



15

Creative Writing Concepts Every Writer Should Know

1. SHOW, DON'T TELL



Use actions, dialogue, and sensory details to help readers experience a moment rather than simply explaining it.

Telling: Sarah was nervous about the interview.

Showing: Sarah smoothed her skirt for the third time. Her interview was in two minutes, and she'd already forgotten the name of the person she was supposed to meet.

Tip: Show important moments, but use telling to summarize less important events

2. VOICE vs. TONE



Voice is the personality of your writing; tone is the attitude or emotion conveyed in a particular passage.

Same voice, different tone:

- **Lighthearted:** Apparently, my brilliant plan to become a morning person had one tiny flaw: mornings.
- **Bitter:** He'd promised to change. Apparently, he'd forgotten to mention that the changes would all be for the worse.

Tip: Keep a consistent voice while allowing the tone to shift with the scene.

3. THE RULE OF THREE



Groups of three can create rhythm, but overusing them makes writing feel predictable and formulaic.

Overused: The house was dark, silent, and mysterious.

More Effective: The house was dark. Someone had left the kitchen light on, though nobody had lived there in years.

Tip: Use there intentionally, and vary your sentence structure.

4. CONFLICT AND STAKES



Conflict is what stands in your character's way; stakes are what they stand to lose.

Basic: Emma wants to win a baking competition.

Stronger: Emma needs to win the baking competition because the prize money is her last chance to save the bakery her grandmother left her.

Tip: If your story feels flat, ask: what does the character want? What's stopping them? Why does it matter?

5. CHARACTER MOTIVATION



Give characters believable reasons for their choices, even when those choices are terrible.

Two siblings, same goal, different motivations:

- One wants to keep the family home to preserve memories.
- The other wants to sell it to escape financial trouble.

Tips Your character doesn't make good decisions, just ones that make sense for who they are.

6. FORESHADOWING



Plant subtle clues early that hint at events or revelations later in the story.

Example:

A character notices the basement door is unlocked before a vacation. Later, they discover someone has been living there.

Tips: Make clues noticeable enough to matter, but subtle enough not to spoil the surprise.



15

Creative Writing Concepts Every Writer Should Know

7. PACING



Control the speed of your story by balancing action, description, dialogue, and reflection.

Fast: The door slammed. Footsteps followed. She ran.

Slower: She stood in the empty hallway, listening to the old house settle around her. Somewhere upstairs, a floorboard creaked.

Tip: Use shorter sentences for urgency and longer ones for reflection or atmosphere.

8. SUBTEXT



Let characters communicate meaning through what they imply, avoid saying, or do instead.

Direct: "You're angry because I forgot your birthday."
"Yes, I'm angry."

Subtext: "I brought you flowers."
"That's nice. What day is it?"
"Thursday."
"Exactly."

Tip: Subtext works well in arguments, romantic tension, and conversations involving secrets.

9. POINT OF VIEW (POV)



Choose whose perspective tells the story and how much information readers can access.

First person: I opened the door. (Your character's perspective)

Third-person limited: She opened the door, hoping he wasn't inside. (Follows the character's perspective)

Second person: You open the door. (Directs the reader)

Third-person omniscient: The narrator can reveal the thoughts and experiences of multiple characters.

Tip: Choose the POV that best fits your story and whose experience matters most.

10. CHARACTER ARCS



Show how a character's experiences challenge, change, or reinforce their beliefs.

Example: A character who refuses to trust anyone after a betrayal might gradually learn to rely on others by the end of the story. (Or they might not change and that's okay, too.)

Tips: Consider what your character believes at the beginning and how the story might challenge that belief.

11. THEME



Plant subtle clues early that hint at events or revelations later in the story.

Example: A novel about estranged siblings returning home after their father's death might explore forgiveness. The plot is what happens. The theme is what those events explore.

Tips: You don't have to decide on a theme before writing; sometimes it emerges naturally.



15

Creative Writing Concepts Every Writer Should Know

12. CHEKHOV'S GUN



Give emphasized details a purpose, especially when readers expect them to matter later.

Example:

A character mentions the back door sticks unless you hit it. Later, the detective realizes the intruder couldn't have entered that way without knowing the trick.

Tip:

During revisions, look for details you've emphasized but never used, and events that need earlier setup.

13. SCENE vs. SUMMARY



Use scenes to experience important moments and summaries to move efficiently through time.

Summary:

Over the next three weeks, Mia avoided her sister's phone calls.

Scene:

Mia watched her sister's name flash across the screen. For the fourth time that week, she pressed Decline.

Tip:

Use scenes for key moments and summaries for transitions or routine events.

14. DIALOGUE TAGS AND ACTION BEATS



Use tags to identify speakers and action beats to reveal movement, emotion, or reactions.

Dialogue tag:

"I don't believe you," she said.

Action beat:

"I don't believe you." She folded the letter and slipped it into her pocket.

Tip:

Use simple tags (like "said") and meaningful action beats to keep dialogue clear and natural.

15. KILL YOUR DARLINGS



Be willing to cut even your favorite passages when they don't serve the story.

Example:

A beautiful description might interrupt a tense scene or a fun side character might not actually be necessary.

Tip:

If you love a passage, but it doesn't fit, save it in a separate document. You can always use it later.

BONUS: SENTENCE RHYTHM & VARIETY



Vary sentence length and structure to create natural flow and avoid repetitive, mechanical prose.

Repetitive:

She opened the door. She walked into the room. She looked around. She noticed the window was open.

More natural:

She opened the door and stepped inside. The window was open. Strange. She was sure she'd closed it.

Tip:

Read your writing aloud and watch for repeated sentence patterns, especially three-part lists.