

The Following student's outline is a sample outline that you may use as a guide as you prepare your informative speech preparation outline. You will want to include all the labels that you see in this outline. The following is the exact format and Visual Framework I would like you to use for your Informative Preparation Outline, however, yours will be full size.

Specific Purpose: I will inform my audience about what a good story includes.

Central Idea: A good story includes well-developed characters engaged in realistic dialogue, an interesting plot, and a vivid setting.

INTRODUCTION

- I. **(Attention Getter)** Tom Sawyer by Mark Twain.....The Grapes of Wrath, John Steinbeck.....Harry Potter by J. K. Rowling..... Three incredible storytellers who have provided hours of exciting drama for readers throughout the world. Have you read books like these, where the action taking place in the story is so gripping that it is on your mind even when you're not reading? Has that preoccupation sometimes seemed more appealing than your own reality?
- II. **(Reveal Topic)** Today I'm going to share with you some basic guidelines that these three authors have used in creating their masterpieces. I'm going to explain to you how to go about writing a good story.
- III. **(Credibility Statement)** In addition to completing many writing-intensive classes here at MCC, I've also written several short stories and some poetry. I won the League for Innovation Literary Competition the past two years--once for short story and once for poetry.
- IV. **(Relevancy Statement)** Because each of you is going to have the opportunity to complete at least one writing-intensive class as a prerequisite to graduation, the information that I'm about to share with you should prove very helpful. In fact, if you follow this formula, I can guarantee you an A!
- V. **(Preview)** A good story includes well-developed characters engaged in realistic dialogue, an interesting plot, and a vivid setting.

(TRANSITION: Let's start with what is widely regarded as the most important components of a good story: the characters and the way that they speak.)

BODY

- I. **(MP 1)** A good story includes well-developed characters engaged in realistic dialogue.

(INTERNAL PREVIEW) Three vital steps toward developing your characters are: get to know them intimately, give them a relevant past, and provide them with realistic dialogue.

- A. **(SUB-POINT 1)** Get to know your characters intimately.
 - 1. **(SSP 1) Figure them out.** In her national bestseller, *bird by bird*, author Anne Lamott tells us that, as a writer, "you need to find out as much as possible about the interior life of the people you are working with."
 - a. **(SSSP 1)** You must determine what kind of a person each individual character is.
 - i. **(SSSSP)** What motivates them?
 - ii. **(SSSSP)** What do they care about?

- b. **(SSSP 2)** Make your characters multifaceted.
 - i. **(SSSSP)** Remember that *no one* is "all good"
 - ii. **(SSSSP)** Or "all bad."
- 2. **(SSP 2) Reveal the characters.** Also in *bird by bird*, Lamott writes that "Everyone is walking around as an advertisement for who he or she is--so who is this person? Show us."
 - a. **(SSSP 1)** The reader wants to emotionally connect with the characters.
 - i. **(SSSSP)** Let the reader inside the characters' heads.
 - ii. **(SSSSP)** Show what makes them angry or sad; what would they teach their children?
 - b. **(SSSP 2)** Give detail about the characters' physical appearance.
 - i. **(SSSSP)** What do they look like?
 - ii. **(SSSSP)** How do they hold themselves (are they slouched like an old hat or erect like a five-star general)?
 - iii. **(SSSSP)** How do they move?
- B. **(SUBPOINT 2)** Give your characters a relevant past.
 - 1. **(SSP 1)** Characters who have survived or are surviving a great deal are the most likable, so place hard times in their lives.
 - 2. **(SSP 2)** Make it plain how their past has shaped them into the person that they are now, and make their behavior support this individuality.
- C. **(SUBPOINT 3)** Provide your characters with realistic dialogue.
 - 1. **(SSP 1)** One line of dialogue that rings true reveals character in a way that pages of description can't.
 - 2. **(SSP 2)** Robert Houston, reviewer for *The Nation* wrote, "...Nearly 200 years ago, Wordsworth and Coleridge [two literary giants] started a revolution when they proclaimed their aim to write in '**the language really used by men.**' Neither of them quite achieved that..."
 - 3. **(SSP 3)** Make each character sound real and unique.
 - a. **(SSSP 1)** Allow the reader to identify the character by *what* he or she says.
 - b. **(SSSP 2)** Allow the reader to identify the character by the *way* in which he or she says it.

(INTERNAL SUMMARY) Once we are thoroughly acquainted with our characters, have given them a past that provides explanation for who they are, and have placed true-to-life words in their mouths, we have a wonderful foundation for our story.

(TRANSITION) Next we'll see how to place the characters into an intense situation--providing the drama that the reader craves.

II. (MP 2) A good story includes an interesting plot.

(INTERNAL PREVIEW) Two central themes to keep in mind when writing plot are: plot naturally emerges out of character, and plot must provide gripping drama.

A. (SUB-POINT 1) Plot naturally emerges out of character.

1. (SSP 1) If you focus on who your characters are and let there be something at stake, you've got plot.
2. (SSP 2) Plot is what people will up and do in spite of everything that tells them that they shouldn't...let the chips fall where they may.

B. (SUB-POINT 2) Plot must provide gripping drama.

1. (SSP 1) The plot must give your readers the feeling that they simply *have* to find out what happens next.
 - a. (SSSP 1) In order to create this sense of urgency, drama is the key, and it must come fast and furious.
 - b. (SSSP 2) The basic formula for drama is: setup, buildup, and payoff (just like a joke).
2. (SSP 2) Famed author John Gardner, in writing about plot, said that the writer is creating a dream into which he or she invites the reader, and **that the dream must be vivid and continuous**.
 - a. (SSSP 1) Just like a real dream, the plot must flow smoothly, yet be compelling.
 - b. (SSSP 2) There should be no jarring "wake-up" moment when the reader says, "Huh? What happened? That makes no sense!"

(INTERNAL SUMMARY) Therefore, with the story's focus firmly upon the characters, plot naturally emerges, and that plot must provide constant drama.

(TRANSITION) So...here we are: we've got well-developed characters, speaking realistic dialogue, involved in the high drama of an interesting plot. Now all our story needs is one final ingredient.

III. (MP III) A good story includes a vivid setting.

(INTERNAL PREVIEW) Two basic rules of thumb when choosing and writing your setting are to give descriptive detail and to make the setting fit the character.

A. (SUB-POINT 1) Give descriptive detail in writing your setting.

1. (SSP 1) When commenting upon the art of effectively describing a setting, Michele Driscoll, MCC professor of English and teacher of Creative Writing, said, "**There is no such thing as a tree.**"
 - a. (SSSP 1) There's a massive South Carolina live oak, the Spanish moss dripping from its heavy limbs like the drooping, lacy cuff of a lady's blouse.
 - b. (SSSP 2) There's a northern Minnesota jack pine, tall and straight, its bark covered with sticky sap and its pine needles razor-sharp to the touch.

2. (SSP 2) The spot where the action will be taking place--what is its feel, its temperature, its color...can anything be heard or smelled there?

B. (SUB-POINT 2) Make the setting fit the character.

1. (SSP 1) Just as everyone is a walking advertisement for who he or she is, so every room is a little showcase of its occupants' values and personalities.
 - a. (SSSP 1) Make the individual character's own space fit his or her personality.
 - i. (SSSSP) If the character is a neat nut, his or her home will not likely look like a tornado just hit.
 - ii. (SSSSP) If the character is a lazy oaf, he or she will not live in a perfectly organized environment.
 - b. (SSSP 2) Make the character's private space fit his or her interests.
 - i. (SSSSP) If you're describing a cop, there will likely be a handgun, handcuffs, and a badge on the table and maybe a uniform in the closet.
 - ii. (SSSSP) If your character is a priest, it would make sense to have a Bible on the nightstand.
2. (SSP 2) If the space you're describing is a communal area (police station, hospital, park, department store, etc.), first visit a similar place and then describe it accurately.

(INTERNAL SUMMARY) You can see that by giving descriptive detail in writing your setting, and making the setting fit the character, the readers will feel like they are actually *there*, present in that space.

(TRANSITION) We've now broken down the process of writing a good story into a step-by-step procedure that should be easy for any writer to follow.

CONCLUSION

- I. (Summary Statement) A good story includes three important elements. First, it must have well-developed characters engaged in realistic dialogue. As we've seen, it's vital that the reader be able to both relate to the characters and believe their words. Next, the story must offer us an interesting plot. Using the basic formula of setup, buildup, and payoff, the drama must be absolutely spellbinding. Finally, it's key that the story's setting be vivid. The reader needs to feel as if he or she is actually *there*, witnessing the action.
- II. (Memorable Closing Statement) There will never be another Mark Twain, John Steinbeck or J. K. Rowling; however, each of us *can* know what it means to write well. We can experience the thrill of connecting with an audience...of touching our readers' hearts...and of creating in them a greater understanding of the human condition. We can be heard telling the truth.

REFERENCES

- Driscoll, Michele. Assistant Professor of English, Maui Community College. Comments from in-class lecture, Creative Writing, English 104WI, Spring, 2000.
- Gardner, John. Excerpt from bird by bird by Anne Lamott. New York: Random House, 1994.
- Houston, Robert. *The Nation*. Excerpt from review of What We Talk About When We Talk About Love by Raymond Carver. New York: Random House, 1989.
- Lamott, Anne. bird by bird. New York: Random House, 1994.