



Reminiscence: A Creative Writing Workshop



► **“Everybody needs his memories. They keep
the wolf of insignificance from the door.”**

—Saul Bellow



What Is a Scene?

Most scenes contain three basic components:

1. Description
2. Internal responses
3. Dialogue

We've already discussed **description**, the necessity of sensory details in a narrative.

Inner responses in a scene give the reader access to your intangible thoughts and feelings. Emotions and insights are like the close-up shots in a film. Without them, the audience feels disconnected—at too far a distance.

As you are writing scenes, you need to ask and include your answers to the following:

- How did I feel?
- What did I think?
- How did I react?

Direct Dialogue: Conversation occurring among characters in a scene/narrative.

What Direct Dialogue Is Good For....

Good dialogue works on a number of different levels. Here are the main things you want to accomplish with it:

- Add to the reader's knowledge of the situation.
- Keep the piece moving forward.
- Control the pacing of the narrative.
- Reveal things about the speaker (What is *not* being said is called the subtext: reading between the lines: an underlying theme in the narrative.
- Show relationships between characters who are engaged in a conversation.

Good dialogue should sound natural—"I'll be back," not "I will be back."
It should have the rhythms of real speech—"You go ahead and eat."

Complete scenes with dialogue are minidramas that replicate the essential elements of a story. As with a story, it should have a beginning, a middle, and an end.



Dialogue Dos and Don'ts

Do:

- Recreate the impression of natural speech.
- Include the person's gestures as he/she speaks.
- Use dramatic structure to shape the sequence of what is said (what we've already discussed in terms of scene).

Don't:

- Let characters make long speeches.
- Put in dead dialogue that doesn't further the narrative ("Hello, how are you." "Fine, how are you?" "I'm fine.")



Session 6: Writing prompt using scene/dialogue

List times in your life of transition, change, times of endings and beginnings. This may be in terms of where you live, work, or went to school. Or it could be changes in family relationships or social connections, some deliberate change of image/identity, some recognition of a psychological issue or disability or abuse problem. Rewind the reality film of your life to find one scene that best captures this time of transition. Try to restrict yourself to one relatively short period of time (a few hours maybe or even shorter). Try to imagine yourself back to that scene, and write about what you see, hear, what the place looks like, what other people (if any) are there and what they do/say. Limiting yourself to 500 words is a great exercise in conciseness. Focus on appealing to all five senses. As always, aim to show as much as tell.



Critique Guidelines:

- *Meet in small groups of four plus the writer. I'll meet with one of the groups.*
- *Choose a moderator who will keep the group focused and working within our time frame (aim for 10 mins per person)*
- *Read the pieces silently and make brief notes.*
- *Share your comments orally.*
- *When you finish, jot down on my copy what your group told you so I can review what people have already said.*



Critique questions:

In these responses, you will not be pointing out grammar or spelling errors—and nor will I. We are interested in helping each person improve the content of his/her submission. Since there are no grades, you needn't feel in competition with one another. Remember, we are all in this together. Nasty or unnecessarily negative comments don't help the writer to improve. Instead of telling the writer “you should do this or do that,” just point out if you felt confused or needed more details.

- What stands out about the piece? What caught your attention?
- Is there anything you don't understand about the narrative? If so, explain.
- What changes would you suggest to strengthen this piece based on elements we've covered so far that make for strong narratives?
- **Has the writer appealed to multiple senses. Are there places where more showing rather than telling is needed?**