UNIT STRUCTURE

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7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- learn the techniques for writing a novel,
- grasp the essentials about plot and story structure,
- learn about narrative and its different modes,
- acquaint yourself with the technique of writing characters,
- understand such important concepts as setting, space, time, points of view and perspectives associated with the writing of a novel.

7.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we are going to look at some of the important features of the creative writing process in the context of the novel. As we have seen in the previous unit, the novel as a genre is a modern phenomenon. It is a form of narrative and as such we shall be considering the ways in which the storyline of a novel may be arranged. We shall also consider the different ways in which characterization is done in a novel. Besides plot and character, a novel deals with the issues of location, time and space. In some cases, the novelist may invent a wholly new region within which to place the characters, or he/ she may re- imagine a historically recognisable space for the setting.

The usage of time is one of the most important elements of a story. Some stories may span years, decades and even centuries while some may be confined to a few hours. Along with the plot, we must look at the way a story is told and this means paying attention to the perspectives you may adopt in telling the story. As you are well aware, there are different kinds of narration and we shall be considering these in this unit. A reading list suggesting the relevant books on the subjects will be provided at the end of the unit.

7.3 INTRODUCTION TO NOVEL WRITING TECHNIQUES

(a) Making a Start: What do you have in your mind when you start thinking about beginning a novel? It is important to have a clear view of the project in order to develop the idea into a narrative. Writing must give you a sense of pleasure, you must enjoy what you are doing and must be comfortable with the subject. What you decide upon as a subject for your novel and how you go about it matters a lot at this initial stage. Once you are clear about what you want to achieve then things become a lot easier. Otherwise your effort may not lead to what you envisaged at the beginning. So, **first important thing** for a writer who begins work on a new novel is **clarity of ideas**. The **second thing** is to develop a critical distance so that 'personal' elements do not intrude the narrative. Remember, this is fiction and you cannot always go back to your own experiences as source material for your novels. (There have been very accomplished writers who have used their life-experiences as the source of their novels, but there is always a creative transformation that takes place which makes them separate from autobiography. Such novels are known as **autobiographical novels**). The **third thing** is to **know your own schedules**. Are you comfortable writing during the day, or can you do it better at night? Are you in discomfort when there are people around you? The English novelist Charles Dickens found it impossible to write anything when he was surrounded by

people. This awareness of your own situation and circumstance is of immense significance for the optimum realization of your creative potential. Once you set a schedule in view of your own comfort and inclination, then you have actually prepared the ground for the execution of the novel writing project.

(b) **Making Notes:** Before embarking on the project it is rewarding to make notes of the ideas that appear to be important to you. Writers like Henry James, Virginia Woolf and James Joyce kept track of their ideas and we can see how things developed or changed in the course of the actual writing. These notes may be maintained according to your own convenience and requirement. And you may have notes in formats that suit you and are easy for you to refer to later. You should maintain a journal for this purpose. Even here, the choice of the copy is important – you must be comfortable with it, like its company and it should be pleasant to write in. When you make notes it is helpful if you can maintain some sense of order. For example, if you have some idea that you would like to scribble about the structure of the novel, you could write it preferably where you put other similar ideas about the novel's technique; and if have idea about character, you could place it separately. In this way, the ideas are easy to locate and you won't get jumbled up when looking for it later.

(c) **Casual Draft Making:** It is always good to try your hand at writing – it could be anything that appears to you to be worthy at that moment in time. This is known as **freewriting**. It basically means that you are trying to get into the habit of putting pen to paper. It also helps in getting rid of the fear that may occupy you before writing. As you are aware, writing is a matter of habit. Once you develop this habit you will feel like getting pen to paper regularly. Along with making notes, it is necessary to begin preliminary drafts; these drafts may be in random order and may not even be organised in the way you have thought about the eventual arrangement of the novel. This process will enable you

to get a picture of how things appear once you get down to write. After all, the objective is to transfer your ideas and plans into writing. Making drafts is the first step in this direction.

(d) Organizing in Sequences: Once you have made the drafts you can think of organizing different parts of the drafts into a sequence. You could form them into some sections depending on how you distinguish them from one another. For example, you could put in the scribbling about character in one section and your writings about description or narration in another. This is also a way of editing what you have scribbled and it will give you a clear view of how things would develop once you start writing the novel.

7.4 PLOT AND STORY STRUCTURE

(a) The Subject and the Method: Once you have decided to embark on the novel-writing project you must be certain about the way you would like the novel to develop. The first thing is to realise that you are now involved in telling a **story** and just as what constitutes the story is important, the manner in which you organise your narrative is of equal significance. A novelist is, in other words, a storyteller. As you are well aware there have been different kinds of storytellers in human history. The storyteller in the epic traditions of the ancient world focussed on the presentation of the theme but the purpose was not to evoke the element of surprise (the hearers were already familiar with the storyline) but to engage the mind of the audience. Just think of a group of people in the ancient world listening to the epics of Valmiki or Homer: they already knew how the story was going to unfold. What they were interested in was how the storyteller innovated within the familiar narrative frame. The modern storyteller, on the other hand, is of a slightly different type. He may use sources that are old and well-known, but he would invent situations and combine elements that appeared new. Just look the novel written by the Spanish novelist Miguel de Cervantes in the early seven-

teenth century, *Don Quijote*. In this novel, Cervantes borrows a lot from the medieval and Renaissance cultural traditions of Europe, but it is his combination and plot-design that make it unique and unlike any other that preceded it. A reader of *Don Quijote* would find elements of medieval romance in the novel, yet the creative transformation marks it out as a distinctly different narrative. Novelists of the early period of the novel's history were try to work out different processes through which they could tell their stories. In other words, they were trying to see how **plot** works in a novel. As you try to organise your story within the narrative frame, you must be clear about what shape the story is going to take. So, please bear in mind that your aim is not only to tell a story, but also to tell it well and engage the attention and interest of the reader for the entire length of the novel. Different people respond differently to the idea of plot. The English novelist E. M. Forster gives the following example of different responses to the idea of storytelling:

Let us listen to three voices. If you ask one type of man, "What does a novel do?" he will reply placidly: "Well—I don't know—it seems a funny sort of question to ask—a novel's a novel—well, I don't know—I suppose it kind of tells a story, so to speak." He is quite good-tempered and vague, and probably driving a motor bus at the same time and paying no more attention to literature than it merits. Another man, whom I visualize as on a golf-course, will be aggressive and brisk. He will reply: "What does a novel do? Why, tell a story of course, and I've no use for it if it didn't. I like a story. Very bad taste on my part, no doubt, but I like a story. You can take your art, you can take your literature, you can take your music, but give me a good story. And I like a story to be a story, mind, and my wife's the same." And a third man, he says in a sort of drooping regretful voice, "Yes—oh dear yes—the novel tells a story." I respect and admire the first speaker. I detest and fear the second. And the third is myself. Yes—oh dear yes—the novel tells a story. That is the

fundamental aspect without which it could not exist. That is the highest factor common to all novels, and I wish that it was not so, that it could be something different—melody, or perception of the truth, not this low atavistic form.

Forster reiterates the fact that a novel tells a story. But it is also important to recognise that however different the ways of telling a story may be, the reader must be able to distinguish it from other forms of literature. In other words, it must have the character of fiction. This will only be possible when you organize your material into a credible and interesting order.

One of the ways in which this can be done is by providing the elements of **tension**, **crisis**, and **resolution** in the story. The Greek thinker Aristotle had said that all plots must have a beginning, a middle and an end. These Aristotelian aspects must be complemented by the presence of things which will win the interest of the reader. You may tell a very pleasant and happy story, but without conflict and tension it will not keep the reader interested. The source of the tension may be anything from **class difference**, **social unease**, **gender inequality** to **individual crisis** but it must be worked out within the frame of the plot. When you organize your material please see that there are no loose ends left: the masterful storyteller is always in command of his resources. You must situate the characters in a position of conflict or a crisis which will then be resolved towards the climax of the story. As you are aware you may not only have a storyline moving forward, it may be supplemented by subplots which **converge** at the appropriate time. Thus, you must have a mental and structural map of which elements of the story may be introduced at the various points in the narrative. This is where your note-keeping will come in handy.

It is important to keep the objective in mind while developing the plot. After all, you are trying to convince the reader by presenting a story that is credible, apart from it being interesting. As Ansen Dibell in his book titled *Plot*, “Whether you’re writing fact-based fiction or spinning the whole thing out of your head, you have the responsibility of cre-

ating a satisfying, self-consistent, independent world and making it all come alive on the page." (4) We could say that the plot is the framework which holds the narrative together. It is the basic narrative principle that controls the movement of the story. Sometimes the function of the plot may not be directly apparent, but it actually guides the story from the beginning to the end. We have just discussed how conflict, crisis and resolution are important for the plot's engagement of the reader's attention. But as you will realise, this can only be possible through the representation of **situations**. These situations are to be placed at moments in the story in such a manner that they keep the reader hooked on to the narrative. So, the writing of episodes is of great importance in the crafting of a novel. You may make the episodes dramatic and spectacular; or you could make them the sites of contemplation or discussion. In Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, we find that the interest of the story lies in the presentation of contemplative episodes where Clarissa (the central character) ponders over the circumstances of her life and thinks about the issue of death. There is nothing dramatic in such representation but they are equally effective and win the attention of the reader. The situation in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, on the other hand, is highly dramatized with a lot of twists and turns. How you make use of the episodes depends on the genre you have decided upon and its function in the plot.

(b) Beginnings, Endings and Plot Organization: Quite often, the novels that hold our attention are those with a wonderful opening. How you open your novel will depend a lot on the kind of story you are writing. Sometimes, a quiet opening may lead to something really gripping, or you may have an opening that catches the reader by surprise. Whatever style you adopt to open the novel, keep in mind that it must have relevance to the story you are telling. There are some points that you may remember as you prepare your opening: (i) do not make the opening excessively descriptive, as it may lead to unnecessary digressions; (ii) make an opening that suits your overall purpose; (iii) try not to cramp too many things into the opening as it may confuse the

reader; you'll have the scope to develop the ideas that you mention during the opening at a later stage in the novel.

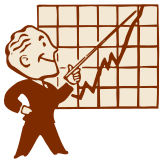
Some novelists use a **frame device**. A frame device is a justification for the story being told. It is an explanation for the presence of the story. As John Mullan observes, "the frame (or explanation) surrounds the rest of the narrative. A framing device must therefore be used at the beginning of a novel." (31) One example of the frame narrative can be seen in Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*, where a much older Marlow is narrating his experiences as a young man to a group of hearers. Some of the novels of the American writer Philip Roth employ the frame narrative. This is a process through which you may justify the nature of the story you are going to tell. But since this is fiction, your explanation must be fictionalized and instead of giving a preface, you can adopt the frame narrative. Some writers make use of another method to introduce the subject of the novel. They use the **Prologue**. The prologue is technically not part of the fiction that unfolds in the chapters of the novel, but it sets the narrative in a context and enables the reader to build upon the information provided there. Ajit Barua's novel *Ekhon Premor Upanyas* (1992) uses the prologue to great effect. Here he refers to the historical 'Ajit Barua' (who is a fictionalised figure in the actual narrative) and provides crucial information about the circumstances that form the subject of the novel.

The **ending** of the novel is not necessarily the culmination of the story. A well-known example of this can be seen in Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, where the novel ends, but the story isn't quite finished. Kafka had written the beginning and the ending early on, but he was unable to finish the story. This is not a regular phenomenon, but you will realise that many modern novels leave scope for speculation even when the narrative ends. Again, novels may have multiple endings, as in the case of Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* or John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. The important thing for you, as you plan out the beginning and the ending of your novel, is to see that there is some sense of coherence in the entire enterprise. Otherwise, any lack

of agreement or contradiction will lead the reader to doubt the narrative purpose of the novel. The French word *denouement* (which means unknotting) is not always the same as ending, for a novel may end but things may not be resolved. This is the case in D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* where the narrative ends but the fate of its chief protagonist Paul Morel remains undecided. A novelist may also adopt the **Epilogue** to end the narrative. Like the prologue, the epilogue is technically extra-fictional in character, but it may be used to provide information about the narrative that is not part of the actual story that has just ended.

The beginning and the ending can only be tied up when there is a reasonable bridge that connects the two, which can be achieved through the organisation of the narrative. Once you have a clear vision of how the story is going to culminate you will need to connect it through the episodes that you place in the narrative. There must be a symmetry between the various parts in your plot. Even though the story will be read in one flow by the reader, it is actually the result of your plot arrangement that will grant it its seamless effect. We shall be discussing details of the narrative process in the next section.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Why is a novelist called a storyteller?

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2. What are the different kinds of storytellers?

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3. Who said that all plots must have a beginning, a middle and an end?

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4. What do you mean by Prologue and Epilogue?

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7.5 THE NARRATIVE AND ITS DIFFERENT MODES

(a) Showing and Telling: The narrative is the main body of the novel. Your achievement as a novelist will be judged, to a great extent, by your ability to control the narrative. There are different ways in which you may organise your narrative. Two of the most effective are **showing** and **telling**. There will be events, episodes and other situations of the story that would require detailed presentation. You must then create an environment through which you may give a **vivid idea** about the situation in your novel. The key is to win the trust of the reader. This can only be done when he/she identifies with what you are presenting in the novel. Showing or describing a situation and its various aspects is one of the ways in which this can be done. When you are showing something, the focus is on creating a visual image through language. Your narrative must be tailored in such a way that it enables the reader to construct a visual state on the basis of what is there on the page. This can be done by attending to details which you would like the reader to take note of. It could be about the surroundings or the circumstances or even minor details like shape and colour of things which occupy an important

place in the narrative. Showing is another way of letting the reader experience the condition of the character, or sometimes the event that you are describing. While showing can be very effective in creating a sense of immediacy and authenticity, it can sometimes be a trap. You must avoid excessive use of description because it could be jarring and also become predictable. **Showing** and **telling** must be interspersed in such a way that there is enough scope for twists and turns. Both must complement each other. **Telling** is the opposite of showing. The narrator acts as a reporter and does not provide details about the character or event, instead certain information is given which is relevant to the movement of the plot. Telling can be extremely effective as it can serve to sum up the developments and also be crisp and pointed. The success in telling depends to a great extent on the way you phrase your words and organise the passages within the narrative.

(b) **Language and Passage Management:** How does a successful novelist create the impression of authenticity? As an aspiring novelist, you must realize that your primary tool is language. How you make sense of language and organize it contributes to the overall effect of the novel. Take, for example, the case of tense. You may organise your narrative in such a manner that it oscillates between different time-frames: the past and the present. This is known as **time-shift**. Most novels usually adopt the past tense to tell the story. In some cases, however, we find the adoption of a single tense throughout the novel. This is seen in some narratives of the South African writer J. M. Coetzee and the Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood. So, while you are dealing with the story-time, it is actually a reflection of the way in which you have been able to bring language and plot-movement into one plane. Sometimes language use provides great scope for variety in conversation. Or you could also consider looking at **memory** as one of the agencies through which you control the tense in the story. The narrative must not sag during any point in the novel. For this to be maintained, you must be very careful with the way you organise

the narrative. You may employ a combination of descriptive narration, conversation and **free indirect narration** to further your story. Free indirect narration is a device which was popularised by the English novelist Jane Austen. This is a method through which you can present the mental state of a character without dialogue. The use of free indirect narration as a narrative mode is a very common one. This is done quite often in realistic novels where events and experiences are presented without authorial interference. We shall be looking at the various types of narrators at another section. It is imperative that in using language you remain consistent with the subject. The next aspect regarding language use relates to the way you structure your narrative. This is not the same as the story structure that we have discussed above. What you must look for in patterning your language is to create a sense of trust in the reader. This is often done through a combination of different forms of language use: dialogue, description, analysis and observation. As you will be well aware, variations in language is one of the most important things in narrative. The effect of immediacy and authenticity can be created through language variation. In Emily Bronte's novel *Wuthering Heights*, we find the use of dialects as well as urbanised speech, each functioning as a suggestive index about the characters' cultural affiliation. How you space out your passages or paragraphs cannot be explained through formulas, but you must see to it that there are sufficient breaks for the sake of variation and effect. You may divide your novel into chapters, sections within chapters or choose to do without any break at all. These are crucial decisions and how you execute them will effect the way the novel eventually turns out to be.

(c) Dialogue and Conversation: Dialogue is one of the great sources of the novel's appeal. What you must consider here is that the voices that are ascribed to the different characters are actually serving as their representatives. As such you cannot even suggest that they seem to have the same voice or orientation.

Conversation and the priorities that are attached to it go a long way in identifying the characters and distinguishing them from one another. A loud-mouthed character is different from a soft-spoken one. How do you create this sense of difference? Only through language. This is when you must cultivate a critical distance and disengage yourself from the narrative voices that speak on behalf of the various characters. The Russian thinker Mikhail Bakhtin called this process polyphony. Even if you are presenting a scene where the reader seems to overhear a private conversation, your arrangement and planning is what matters. Then there is the conversation of formal situations, where rhetorical devices are at work. Describing a conversation between social elites would thus be different from presenting a dialogue where two bumpkins are engaged in talking. The difference is a matter of degree, but the subtler you are in your variations the more effective will be the eventual effect.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What is the difference between 'showing' and 'telling' in a narrative?

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2. What do you mean by free indirect narration?

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3. *Wuthering Heights* is a novel by Charlotte Bronte. True/ False?

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4. Mikhail Bakhtin talked about polyphony. What is it?

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ACTIVITY



Go through the *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary* to brush up your vocabulary. This will help you in creative writing pursuits.

7.6 MAKING CHARACTERS

(a) People and the Novel: Novels, like the other forms of literature, are about people and their lives. Irrespective of the situations in which the people are placed, their conditions are what matter the most to the reader. Even in allegorical novels or in the narratives that employ unconventional narrative modes such as magical realism, the focus on human life remains constant. As we have already discussed in a preceding section, you must generate **conflict** in the narrative to hold the interest of the reader. It is in the conflict among the characters that the novel's appeal lies. You must generate that conflict by placing the characters in situations of crisis, by creating doubt, by making them take hard decisions, by making them realise the difficulties of existence. This can be done in a variety of ways. Your goal as a novelist is to create people that are credible and 'real.' Bringing about this effect is not easy. You may achieve this through the use of different **perspectives** (which we are going to look at in a later section) or through the arrangement of the plot. But unless the

characters themselves do not have credibility, then narrative craftsmanship won't be enough to convince the reader. The reader must feel that these are 'lifelike' characters, people you are most likely to bump into in your own neighbourhood. How are you going to make them believable and real? Let us consider the various options and possibilities in the following sections.

(b) The Sense of Selfhood: There are different ways in which you can create character. It all depends on the nature of your subject and what you really want the reader to believe. As you will realize, all characters are not of the same nature, either in terms of breadth, dimension or depth. Almost all novels have marginal, functional or operational characters that occupy narrative space for specific purposes but are not fully developed. We can look at the novels of Thomas Hardy for such people who offer alternative perspectives on the theme. In Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* the novel opens with the narrator Lockwood beginning the story, but we soon realise that he is actually a function and all important personal details of his life are withheld from the reader. Such characters do not have the **sense of selfhood** that characterises the protagonist of the novel. Irrespective of the moral, social or cultural affiliation of a character he/she is usually presented as having a personality, as having selfhood which enables us to distinguish him/her from other characters. This sense of selfhood also makes it possible to pass judgements on his/her actions and thoughts. While creating a character, this is an important aspect that you must take note of: try to create characters that do not appear the same. This will only be possible when you make their selves distinctively varied from one another. For you to achieve it you must make subtle but effective variations which emerge as striking features of the characters identifying them as distinct personalities. In Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* we have in the characters of Mr Micawber and Uriah Heep personalities that are defined by specific character traits and mannerisms. You may adopt such a process to create distinct selves in

your novels. We are going to look at behavioural patterns in the next part.

(c) **Motivation and Behavioural Patterns:** How a person behaves and responds to situations can give us important clues about that character's personality. There are some people who are identified by their anger or submissiveness, others by their wit and understanding – in fact, you may work on the traits of characters by investing attributes in them which will separate them from others. Mrs Bennet's obsessiveness regarding her daughters' marriages sets her apart from the other people in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. David Lodge states the matter succinctly when he talks about the complex process through which a character operates in fiction:

Character is arguably the most important single component of the novel. Other narrative forms, such as epic, and other media, such as film, can tell a story just as well, but nothing can equal the great tradition of the European novel in the richness, variety and psychological depth of its portrayal of human nature. Yet character is probably the most difficult aspect of the art of fiction to discuss in technical terms. This is partly because there are so many different types of character and so many different ways of representing them: major characters and minor characters, flat characters and round characters, characters rendered from inside their minds.

This difference in character types that David Lodge talks about in relation to the European novel actually applies to the novel genre as a whole. We make distinctions between people in terms how we perceive them. One of the most common ways in which this is done is by analyzing the behavioural pattern and mannerisms of the people. It is in this sense that we *typify* character and try to understand them in the context of the dominant patterns that they display. While delineating character, you must also keep in mind why you are doing so. In other words, your orientation must

be clear: you cannot present a comic pattern in a crisis situation, unless for the sake of parody, satire or caricature, for by doing so you will be affecting the credibility of both the character and the narrative. Again, unless warranted by the narrative and thematic compulsions, it is better to remain consistent in relation to characterization. We cannot imagine a tragic Mr. Micawber in *David Copperfield* once we have been led to believe that optimism is what defines him as a person. Such small nuances are significant as they contribute to the sense of autheticity and credibility in a narrative.

(d) **Relationships:** Human relationships constitute one of the most important aspects of the novel. The conflict potential of a novel is often best realised through the relationships that undergo changes over the course of time. How you organise and present relationships is closely associated with the way you develop the personalities of your characters. In the novels of the Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky we find people troubled by crisis, which also affects the way they respond to the individuals around them. In the novel titled *Crime and Punishment* Dostoevsky shows the dilemma of Raskolnikov, a young student who murders a old woman without any apparent motive. His perception about the world is affected by this event and he soon comes to confront the complex realities of existence by befriending people he would have hardly met under normal circumstances. This process of presenting characters in crisis situations enables the novelist to show aspects of their personality which shed light on the way they look at the people who most matter to them. In other words, the relationships in which a character is engaged can serve not only to further the plot, but also present aspects of his life which mere portraiture won't be able to do. You must choose what kind of relationship would do for you. There are several factors that may influence your representation of human relationships in the novel. Social, political, economic and cultural factors play crucial roles in determining the lives of the characters. In many novels

we find characters struggling with intellectual and spiritual crises, and often they have God or some form of spiritual presence as a condition that affects their lives. Religion or spirituality has played an important part in shaping and determining the character of human relationships in the novel. In what context you place your characters must be determined by the demands of the plot and the theme.

(e) Society and its Institutions: A character's identity is often determined by the social and cultural context in which he/she is placed. Social forces play a great part in affect the conduct of character. In the novels of the American novelist William Faulkner we see the depiction of the American South at its most intense and it is almost impossible to dissociate the characters from the setting in which they are placed. You may decide to situate your characters within a particular social frame so as to identify and individualize them. Many regional writers do this for the sake of authenticity and effect. Apart from Faulkner, Thomas Hardy also makes a close connection between character and location in his Wessex novels. Many social institutions – faith (or religion), family, workplace – serve as important frames where characters are placed by different novelists. These institutions also enable the reader to identify certain traits of the characters by they way the people respond to them.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. How can conflict in a narrative create interest in the reader?

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2. Uriah Heep is a character in .....

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3. Why does David Lodge say that “character is probably the most difficult aspect of the art of fiction”?

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4. Name two writers who make a close connection between characters and setting in their works.

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ACTIVITY

1. Read Dostoevsky’s Crime and Punishment to know more about the dilemma of Raskolnikov.
2. Read a novel by William Faulkner to get an idea about life in the American South.

7.7 SETTING, SPACE AND TIME

(a) Location: Location in the novel may not operate in the same way. In the early history of the novel, for example, especially when the picaresque novel was in vogue, the plot moved with the protagonist. There is hardly any sense of definite place in the novels such as *Don Quijote* by Cervantes or in Henry Fielding’s *Tom Jones*. By the nineteenth century, however, when the novel form consolidated, narratives are set in specific locations which grant them their special character. The London of Dickens or the countryside of the novels of George Eliot provide significant in-

sights into the way the characters respond to the worlds around them. Often a neighbourhood development or incident propels the story forward. In the Miss Marple adventures of Agatha Christie's detective novels, the location plays an important part. We can also judge a character from the location in which he/she is placed. If you are writing a novel that portrays class differences, then the location that a character comes from could provide a clue about how he or she is perceived by society. In the novels of D. H. Lawrence, the residents of the mining town districts are often looked down upon by the urban population. This is a deliberate choice on part of Lawrence as he draws attention to the plight of his characters by doing so.

(b) Setting and the Sense of Place: Location and setting are not always the same. Location is actually the idea of geographical space, while the setting may be more specific such a street or a room or even the seaside. In the novel titled *Kiss of the Spiderwoman* by the Argentinean writer Manuel Puig the narrative is set inside a prison where the convicts talk about different issues. The prison becomes the setting and provides them the sense of place. The exact geographical location is not specified. Many thrillers belonging to the pulp fiction genre employ indoor settings where the drama and the intrigue take place and often the context is imaginary or nonexistent. Your organisation of the story in terms of the settings that you use thus can play a crucial role in the way the narrative unfolds. You could set the story in a bar, in a forest or even imagined places, but see to it that there is some connection between these spaces so that the narrative continuity is not marred.

(c) Different Aspects of Time: The management of time is of crucial importance in the novel. It does not really matter whether you make your story into a linear narrative or a fragmented one. But the reader must be able to make sense of the time-plane where you place your story. One of the ways in which time functions in

a novel relates to the orientation of the characters. This could be achieved through a reference to various conventional time-devices such as memory, flash-backs and flash-forwards and recollection. Or you could consider presenting a series of fragments which are connected through the medium of some common event or development. You could also show alternative time frames (in the plot and the subplot) as the Canadian author Margaret Atwood does in her novel *The Blind Assassin*. You could also build your novel through a series of episodes that connected because of the way they are arranged in a time-sequence. In Umberto Eco's *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* the protagonist moves through the past to the present only on the basis of the memory of the books he has read. Memory serves as the agency through which he makes sense of time in the novel. If we leave out memory in the novel then the various episodes that he refers to have no connection with one another. The key here is to keep the reader's interest and it does not really matter what time-sequence you adopt as long as you are able to make the representation coherent and consistent.

(d) **The Temporal and the Spatial Planes:** As you will be aware by now, the planes of time (temporal) and space (spatial) control the movement of the story. They may act and function in conjunction and operate in the same plane or there may be an altogether different scheme of things in the way they are managed. In Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* two parallel narratives move forward: the first addresses the reader and the other is the telling of story that constitutes the actual novel. Both the narratives operate in two extremely different planes and seem to be completely disconnected; but as we read on, we realise that they converge towards the end of the novel and both the narratives find meaning in the way they come together. Many postmodern novels play around with the spatial and the temporal planes in order to complicate the sense of reality. This is not quite the case with the novels written in classic realist tradition. In the

novels of Jane Austen or George Eliot we find the space and time operating in the same plane. For a reader accustomed to conventional narratives, the playfulness of the postmodern text (where time/space confusion is more common) may be the source of surprise, but it is after a matter of structuring that shows careful deliberation on the part of the author. Your objective is to create a sense of reality (which may be different from that of others) that will be consistent throughout the novel, for which you must make use of the temporal and the spatial planes most effectively.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What is the setting of the novel *Kiss of the Spiderwoman?*

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2. Give an example of how memory helps make sense of time in a novel.

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7.8 POINTS OF VIEW, USE OF PERSPECTIVES

(a) Kinds of Narrators: When you plan a novel, you must choose the nature of the voice that shall do the narrating. Much of the shape of the novel depends on the way you organize your narrative voice. The narrative will also contain dialogues. How will you place them and what variations will you adopt? After all, you

cannot make all the characters sound and speak in the same way. This is where your homework and note-taking comes in handy. You must design the narrative in such a way that the voice that narrates is consistent in the way things are presented in the course of the narrative. You may decide on a **first-person narrator** or an **objective, omniscient narrator** or even an **unreliable narrator**, but the key thing is that it must be the best suited for the narrative you have designed.

(b) **The First-person Narrator:** The first-person narrator is the speaking subject that presents first-hand information on the basis of what he/she observes, sees, hears or experiences. The nature of the first-person narrator may be very different from author to author. One of the conventional ways in which this is done is by winning the trust of the reader. The conventional first-person narrator is reliable and trustworthy. He/she creates a sense of authenticity by describing episodes to which he has been witness or about which he had definite information. The first-person narrator can provide the insider's view as he/she is directly involved with the subject that is narrated. If you adopt this mode of narration you must, however, also be aware of certain disadvantages. For example, the first-person narrator cannot describe *everything* pertaining to the subject of the novel, for he/she must be present at the scene for the information to be relayed to the reader. You must therefore choose the first-person narrator only if you feel he would be able to carry your story forward most effectively.

(c) **The Omniscient Narrator:** The omniscient narrator is the objective narrator who is usually placed outside the scene of action. Whatever happens does not affect him and he takes an objective view of things. He is in complete control of the narrative process and can modulate and determine the pace of the narrative according to the demands of the story. Such a narrator is useful is have a wide canvas or a broad narrative framework. The omni-

scient narrator can also provide a sense of critical distance in terms of how the subject is viewed or represented. Usually this kind of narrator does not display any bias towards any character and presents the story quite objectively. The narrative voice in this case can be the source of scrutiny or satire depending on how you orient it. The method of narration and the choice of narrative voice should be part of the design that you have adopted for the story. The process of narrative enunciation is also closely related to the way the structure or plot of the novel is worked out, so you must see to it that they synchronise and cohere to give the effect of credibility.

(d) **Using Different Perspectives:** One of the interesting ways in which narrative point of view is modulated in a novel is through the use of different perspectives. A point of view indicates the position from which a object is scrutinized or observed. Quite often, the narrator may present things through different perspectives or points of view. For example, the same incident may be reported by different characters from alternative perspectives. This happens quite often in detective fiction where a murder, for instance, is presented in such ways that do not privilege any particular perspective. It is the eventual unknotting that resolves the matter. Different perspectives may also be employed to create the conflicts and crises in different episodes in the novel. Your adoption of the multiple perspective method will require considerable skill and narrative management. But then, this should be a challenge that you should be ready to accept as you try to create your drama and conflict, for only then can you arrive at an affective and impressive climax.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What are the disadvantages of a first-person narrator?

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2. In which type of fiction are different perspectives generally used?

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3. Who is an omniscient narrator?

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7.9 LET US SUM UP

We have considered the various aspects of writing novels in this unit. From making drafts, taking notes, organising the narrative, modulating the narrative voice, creating characters to managing the different temporal and the spatial elements in the novel – we have looked at some of the important aspects of novel writing. As you will be well aware, writing a novel is related to your talent and skill, besides proper understanding of the prerequisites for its execution, which this study material hopes to familiarize you with.



7.10 FURTHER READINGS

Ansen Dibell. *Plot*, Cincinnati, Ohio: Writer's Digest Books, 1988

James N. Frey. *How to Write a Damn Good Novel*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987

Janet Burroway. *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft*, New York: HarperCollins, 1992

John Mullan. *How Novels Work*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006

Sol Stein. *How to Grow a Novel*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999



7.11 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

1. What are the important points to remember while embarking on writing a novel?
2. Comment on the importance of plot in a novel. What is a frame device?
3. Your primary tool as an aspiring novelist is language. Discuss.
4. How can you make the characters in a novel believable and real?
5. How is time important in a novel?
6. Write a note on the different kinds of narrators in a novel.

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