mind*. Lagos.

(2006). *Fractures & Fragments*. Lagos African Cultural Institute.

Maxwell-Mahon, W. D. (1984). *Van Schaik's Guide to Creative Writing*. Pretoria: J. L. Van Shaik.

## UNIT 2 THE NOVEL

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### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

We tried to write a short story. I hope that you have written and submitted your own. In this unit, we will examine the definition of the novel by different scholars and arrive at our own definition. This will help us to get a clearer understanding of what a novel is or should be before we attempt to write one.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define the novel;
- draw an outline of a proposed novel;
- give a title to your novel; and
- list the major characters in the proposed novel.

### HOW TO STUDY THE UNIT

- a. Read this unit as diligently as possible.
- b. Find meaning of unfamiliar words in the unit using your dictionary.
- c. As you read, put major points down in a piece of paper or jotter.
- d. Do not go to the next section until you have fully understood the section you are reading now.
- e. Do all the Self-Assessment exercises in the unit as honestly as you can. In some areas where it is not feasible to provide answers to Self-Assessment exercises, go to the relevant sections of the unit to derive the answers.



### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Definition

The novel has been defined differently by different scholars. The definitions are as varied as the novelists. Here, we will take a few definitions to widen our scope and also help us in our own personal conception of what constitutes a novel. E. M. Forster sees story telling as the fundamental aspect of the novel (p. 40). W. D. Maxwell-Mahon starts by stating what a novel is not.

The novel is not an extended short story nor is it a collection of short stories with a multiplicity of characters and a diversity of incidents. Generally speaking, the novel is a narrative in prose of extended length that combines characterization with various temporal and causal effects in the development of a particular theme or subject matter. (ii) We can deduce from this definition that the novel is a form of narrative that is presented in prose form. It is like a story that is being told by the author and could be presents in any language. This distinguishes it from other genres of literature like drama that is presented in dialogue and poetry that is presented in verse. Like in drama, the novelist presents characters whose lives and experiences constitute the story. In this story she/he explores a theme with the aid of the characters, events and incidents that are causally presented. Oakley Hall sees the novel as “unfolding of a tale, the events of which exist before writing, only in the writer’s mind. His effort is to enable the reader to experience those events he has seen in his imagination”. To do this, he must evoke those events in details so that his audience will react to the characters and events that are not real but only ink smudges on paper (p. 3).

We have seen here that the novel is a product of the writer’s imagination which he tries to make real through the use of language and vivid presentation of events. In this way the reader feels them as real when in actual sense they are not.

*Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture* defines the novel simply as “a long written story not in poetry dealing with invented people and events”.

The novel is written for several reasons. These include: interpretation of life, entertainment, escape, propaganda, reportage, as agent of change in language and thought, expression of the spirit of its age, creation of life and style, or/and reflection of a historical event. The main elements of the novel which you are aware of include: plot, character, scene or setting, narrative method or point of view.

I have listed the definitions above to help you decide your intention before writing your proposed novel. Do you want to write for mere entertainment, create a life style or to advocate of social justice? Your intention, to a large extent will influence your style and the infusion of other elements of the novel.

### 3.2 Types of Novels

There are so many types of novels as can be seen from the list below, culled from the Internet.

(<http://www.virtualsalt.com/lit/novelty.htm>).

Here is a list of some of the types of novel. Some novels fall under more than one type. It is possible, for example, to have an epistolary, detective, psychological, regional novel. Some techniques used in writing novels (satire, metafiction) might also be argued as their own types. This list is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to show the variety of types.

Adventure novel, allegorical novel, anti-novel, apologue, autobiographical novel, best seller or pulp fiction novel, bildungsroman or apprenticeship novel, children's novel, Christian novel, cult or coterie novel, detective, mystery, thriller novel, dime novel, dystopian novel, epistolary novel, erotic novel, fantasy novel, gothic novel, graphic novel, historical novel, hypertext novel, interactive novel, multicultural novel, novel of manners, novella, pastoral novel, picaresque novel, post modern novel, prequel, proletarian novel, psychological novel, regional novel, roman a clef, roman fleuve (river novel), romance novel, science fiction novel, sentimental novel, sequel, series novel, spy novel, utopian novel, western novel

Some of these types of novels are categorized according to years of historical experience. The earliest forms of novel are the romance and the picaresque. In the latter, the protagonist is usually a social underdog, who is involved in a series of episodic adventures in which he sees much of the world around him and comments satirically upon it. The historical novel embraces event-filled romances and strives to convey the essence of life in a certain time and place.

The classifications of novels help in determining or “indicating the breath and diversity of the form ... the great novel transcends such categorization” (<http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/ent/A0860064.html>). You should therefore strive to write a great novel instead of trying to confine yourself to a particular type. Besides, some novels fall into one, two or more categories.

### 3.3 Length

Just like the length of stories, real or imagined, told in everyday life vary, the length of the novel varies too. It depends on the story and the teller. Some story tellers possess the gift of elongating their stories through giving details and vivid description of events and incidents. Others tell stories with less emphasis on the details. Either way, the important factor is the end product. One may fill his stories with unnecessary details that could mar the story. On the other hand, lack of necessary details could make the story dull and uninteresting. So the length depends on you and what you want to write. According to Mahon, “a novel of

average length would be approximately 75,000 words... about 2500 words per chapter” (p. 12). This calculation would give you an average of about 30 chapters. However, some novels do not exceed 12 or 15 chapters. As stated earlier, everything depends on your subject and the way you treat it.

This does not mean that you should count the words as you write. Just continue writing but don't write too much or too little. The figures above would serve as a guide for you.

### 3.4 Outline

We have always emphasized that there are no specific rules for creative writing in any literary genre. However, some helpful tips are given to the budding artists. Some writers just start their novels and as they progress, the characters are developed as events unfold. Others draw their outlines and characters sketches before they start. For the purpose of this course, we will adopt the latter approach. We will draw an outline, but this will be different from the outlines we have drawn so far. We will draw an outline based on a published novel. We will use Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* for illustration for the rest of this module. This is because we do not have the time and space to write a novel here. However, as we go along, you should be working on a novel you could.

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

If you were to write the novel, *Things Fall Apart* draw an outline of not more than 10 sentences or phrases. Compare what you have done with my own presented below.

1. Okonkwo grows up with a lazy father.
2. He determines never to be like his father.
3. He works very hard.
4. Record great achievements.
5. Makes some mistakes.
6. The colonial masters arrive with their religion.
7. He goes on exile.
8. As he comes back the society is no longer the same.
9. He fails to recognize or adapt to the changes and dies in the process.

This outline could produce *Things Fall Apart* or any other novel. What makes your novel classic like this novel is your ability to demonstrate “...such mastery of plot construction, such keen psychological insight and such an ability to hold your themes steadily before your mind and pursue them to a logical conclusion” (Palmer, 1981:48). Achebe did this in his masterpiece, *Things Fall Apart*, which you should pick read carefully. Can you identify the theme that Achebe kept steadily in mind? You will see it on page 160. “He (referring to the white man) has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart”.

In this novel, Achebe presents a once stable community unified by a common belief system and government. The colonial masters came with their own religion and government and destroyed this harmonious society. You can still tell this story differently and achieve the same purpose.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Whenever the novel is mentioned, we think of a story. This means that the fundamental aspect of the novel is the story telling aspect of it. What distinguishes one story from the other is not just the story but how it is told. The same story could be told differently by different people. One may be interesting, while the other may be boring. There are different types of novel but the most popular one is the realistic novel. The realistic novel presents a slice of life (verisimilitude). The content of this novel is not reality but presents life as it is lived. We advise that you start by writing in the realistic mode and in a moderate length.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

We have tried to present the definition of the novel by different scholars. This is not exhaustive and can never be. You too can define the novel from your own perspective. You have seen that there are different types of novel and that length of the novel varies. You have seen also that you may start your novel based on an idea in your imagination and as you develop the idea, the plot evolves and your characters emerge. You may also draw an outline, create your characters and even give a synopsis of your story before you start writing. The important factor is that you should keep that idea constantly in your mind, develop it from the beginning, through the middle and on to a logical end.

#### **6.0 TUTOR- MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Write, in not more than one page, the synopsis of the novel you intend to write.

#### **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

Ezeigbo, Akachi (1998). *A Companion to the Novel*. Lagos: Vista.

Forster, E. M. (1981). *Aspects of the Novel*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Hall, Oakley (1981). *The Art and Craft of Novel Writing*. Cincinnati H: Story Press.

Harris, Robert (2010) "Types of Novel". <http://www.vitualsalt.com/lit/novelty:htm>.

Palmer, Eustace (1981). *An Introduction to the African Novel*. London: Heinemann.

## UNIT 3 THE LAST WORD

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### 1.0 INTRODUCTION.

In this unit we are going to summarize some of basic guidelines that can guide you in your desire to be a successful novelist. We believe that if you imbibe them you will be in a position to write your first or next novel in at least, hundred days as you will see in the next unit.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- decide to write a novel; and
- make a sketch of your story.

### HOW TO STUDY THE UNIT

- a. Read this unit as diligently as possible.
- b. Find meaning of unfamiliar words in the unit using your dictionary.
- c. As you read, put major points down in a piece of paper or jotter.
- d. Do not go to the next section until you have fully understood the section you are reading now.
- e. Do all the Self-Assessment exercises in the unit as honestly as you can. In some areas where it is not feasible to provide answers to Self-Assessment exercises, go to the relevant sections of the unit to derive the answers.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Qualification

Sometimes, after reading a novel you feel that you could have written something like it. This is a very positive feeling. As I said earlier, anybody who survived childhood has at least a story in him or her. We could now modify it to read that “...all of us... carry at least one novel around in our heads or our hearts” (Ike,

2007:32). This novel in your head or mind will never emerge until you start and conclude it. Do not procrastinate but start now. Write the story as it comes to your mind. It could be presented in a few lines or a few paragraphs. According to the novelist, Toni Morrison, “If there’s a book you really want to read but it hasn’t been written yet, then you must write it.”

It is not easy to write a novel, yet many books are being published. Statistics show that in 1996, according to *Books in Print*, 1.3 million book titles were in print. The number of books published in 1996 alone was 140,000 in the United States. If the 140,000 books were written by people, why can’t you be among them? (Quoted in Hall, 1989:142)

What qualifies you to be a novelist is your ability to write simple English sentences (after all, that’s what made Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* a masterpiece). Another important qualification is your ability to be alert to the world around you, and determination to write an interesting and sellable novel. You may take ten courses in creative writing, attend workshops, learn all there is to learn about how to write a novel but if you are not really determined to write, then you cannot do it. Writing comes from within you so when you have learnt the rudiments, you need to take the bold step of actually writing.

### 3.2 Possibility

Writing requires a lot of discipline. It is not easy to squeeze in an hour or two a day (or night) of writing in the midst of other responsibilities that are yearning for attention. It is not easy to write a novel especially when you have a full time job, family, and responsibilities, but it is possible. It can be done. Others have done it so you too can do it. Most writers in this country, in fact, have had to carry on two lives while they wrote their novel. The reward comes when you see your name in print and you start selling. How would you feel as you walk through a market or bookstore people are asking for your book? You may be lucky and your novel could win an award and you rise to fame. It is possible that you are going to be another Achebe or Ernest Hemingway. It is worse for a woman who has to combine a full time job, motherhood, other aspects of family life, commitments to their communities and the writing of a novel. It is possible. Yes, you have a job. Yes, you are a woman, you are a wife and mother, and you have a family. None of these has stopped great writers in the past. It has been done as we have names like Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo, Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa, Zaynab Alkali and many others. However, as a man or a woman, once you sell your first book, then maybe you will be in the position to quit your full time job and start writing full time.

That you are a student of Literature-in-English offering this course is an added advantage for you. Many of the great writers did not study the course; yet they wrote masterpieces. The poet Wallace Stevens was a vice president of an insurance company and an expert on the bond market. The young T.S. Eliot was a

banker. William Carlos Williams was a pediatrician. Robert Frost was a poultry farmer. Cyprain Ekwensi was a pharmacist. Hart Crane packed candy in his father's warehouse, and later wrote advertising copy. Stephen Crane was a war correspondent. Marianne Moore worked at the New York Public Library. James Dickey worked for an advertising agency. Archibald MacLeish was Director of the Office of Facts and Figures during World War II.

### 3.3 Beginning and Ending

We have mentioned some of the issues to be discussed here earlier in this material and the material on Creative Writing but you are expected to apply them now as you read this. There is one Igbo adage that says that the beginning of a cry is usually difficult but once started, the crier enjoys it so much so that she/he may not want to stop until the emotion is satiated. Sometimes, it is the same with writing a novel. It is not usually easy to start but once you start, you are likely going to complete it faster than you anticipated. Some writers like to map out their story ahead of time which is what we recommend in this course. Other writers jump into the story and the story evolves as they wrote on but bear in mind that writing is not always a perfect process. It can be approached and completed in different ways. It proceeds backwards, inside out, or upside down more often than forwards. You may decide to jettison the suggestions here and add more detailed steps of your own. As **The Writer**, the decision is yours.

You may start with a title. Once you have a story in mind, choose a title. This title may be the name of the major character or a reflection of the subject matter of the novel. For me, I will prefer to choose a title early as it helps to keep me focused on the central idea of the novel.

You may also start with the plot. Decide the type of story you want to write. The way you arrange the story to determine which action comes before the other is called the plot. To start, decide what the novel is about. It could be about a pirate captain who voyages through the seven seas or a knight who defends his fortress from cruel invaders or a concentration camp escapee. Once you have the central idea it will develop into a full-fledged plot. A plot needs a beginning, middle, and an end. It also must have conflict and a resolution based on a believable motivation that will make your writing boring.

Next, list your characters and identify them by names. In giving names to your characters, try as much as possible to avoid using "...names that are readily identifiable with well-known local personalities" to avoid "possible litigation" (Ike, 2007:133). Some of your friends may quarrel with you for using their names in your works especially if such characters are presented with in glorious traits. You may choose only the major characters but if possible identify all your characters as early as possible. It is very easy to get the names of your characters. Choose the from among the names you came across at school, from your primary school, through secondary school to the university. Also, you can pick names

from newspapers, your office and your general environment. The names of your characters can reflect their actions, posture or position in the society especially if you are using traditional/local names.

In creating your main characters, ensure that there is a main good person (protagonist) and a main bad person (antagonist). There are several ways to do this. One way could be to draw rough sketches of them. Another could be to write up a list of questions (name? age? pastimes? fetishes? flaws? temptation?) and answer them for each character. It is important for you to ensure that your characters are believable and natural. Remember that no one in real life is perfectly flawless so do not create a protagonist that is flawless. Pay special attention to the development of the characters by revealing them in appropriate scenes that tell the reader something more about the character. This will help the readers feel more strongly about him or her. In the same way, your antagonists should not be completely bad. If they have no good or human qualities, your readers will not be able to identify with them, and they will seem impassive. You should also create your other characters. Do not make the mistake of thinking secondary characters are unimportant. Your major characters cannot exist in isolation. These minor characters inhabit the backdrop of the novel and must help to bring the place alive. However, as you explore these characters remember that they should not get in the way of the protagonist.

If you have successfully selected your characters, your novel is almost completed because you are now aware of the actions they would be engaged in. That, to a large extent, determines that length of your novel. The next step is to present your outline for each proposed chapter. Once that is done, start writing, reviewing and revising appropriately.

One important advice that is given to budding novelists is “Show, don’t tell”. It means that you are expected to present your story in such a graphic manner that your reader will feel with the characters, perceive smells, and actually see the events as vividly as possible. You are expected to dramatize the events and not summarize them. In practical sense, it means that instead of writing, ‘The door opened and we saw two soldiers walk into the bar’, you write “Just then, the door was kicked open. We turn and stare as two soldiers enter, dripping wet from the rain, guns slung over their shoulders” (Helon Habila *Waiting for an Angel* p. 370). Here is another example: instead of writing; ‘He was angry’, you write: “He screwed the piece of paper into a tight ball and threw it so hard it bounced off the wall and the table before landing back at his feet”. In telling or showing your story, you have to choose a point of view. By now you are conversant with the points view at your disposal. The third person point of view is the most popular as it enables you present your story naturally in a narrative form. With the third person point of view, you will be in a position to really show instead of telling your story. The third person omniscient narrator is the most wide-ranging and authoritative point of view (Anderson, 1998:115). This



point of view will enable you enter the character's consciousness; describe his/her appearance, speech, behaviour, thoughts, history, and motivations. You will also be in a position to present events or incidents that happen elsewhere or in the past and what will happen in the future. You, as the omniscient narrator can also make comments on the action, present forewarnings of future events or wise reflections on life. The point of view helps you to say a lot about your characters, theme, environment and period.

You may decide not to use the third person point of view and use any other one. The decision is yours but you must ensure consistency. Once you have chosen a particular point of view for your novel, it is important to stick to it with clarity and consistency.

### 3.4 Approaches

Here, we will summarize some of the major approaches to novel writing culled from the Internet. You can now choose the one that is most suitable for you.

The first approach is the one we have presented above. Here you **begin with the ending in mind**. In this case you draw your outline before writing. If you know the ending of the story, it can help you form the theme, the plot, the settings, the characters, and it can help you progress more easily toward that ending.

The second approach is the one called **the big picture approach**. Here you try to create the world (the overall setting and environment), and then build on it to create your novel. Create geography, races, towns, cities, capitals, cults, factions, governments, etc. For a novice, this will be a bit problematic as she/he might find it difficult to control the scope of the story. The consequence will be a tendency towards unavoidable digressions.

The third approach is **The Dive in approach**. This may also be referred to as impulsive writing. Here, you make a list of ideas, choose one of them you start writing while it's still fresh in your mind. You may recall that we did something like that in earlier when we asked you to write out ten ideas that come to your mind concerning an object like the door or the universe. You were asked to choose one of such ideas and then, write. That was when we were discussing creative writing generally.

The last one is the **Start with character approach**. In this case, you will create three or four characters and let the plot build up around them. A budding writer who adopts this method is encouraged to try to draw a sketchy plot around those characters. This will allow the characters to be more embedded in the plot.

### 3.5 The Last Word

This section is sub-titled the last words because they contain mainly some tips on how to sustain and complete the novel which I believe you must have started or have decided to write

- **Make the Commitment.** You do need to understand what you're undertaking. Many wonderful writers go unnoticed and unread because their drawers are filled with unfinished novels. You must say to yourself that if this novel does not get written then you can only blame yourself. Try to set small goals. This will keep you motivated.

Make your writing a habit by writing every day, whether it is a sentence, a chapter, or more, you must regularly dedicate some time to your novel. We have discussed that. Set aside a quiet hour where everyone must leave you alone. Morning or night, it doesn't matter, although some writers work better at certain times of the day. Just make sure you write daily! You may give yourself a deadline. Many writers write better when there is a deadline to face.

- **Create a writing space.** Find a cozy place where you can relax and there are no distractions. Get a good chair to sit in which won't give you back pains after hours and hours of sitting and writing. You don't write a book in an hour, it takes months, so protect your back.
- **Seek constructive feedback.** Never show your precious writing to someone you don't completely trust. Your writing is in its "baby stage" and it needs nurture and love. You need someone encouraging, but who isn't afraid to be honest and completely blunt with you. You must not hesitate to take criticism from a friend as long as you know they are being honest with you, otherwise it is better to get criticism from an editor or agent.
- **Consider joining an online or offline writing community.** This can provide support, feedback, and peer reviews. Check the internet for online groups. You can also join a literary organization like Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA). It has branches in many states of the federation.
- **Rewrite.** Do not hesitate to rewrite your story at any point. Editing and rewriting is what makes the story good. The writing stage is when you set your ideas down. The rewriting stage is the time to make it great. But be careful not to over-edit. It is possible to rip out your story while you straighten your grammar. Check with two or more "personal editors" among your friends, family, teachers, or colleagues. However, remember that before you do a massive edit (although your opinion is the final decision it is not always the right answer). Always save the first draft in a safe place. Sometimes you DO go overboard with the editing and end up wanting to go back to that first draft.

**Keep rewriting.** A great story is never truly finished, and as an amateur, you really don't have any time restrictions. "A story is never finished, only abandoned."

**Publish your work.** This is the conclusion that most writers aim for. Whether you choose a well-known publishing company, an online e-publisher, or self-publish, they are acceptable.

**A good way to start writing a novel is to think about what interests you.** If you don't write for yourself, your novel will seem superficial and plastic. It's better to share your plans with someone else, but only if it seems comfortable. Just do what you think is right and with the computer you can always check your spellings. Write what you know and make it easy on yourself.

**One simpler tip is to make it casual and simple.** Sagas are okay if you are completely ready for them. Do not keep blabbering about how characters are walking but stick to the point. Only use key interactions. Especially show the reader not by telling them how a character feels but by showing them like:

**"Janet looked up at the overcast sky as her green eyes filled with tears."** This tells the reader three things; she is sad, she has green eyes and it is a cloudy day. It also makes the reader wonder; why is she crying, what will happen next? It will also set a mood. These are all the things you should keep in mind when writing.

**Keep it simple.** Use writing advice that works best for you. Different writers write differently.

- "It is better to write for yourself and have no public than to write for the public and have no self." Write your story the way you want. There are markets for all genres, and there will always be a slot for your story if it's well written and interesting.
- Keep a record of any ideas you may have. You might want them later.
- It is good to have more material than you actually need in your first draft. Long paragraphs of description can be trimmed later, but those are things that YOU need to know during the early writing process.
- Do not make your story "episodic": sure, bomb threats and explosions are great hooks and very engaging – but only in the right context. If you throw dynamite in for effect, your reader will start to lose faith in you to tell a good story.
- Do not expect too much from yourself. Remember that rewriting can only do good for your story.
- Have self-confidence. If you expect yourself to fail, you will.
- Do not write expecting bundles of money. Money in writing is all about luck. And good luck to you.
- Avoid using too many clichés or stock phrases. They have their place, but over using them is boring and uninventive.
- Try not to lose heart in your book. For example, when you get to a boring bit and stop for the night, you might not want to go back to that part. If you feel that way, try writing an exciting bit to get yourself motivated again.
- Do not be disappointed if you lose heart. Many writers write tens, even hundreds of stories a year, some which never get past the first page let alone the first chapter! You'll know after a while if a story you're writing has really captivated your attention and imagination. If you don't

feel this right away, keep developing ideas and trying! Sometimes it helps to listen to music in between moments when you're writing. It helps you think of different scenarios and chapters, and how characters might feel about these adventures, themselves or even other characters around them.

- Never give up! Some people will discourage you but many more will love what you write if you love it as well. Write with passion.
- Jot down your thoughts while writing; even when you're not, it's good to see what you were thinking before on the subject just in case another day you think differently. It might become a handy argument and you could see within yourself for the way you truly think and believe.
- Have fun with your writing and let your imagination go wild. Play with words and enjoy yourself. Never get discouraged or let people bring you down.
- Keep a dictionary and Thesaurus with you while writing.
- Read Literature often to improve your writing skills.

### **Things You Will Need**

- A quiet place to work and think, A computer, Paper and pen, A note pad or journal.
- An open mind, Imagination and determination, A good story idea.
- A plot line with a beginning, middle and an end.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Creative writing is a personal enterprise. You must make up your mind to write. What we are trying to do in this course is to guide you in this task which you have decided to undertake. The only thing you need is discipline.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, you have been exposed to some of the features you need to be a good novelist, poet or playwright. It is up to you to utilize the advice.

## **6.0 TUTOR- MARKED ASSIGNMENT.**

Draw your writing schedule and an outline of a novel you intend to write in the next unit.

## **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

Read as many works on creative writing as possible.

Go to the Internet and search for creative writing, how to write a novel, a play or a poem.

Ike, Chukwuemeka (2007). *How to Become a Published Writer*. Ibadan: HEBN Publishers Plc.

Ker, David (2003). *The African Novel and the Modernist Tradition*. Ibadan: Mosuro Publishers.

## **UNIT 4 REALISM AND THE NOVEL**

### **CONTENT**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Realism
  - 3.2 Realistic Characters
  - 3.3. Realistic Experience
  - 3.4 Realistic Setting
  - 3.5 Plot and Structure
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

I have decided to include this unit before you commence on the actual writing of your novel in the next unit. Realism is a very important aspect of the novel. The novel is expected to present a slice of life and this unit presents an elaborate guide on ways of ensuring that the novel you are about to write will satisfy that requirement.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- create realistic characters in your work;
- present realistic experience; and
- employ setting in illuminating your characters.

### **HOW TO STUDY THE UNIT**

- a. Read this unit as diligently as possible.
- b. Find meaning of unfamiliar words in the unit using your dictionary.
- c. As you read, put major points down in a piece of paper or jotter.
- d. Do not go to the next section until you have fully understood the section you are reading now.
- e. Do all the Self-Assessment exercises in the unit as honestly as you can. In some areas where it is not feasible to provide answers to Self-Assessment exercises, go to the relevant sections of the unit to derive the answers.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Realism

Realism is the defining characteristics which differentiates the works of early 18th Century novelists from previous fiction. The novel is realistic not only because it presents the mean side of life but because of its attempt to portray a wide range of human experience. Realism in the novel is not so much as what is presented but how it is presented. This means that you should pay particular attention to the way you present your story in the novel you are about to write in the next unit.

Realism therefore is a concept associated with the illusion of reality presented in prose fiction, especially the novel. It distinguishes the novel from the plot of earlier writings. The plot of the novel is not usually taken from myth, history or legend so it deviates from the use of traditional plot found in these earlier prose narratives. In the novel, there are realistic characterization and setting. The characters are given proper names that we find in everyday life and are seen as particular individuals in the contemporary social environment.

Time process is very important in the novel (you must have learnt more about time and space in the novel in the course material, *Introduction to Prose Fiction*). Time process enables the round characters to gain experience and grow to maturity in the fictional world of the novel. When you present realistic characters, your reader would sympathise, empathize, and identify with them. Time and space differentiates drama from the novel because the playwright condenses information about the character in dialogue and short descriptions in the stage direction. The novelist on the other hand has the time and space to present the minutest details about the characters and this includes their innermost thoughts.

Realism is applied exclusively to the novel through the presentation of credible incidents that must be as close as possible to life. In spirit of realism, you as the author should take a bit of information, character traits from different people and artistically synthesizes the various traits of living people and combines them in a single character whose existence is fictitious but whose traits are a conglomeration of various people, past, and present.

One major factor in realism is realistic details through vivid description of characters and their actions so strive for that.

#### 3.2 Realistic Characters

The novel deals realistically with human relationships, with Man in society in relation to other beings. You should therefore expose your protagonist to other characters and through their inter-personal interaction, he gains in experience, and progresses from innocence to knowledge and may have to come to terms

with reality. The novel differs from the short story and drama you have the time and space to be much more discursive and relaxed in your presentation. Where the short story concentrates on a particular situation or episode making rather sparing use of dialogue, In the novel you have the liberty to expose your characters to several situations and episodes, exploring each in depth and making use of a great deal of dialogue. You should bear in mind that all novels that are “successful works of art contained two elements- life and pattern” (Kettle, 1960:28). This means that your novel must be a reflection of life and of human experience. You must therefore to your reader with words, a representation of a realistic world peopled by realistic men and women that are engaged in realistic activity.

The detailed description of the individual’s inner life could also be a component of realism. However this depends on the point of view you are using. You recall the discussion on different points of view. Which point of view would you use if you intend to explore the inner life of your characters? It is not every novel that includes minute and detailed descriptions of places and objects but try to do so. Different novelists will balance this aspect of the novel in varying proportions. The important point here is that the world you present in the novel should reflect normal human activity that the people should look like realistic men and women and the subject matter, relationships and incidents should be plausible and applicable to the human race. This will indicate according Ian Watt that novels realism resides not just in the kind of life it presents but also in the way it presents it (p. 11). You are therefore obliged to convince your reader of the reality of the world he has created and you can only achieve this through your technique.

### **3.3 Realistic Experience**

A good novel is expected to have the capacity to enrich the readers’ understanding of life, expand the range of their range experience, sympathies, develop their minds, and deepen their knowledge of the sociopolitical, cultural and historical issues of the world around them. You should bear this in mind and ask yourself if your work is going to do that. Novelists have written about almost all the themes you can think about. We have read a lot about colonialism, wars, corruption, and greed in developing countries, political instabilities, bad leadership, injustice, oppression and other vices that plague the society. We have also read about rich cultural heritage of a people, upholding of values and standards which have a universal applicability in novels. It means that you are not saying anything new but what makes your work new and unique is your manner of presentation. Your ability to create a coherent unified work marks your work as good. You should therefore pay serious attention to your technique. Narrative technique is not just the narrative method or first or third person narrative but the various devices you can employ to tell his story in such a way that it presents the desired spice of life.

You can achieve this through the management of judgment and the blending of scenes, summary, and description of events and actions.

A great novel is expected to present a coherent, unified, fiction prose narrative with a beginning, middle, and an end "...with the materials deployed in such a way as to give the image coherence, continuity, and wholeness, and with certain tensions and anticipations regarding central characters carried through the entire length of the work to be resolved only at the end" (Stevick, 1967:4).

Some novelists tell and others show but good novelists do not tell he must show remember our discussion on showing and telling. You must strive to show through dramatization of action and impersonal and objective presentation of your subject matter. Impersonality is very important because "The act of fiction does not begin until the novelist thinks of a story as a matter to be shown, to be so exhibited, that it will tell itself (Lubbock, 1921:38). Impersonal narration or showing has the advantage of involving your reader more easily in the fictional world since your reader would see the events through the eyes of one or more of the characters.

### **3.4 Realistic Setting**

Setting is a very important aspect of the successful novel. The detailed presentation of all aspects of the characters environment is one of the things that will give solidity and a sense of realism to your novel. It involves not just the physical and historical setting, the creation of an appropriate atmosphere or background but you can also use setting to illuminate your characters by employing it much more meaningfully to reflect the character's changing moods, fortunes or state of mind.

### **3.5 Plot and Structure**

The formal elements of plot structure and coherence are very important but in addition there should be a significance and moral design in your plot. You are not expected to present merely a photographic copy of life or a reportorial account of it in the name of realism, you should imply what you think of the aspect of life you are presenting. You should not just copy life but must clarify and evaluate issues situations and characters. You should try to enlarge your readers, sympathies or expose them to areas of experience they never thought existed. In your plot structure you should attempt to "...impose some order on the chaos of experience ...for characters to be real... the plot ought to cause surprise" (Forster, 1981:91) so suspense is equally important in your plot.

Some writers project their moral or social designs. In this case, the writer starts with an idea, a message or some moral significance he wishes to convey, and then



sets out to create characters and situations to embody the idea. If you are in this group, don't be so preoccupied with your message that will fail to create realistic characters and situations that will convincingly carry the message. If you fail to do that, you may end up writing a moral fable or a propaganda tract.

Plot and structure are aspects of the shape of the novel but let us distinguish the two. Plot is the summary of the events of the novel and in addition, it is the sequence of events as they are brought about by the interaction of character, thoughts, actions and changes in fortunes. Structure is simply how the plot is organized. The division of the work into chapters or parts or movements depicts the structure. The use of chapters or parts depends on the discretion of the writer but most writers use chapters. In a good structure a succeeding chapter is expected to balance an earlier one and linked to the preceding one. Even when there are flashbacks, there is always a link between the chapters and this adds to the unity and coherence of novel.

You could present human experience in a linear chronological sequence with events moving from the beginning through a series of complications in the middle to the resolution in the end. On the other hand, you could dispense with chronology but ensure that your flashbacks and digressions are logically related. There is nothing wrong with any sequence as long as there is some coherence, some logic in its organization.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

In the novel you are about to write, ensure that you achieve realism and you can only do this through the technique you adopt because it is not possible to discuss your novel as a work of art without discussing the technique. It is important for your reader to pay attention to what you have to say novelists has to say but more important to pay attention to the way in which you say it. Remember that you must not separate technique and subject matter. The totality of a novel's impact and meaning is an amalgamation of subject matter, plot, structure, style, and narrative method- all the various facets of the novel. You should therefore that you study, understand and apply the various elements and devices of the novel so that in the end you will be able to produce an enriching artistically satisfying novel.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

We have seen in this unit that in writing your novel, you must present a fully realized body of life and create realistic characters and situations. This shows that realism is a very important component of the successful novel, although it is difficult to define realism. You have a duty to convince the reader of the individuality of your characters by highlighting in detail their particular traits and

defining their environment precisely. I will advise you to read one of these classical novels and note the description of incidents, episodes, places, objects and actions in minute details. Some of the novels are Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders* And Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and note in particular the application of realistic sense of time in these and some other African novels.

## **6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

List four areas you would pay particular attention to, to ensure that you achieve realism in the novel you are about to write.

## **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

Forster, E. M (1981). *Aspects of the Novel Abinger Edition*. Middlesex: Penguin.

Stevick, Philip ed. (1967). *The Theory of the Novel*. New York: The Free Press.

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## UNIT 5 WRITE A NOVEL IN 100 DAYS

### CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Day 1 – 20 The Basics
  - 3.2 Day 21 – 29 Starting
  - 3.3. Day 30 – 60 Writing
  - 3.4 Day 6- - 80 Re-writing
  - 3.6 Day 81 – 100 Revision, Editing
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor- Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further reading

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, which is the last, you are going to put into practice all you have learnt. Try to follow this schedule and see if you can write a novel in 100 days! I saw this on the internet and decided to present it to you with some modifications. You can visit the internet on your own. There are many essays and guidelines on novel writing on the net.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to write a novel following the day today schedule.

### HOW TO STUDY THE UNIT

- a. Read this unit as diligently as possible.
- b. Find meaning of unfamiliar words in the unit using your dictionary.
- c. As you read, put major points down in a piece of paper or jotter.
- d. Do not go to the next section until you have fully understood the section you are reading now.
- e. Do all the Self-Assessment exercises in the unit as honestly as you can. In some areas where it is not feasible to provide answers to Self-Assessment exercises, go to the relevant sections of the unit to derive the answers.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Write a novel in 100 days – The Basics Day 1 - 20

On your first day of writing your novel, make a promise to yourself that you are going to do it. This is critical. Without that commitment, you may as well save

your pencils and paper. It is not going to be easy but it can happen. Remember; write as often as you can. That is what writers do – they write.

Each writer has his or her own writing hours. For instance, it is said that “Graham Greene wrote before breakfast, Balzac wrote into the night, Dickens wrote during the day, while Trollope worked daily from 5.am and wrote 2,500 words before going to work. Zola wrote every day from 10.am to 1.pm covering 4 – 5 quarto sheets each day” (Ike, 2007:130). Chukwuemeka Ike explains that as a Registrar of a University, he used to work from 8.am to 6.00pm. This means that by supper time, he was too tired to write, yet he had a “burning urge to write” so he started writing from 4.00am till 6.00am and it became part of him.

Carve out specific time to write. This is important because in the course of writing a novel, you’ll get discouraged, bored, angry, or otherwise fed up, and when you start feeling that way, you’ll need clearly defined patterns to keep yourself working.

In the first week, decide upon the story you are going to write. You might not work out every detail, but today you are going to begin the process. You are not going to procrastinate – procrastination is your enemy. The time has come to stop merely talking about writing your novel. Plan it now. What kind of novel appeals to you? What really gets your juices flowing? Is it a good murder mystery, science fiction, a thriller, romance or general fiction?

It doesn’t matter what kind of book you decide to write. There are no rules other than that the story has to be very, very interesting. It can be exciting, scary, fun, funny or sad – but it must not bore the reader. Although there are no rules about the story ideas, I would offer you one caution: think small. One of the worst mistakes most beginning novelists make is thinking big, trying to come up with an end of the world story, in the belief that big is better. That is not true. Keep your story/idea small and focused. Look into your creative soul and search for a little story but one that has real meaning to you. We are all part of the human family. If you create a story that has deep meaning to you, chances are that it will have deep meaning for the rest of us. Present your experience truthfully.

Start writing but don’t be afraid to write down scenes or sections that don’t lead anywhere. Don’t discard them if they are not leading anywhere. Follow the advice of Joan Didion who pins them on a board with the idea of picking them up later. Quite early in her novel, *A Book of Common Prayer*, she says, she wrote about Charlotte Douglas going to the airport, it was a couple of pages of prose that she liked, but she couldn’t find a place for it. “I kept picking this part up and putting it in different places”, she writes, “but it kept stopping the narrative; it was wrong everywhere, but I was determined to use it”. She finally found a spot

for it in the middle of the book. “Sometimes you can get away with things in the middle of the book” (Internet).

Apart from writing about something you know, you can write about something you love. It does not matter what it is, just love it, what you need here is research. Undertake a thorough research to ensure that you present an authentic experience. Let your events proceed from the individual to the group to create a vivid picture. For instance never say that the bomb exploded and 15,000 people were killed. Start with “Jamie and Suzy were walking in the park with their grandmother when the earth opened up or when the bomb exploded and killed Jamie and several others.

More about formula. When Ernest Hemmingway started as a young reporter for the Kansas City Star, he was given a style sheet with four basic rules:

- Use short sentences
- Use short first paragraphs
- Use vigorous English
- Be positive, never negative (Internet)

Asked about these rules years later, he said, “Those were the best rules I ever learned in the business of writing. I’ve never forgotten them. No one with any talent, who feels and writes truly about the things he is trying to say, can fail to write well if he abides by them”. So abide by these rules as your thoughts flow freely on your paper.

Another formula which we could borrow from John Baldwin which he used to structure his novel is hereby presented.

1. The hero is an expert
2. The villain is an expert
3. You must watch all of the villainy over the shoulder of the villain
4. The hero has a team of experts in various fields behind him
5. Two or more on the team must fall in love
6. Two or more on the team must die
7. The villain must turn his attention from his initial goal to the team.
8. The villain and the hero must live to conclude the story (Internet).

### **3.2 Starting Day 21 - 29**

Some characters will be major ones, around whom the story will pivot; others will play bit parts, but these will be critical too, as every player must have a reason for being in the story. If they don’t have a reason for being in your novel, they’ll slow down the story, and slowness bores readers. Keep asking questions, “why?” as you reach the end of the second week of defining characters, you will have a stack of 5x7 character cards that spell out intimate details about the personal life of

each and every character in your story, down to their waist measurement and favourite colour.

### **Voice**

Your “voice” is your choice. Your “style” is your style. Don’t attempt to “sound like” some famous writer. Many beginning writers feel that they have to add something to their “voice” on the printed page. Who you are on the page is who you are in life, just as sophisticated, just as worldly, or not. It doesn’t matter. Keep writing and keep cutting away at the awkwardness that might creep into your writing. Be natural. As the French novelist, Francois Rene de Chateaubriand wrote, “The original writer is not one who imitates nobody, but one whom nobody can imitate” (Ike, 2007:34).

### **Outline**

Prepare a rough outline of the story’s action from Chapter One through to the end. Commit yourself to a point of view early in your planning. This way the reader can get a footing in the story. Once you have decided which character will be the viewpoint character, stick with your decision. Do not shift point of view. If you decide on multiple points of view, show the story through one character at a time, in order to avoid confusing the reader. When using characters to present clues, do not forget body language. Nonverbal signals can communicate much more effectively than words.

Do nothing – absolutely nothing – on your novel in terms of actual writing until your plotting (along with your characters and their roles in the drama) is complete and down on paper. Remember that plot must have a beginning, middle and an end. Do not fall victim to that old author line: “I just start out with a basic idea and a couple of characters. I never know where I’m going. I let the characters tell the story for me”. That may work for brilliant and experienced novelists, but most of us need a clear road map if we aren’t going to get ourselves and our readers hopelessly lost.

Hang the cards and outline you have developed around your office or room so that they can be easily read.

### **3.3 Day 30 – 60 Writing**

Now you have made:

1. a commitment to write
2. a working schedule
3. a story idea
4. a list of characters
5. a detailed plot of the entire story
6. a short description of what your novel is about

Set a goal for yourself to write at least four pages a day. That is 300 – 325 words, double-spaced. Some days you will write one page; others you will write 15 pages. Try to average at least four pages a day.

Your novel is a work of fiction, but that does not mean that you do not need to present your facts in a straight forward manner. Nothing turns a reader off quite as fast as a wrong fact. And nothing gives a story the ring of authenticity like the right fact or detail. Use the Internet for research. It's fast, easy, and inexpensive. Every library in the world is open to you. Look, too, at magazines and newspapers published at the same time and place as the setting of your novel.

Inject dialogue as you write. Conversation is not dialogue. Dialogue has a purpose. It pushes the story forward. It keeps the reader tuned in to the story, and makes a person feel at the heart of the action. Therefore, don't describe distant events second hand. Put the reader in the middle of your story's action and your dialogue will sing naturally. Keep your talk efficient and forceful. And always make certain the reader knows who is speaking.

Without descriptions the reader doesn't have a sense of place and time and mood which are very critical for your story. But with too much, your story will bog down and get boring. Get in, give the telling details. Then get out. Don't drown in your descriptions. Let each sentence count. Grab your reader's attention from the first line. (Or your idea, new and unique – that's what surprises, satisfies and pleases readers. Write with imagination.

Don't get discouraged. Keep writing. Remember the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Ironweed* by William Kenney was rejected by 13 publishers before Saul Bellow intervened on its behalf. Bear in mind that writing a novel is not like writing a letter. Writing a novel is mentally exhausting, far harder than a nine-to-five job. When you write a novel, you live the lives of your characters. Persistence is what is required. Novelist Harlan Ellison once said that "...if anybody can stop you from being a writer, then don't be one".

Go to the library and browse through books on food and gardening. Authors of these books describe smells, tastes, touches, and even sound in precise detail. When writing, always mention scents and tactile sensations. Good description observes all the senses. Select your details, but be specific, present concrete experiences. In the words of Strunk and White in *The Elements of Style*, "if those who have studied the art of writing are in accord on one point it is on this: The surest way to arouse and hold the reader is to be specific, definite and concrete" (quoted in Hall, 1994:340).

There's an old adage in writing: "Don't tell, show". It means, don't tell us about anger, and show us the anger. We then will read and feel the anger. Don't tell the

reader what to feel. Show the reader the characters and situation, and that feeling of anger (or sorrow, love, honesty, justice, etc.) will awaken in them.

### **3.4 Day 61 – 80 Re-Writing**

If you have written five pages a day for the last 60 days, you have written about 90,000 words. It is time to begin to rewrite and edit your novel.

You have written approximately 300 pages but are these pages a novel? Do they have a beginning, middle, and an end? Re-read your novel and ask yourself: have I raised a question or presented a puzzle, and then solved it? If you can give a satisfactory answer to this question, then continue. Do a spell check of your book. Print out your book. Place the book in a safe place and leave it alone for two weeks.

Now that you've been away from it for a while, it is time to start editing your novel. Go back and read the whole novel from start to finish, noting lines and phrases that are awkward, but keep reading. Don't bother to rewrite, not yet. Do chunk editing. Cut away from the bone of the story. Go chapter by chapter and get rid of irrelevances. Re-read your pages – one at a time – out loud to yourself to eliminate any awkward sentence structure. Go back and cut out one excessive metaphor or simile from each page. But please never cut anything out of a book you regret later. Cut out one adjective or adverb in each paragraph. Re-read your novel again and look just for the clichés. Cut: “one fell swoop,” “pretty as a picture,” “in my mind's eye,” “right as rain”.

### **3.5 Editing/Revision**

Review your manuscript and make sure you have given your readers a picture of your characters early in the story. Readers don't need to know everything, but they do need to know what is physically important about each character. Use the five senses to get your characters down on paper.

Identify the climactic scene at the end of your book, a scene that resolves the conflict. Re-read the endings of your favourite novels and re-read your own. How does your book match up?

Don't mail your novel yet. It is now time to research and find the right publisher. Write a brief synopsis – one paragraph, no more – of your novel. Make it strong and lively. This is an important sales tool. Make a photocopy or print out the first fifty pages or so of your novel. Try to leave off at a point where the reader will want to know more of the story. Write a very brief letter to publisher include the one-paragraph description of your novel. And include one brief paragraph about yourself. Do sound professional. Do not say, “I always wanted to be a writer...” or “I can write better than the junk I see...”



If you are sending your manuscript to more than one publisher at the same time, you MUST tell them that this is “a multiple submission.” Entrust your manuscript to FedEx. Keep your receipt. Note the date on your calendar. Don’t expect to hear anything for two months. Buy yourself a drink. Amuse yourself by thinking about the characters in your next novel. Remind yourself that you still have to wait for two months or more. Do not call the publisher. If two full months pass and you hear nothing, you can write a brief note of inquiry.

Remind yourself that everyone – everyone! – gets rejected while you are waiting, start another novel so that you will not lose the plan and rhythm you have created for creative writing.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Writing a novel is not an easy task. You need to create a schedule and stick to it. For you to succeed, you must write something every day. We suggest an average of four pages a day. You may decide to write in longhand before using the computer or you may use the computer straight. I leave you with the advice of Ernest Hemingway “You must be prepared to work always without applause. When you are excited about something is when the first draft is done. But no one can see it until you have gone over it again and again; until you have communicated the emotions, the sights, and the sounds to the reader” (quoted in Hall, 1994:142)

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

We have tried to lead you to write a novel in 100 days. As I said in the introduction, I got this from the Internet and modified it to suit our purpose. For more detailed information on this visit <http://www.peacecorpswriters.org> “How to write a novel in 100 days or less” by John Coyne.

#### **6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Submit the synopsis of the novel you are writing.

#### **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

Coyne, John (2010) “How to write a Novel in 100 Days or Less  
”<http://www.peacecorpswriters.org>.

Ike, Chukwuemeka (2007) *How to Become a Published Writer*. Ibadan: Heinemann.

Hall, Oakley (1994). *The Art and Craft of Writing a Novel*. Cincinnati OH: Story Press.