

The Tiger Cub: Exercises

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1.

Part A: Years 7-13

Abstract Nouns vs Concrete Nouns

We can detect concrete nouns with our five senses, i.e. we can smell or see or taste or hear or feel it. Abstract nouns can't be detected in the same way; they are emotions, qualities and ideas.

Look at the second paragraph of 'The Tiger Cub':

'I got myself out of bed and went to the fridge. Without parental supervision, for breakfast I chose the carton of sugared doughnut holes from the Pak'n'Save bakery. The living room was dim but my parents said to keep the curtains closed if I was home by myself. I settled in front of the TV. *What Now* was on. That's how I remember the day of your birth was a Sunday.'

What concrete details stand out for you?

Tip: Writing becomes more emotive and tangible when you use concrete nouns.

Part B: Years 7-13

The Neighbourhood Where I Live

Describe your neighbourhood using concrete nouns. Try to draw on as many senses as you can. Think about the different times of the day. What can you smell walking past the houses at dinnertime? What would you see if you got up early? What do you hear at night?

2.

Part A: Years 9-13

The Telling Detail vs The Tired Detail

Think of someone in your close family. Respond to each of these questions about them with an interesting concrete detail (do NOT say they have brown hair).

- What do they look like?
- How do they act at home?
- How do they act out of the house?
- What are their favourite things in life?
- What's their most annoying habit?
- What do you love most about them?
- How close are you?

Take your three most telling concrete details and write a short character description.

Part B: Years 9-13

Character in Action

- Write about a time when they made you angry.
- Write about a time when they did something kind for you.
- Write about a time when you missed them.

3.

Part A: Years 7-13

Reaching Back into Memory

- What was 2014 like? You are writing from a child's point of view, so you can't use words you wouldn't have understood.
- What do you remember about the first house you ever lived in?
- What foods were your favourite as a kid? What memories do those bring back?
- Think back to what is your earliest ever memory. Write about that. Try to capture the gaps in it. You can say you don't remember something, but be specific about what you don't remember ('I don't remember if it was my aunty or my uncle', 'I don't remember the colour of that car').

Tip: Make this writing vivid by striving for:

- Texture
- Concrete details
- A sense of time and place

4.

Part A: Years 7-13

Scene vs Summary

You always have to tell any story part in scene and part in summary.

- Scene makes stories feel real and vivid. They put your readers in the moment. Make sure your best and most crucial moments are in scene.
- Summary is a device necessary to move things along, to pick and choose what's actually interesting for the page and what can be shortened and summarised (e.g. don't put you walking to school in scene unless something interesting happens on that walk).

Tip: Scenes are the building blocks of story. Stories written in summary alone sound like the reports you wrote in primary school ('and then', 'and then', 'and then').

Skim back over the first page of 'The Tiger Cub'. Mark in the margins whether each paragraph is in scene or summary.

Part B: Years 7-13

Who is the 'you' in 'The Tiger Cub'?

Writing to You

Write a story to someone in your life. What do you most want to say to them? What moments in your life do you want to tell them about, or remind them of?

Make sure to include scenes, not just summary.

Part C: Years 12-13

What is the difference between epistolary writing and second person?

How to Have a Healthy Relationship with Your [Insert Here]

Write an essay in the form of a how-to guide about a relationship you may have found difficult in your life. Use second person. This distancing might help you to explore the painful parts, or to find humour in it. Be specific, e.g. ‘Don’t call your mother for three months, until your dentist says you need your wisdom teeth out, and it will cost you \$1200. Start by asking her about the garden. Are the daphnes flowering? Zone out when she explains the difference between perennials and annuals.’

Structuring a Personal Essay

People often worry if they don’t have a specific ‘event’ in mind for a creative nonfiction essay – but that’s not necessary.

- Can be one event told start to finish
- Can focus more on a place or a person, you just have to find a narrative within that.
- Try to break up summary with scenes.
- Can move back and forth in time and use collage.

Tip: Creative nonfiction doesn’t restrict you to straight reportage; it can use all the same creative techniques as fiction as long as it remains true.

5.

Part A: Years 11-13

Firsts and Lasts

At different ages, it feels like we are different people. Something that you feel very intensely about when you're younger may seem silly, or insignificant when you are older. As we change, so do the narratives that we create to understand the events in our lives. In this exercise you will inhabit past, current and future selves, and create a lyric essay from a key moment in your life.

- Choose a memorable event from your life, which changed how you viewed something. Examples could be: the birth of a younger sibling, moving house or schools, a parental separation or remarriage, a milestone birthday. It doesn't have to be a big event — it could be something small that mattered a lot to you.
- Write a paragraph about this event from an age before it happened. Was this an event that you wished for, or was it completely unexpected? Were you looking forward to it, or dreading it happening? What did you suppose this event would be like?
- Write the event as a scene, from the age when it happened. What did you feel in the moment? Try to show instead of tell, and be as concrete as possible.
- Write a paragraph about this event from an age at least five years in the future. You must imagine ahead here. How do you hope to view this event then? Will it seem big, or small? Which details will endure, and which will have faded?
- Write a paragraph about this event from the age you are now. Why did you choose this event over others? Did this event match your younger self's expectations? Did anything about your response surprise you?
- Now, take these paragraphs and find an order for them, one that creates a narrative arc. Maybe you want to go chronologically, or maybe you want to start in the future and work backwards, or start with the event actually happening, and end where you are today. Play around with this!
- Save the essay and re-read it when you reach your future age.