Supporting Students to Write in a Variety of Genres

This booklet explores the conventions of the following writing formats, as a support for Session 1 of English CPD 2023/2024:

- Narrative
- Poetry
- Dialogue
- Speech

Contents:

<u>Note:</u> There are a multitude of ways to engage with writing. The following pages explore the conventions of a variety of writing formats. Teachers will need to consider their unique context and both age and stage of their students when planning how to best use/adapt this resource.

What is narrative writing?

A narrative is a piece of writing that tells a story.

- It is generally centred around a main character in a setting who experiences a challenge or is involved in an interesting or significant experience
- A narrative can be fiction or non-fiction
- Narratives can be essays, short stories, fairy tales, autobiographies, news stories or even jokes
- Narratives usually have elements/conventions: plot, setting, character, point of view, conflict and theme

Narrative conventions are the common elements, devices or techniques used in most stories. Let's explore a selection of common conventions below.

Plot

The plot is what happens in a story. This is the chain of events within a story and how the characters and their challenges change over time.

Setting

The setting is the time and place of a story. The setting can be a real or fictional location. A story may also be set in the past, present or future.

Character

Characters perform the actions and speak the dialogue. A character can be a person, animal or thing, presented as a person in the narrative.

Point of View

Point of view refers to the person who tells the story. The three main points of view are:
- first person (I)
- second person (you)
- third person (he/she/they)

Conflict

Conflict provides tension in the story and it refers to any obstacle that a character tries to overcome. The obstacle may be internal or external.

Theme

The theme communicates important messages about issues encountered by the characters and the setting of the narrative.

Read the opening lines below from the novel, *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton. Some common narrative conventions have been identified.

S.E. Hinton
The Outsiders

First-person **point of view:** The protagonist refers to himself as 'I'.

The opening sentence establishes the **setting** as a movie house and the sunlight suggests it is daytime.

The opening paragraph foreshadows the **themes** of identity and belonging that are central to the novel

When I stepped out into the bright sunlight from the darkness of the movie house, I had only two things on my mind: Paul Newman and a ride home. I was wishing I looked like Paul Newman — he looks tough and I don't — but I guess my own looks aren't so bad. I have light brown, almost red hair and greenish-gray eyes. I wish they were more gray, because I hate most guys that have green eyes, but I have to be content with what I have. My hair is longer than a lot of boys wear theirs, squared off in back and long at the front and sides, but I am a greaser and most of my neighborhood rarely bothers to get a haircut. Besides, I look better with long hair.

Characterisation is established as he protagonist describes himself and his appearance.
He also mentions his desire to look like Paul Newman.

These lines set up the **plot** by introducing the main character, Ponyboy Curtis, and establishing the **conflict** between the Greasers and the Socs.

What is Poetry?

Poetry is a form of literary expression that uses language to convey emotions, ideas and experiences.

- Poetry can be written, spoken or performed and it is usually composed in verse
- Poetry expresses emotions, experiences, and ideas, especially in short lines, often using words that rhyme
- Poetry explores themes or conveys complex emotions in a condensed and imaginative manner

As poetry balances tradition with innovation, it allows for endless possibilities of artistic exploration. While poetry is known for its creative freedom and diversity, let's explore a selection of common conventions below.

Form / Structure

Poetry can take various forms and structures, such as sonnets, haikus, ballads, or free verse.
Each form has its own set of conventions regarding the number of lines, syllable counts and rhyme schemes.

Rhyme

Rhyme is the repetition of similar sounds at the ends of lines or within a poem. Poets often use rhyme to create a musical quality in their work, enhance the flow of the poem, or emphasise specific words or ideas.

Tone

Poets use tone to convey their attitudes and emotions towards their subject matter.
Tone can range from serious and sombre to light and humorous, and everything in between.

Imagery

Poetry often relies on vivid imagery to evoke emotions and engage the reader's senses.
This can include the use of metaphors, similes, personification, and other devices that help convey meaning.

Sound

Poets pay attention to the way their words sound when read aloud. They may use alliteration, assonance, and other sound devices to create musicality and rhythm in their poems.

Theme

Poetry often explores specific themes, ideas, or emotions.
The poet's choice of words, imagery, and structure all contribute to the overall meaning of the poem.

**Read the poem, *Antarctica* by Derek Mahon below.
Some common conventions of poetry have been identified.**

Antarctica

'I am just going outside and may be some time.'
The others nod, pretending not to know.
At the heart of the ridiculous, the sublime.

He leaves them reading and begins to climb,
Goading his ghost into the howling snow;
He is just going outside and may be some time.

The tent recedes beneath its crust of rime
And frostbite is replaced by vertigo:
At the heart of the ridiculous, the sublime.

Need we consider it some sort of crime,
This numb self-sacrifice of the weakest? No,
He is just going outside and may be some time

In fact, for ever. Solitary enzyme,
Though the night yield no glimmer there will glow,
At the heart of the ridiculous, the sublime.

He takes leave of the earthly pantomime
Quietly, knowing it is time to go.
˜I am just going outside and may be some time."
At the heart of the ridiculous, the sublime.

Derek Mahon

The poem follows a structured **form** known as a villanelle. A villanelle consists of 19 lines with a specific rhyme scheme and repetition of lines.

In this poem, the first and third lines of the opening stanza are repeated throughout the poem, alternately appearing as the last line of subsequent stanzas.

The **theme** of sacrifice is explored through the line "This numb self-sacrifice of the weakest."
His departure is depicted as a solitary and potentially dangerous endeavour,

Vivid images such as "the howling snow," and "frostbite is replaced by vertigo" evoke a sense of solitude, and danger, contributing to the overall atmosphere of the poem.

The **rhyme scheme** of the villanelle is ABA ABA ABA ABA ABA ABAA.
In this poem, the first and third lines of each tercet (three-line stanza) rhyme with each other, and the last line of the quatrain (four-line stanza) also rhymes with them.

Alliteration: The use of repeated **consonant sounds,** such as in "heart of the ridiculous, the sublime" adds a musical quality to the lines and creates a sense of harmony.

Assonance: The repetition of **vowel sounds,** such as in "pretending not to know" adds a lyrical and melodic element to the poem.

The **tone** carries a sense of quiet resolve and determination. His decision to venture outside, despite potential dangers and isolation, is presented with a calm and resolute attitude.

What is a dialogue?

A dialogue is a conversation that includes at least two people.

- It acts as a feature in a variety of texts, including stories, books, plays or films
- Dialogue can be used to explore the tension and emotion in a scene, without relying on the narrative to move the plot along
- Dialogue will help differentiate one character from another
- It may also show readers a trait(s) of the character(s), and/or change the situation or conflict the characters are in

The conventions of a dialogue vary depending on the context and purpose of the conversation.
Let's explore a selection of common conventions below.

Quotation marks

Dialogue is usually enclosed in quotation marks, with each speaker's words separated by a new paragraph.

Dialogue tags

A dialogue tag is used to identify who is speaking. Common dialogue tags include "said," "asked" and "replied."

Sentence breaks

Separate sentences are used for actions that are before or after the dialogue. This ensures that the narrative is discernibe from the speech.

Paragraph breaks

Each new speaker is typically given a new paragraph to avoid confusion.

Punctuation

Commas and full stops are used to indicate the end of a speaker's sentence.
Question marks and exclamation marks are used for questions and exclamations.

Tone and body language

It can be helpful to include descriptions of the characters' tone of voice and body language to provide context and help the reader understand the emotions behind the words.

Read the short extract below from the novel, *Sense and Sensibility* by Jane Austen.
Some common conventions of dialogue have been identified.
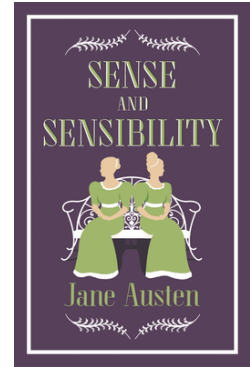
Separate sentences are used for actions that are before or after the dialogue.

Punctuation is used to indicate the end of a speaker's sentence and the question.

"You have no ambition, I well know. Your wishes are all moderate."

"As moderate as those of the rest of the world, I believe. I wish as well as every body else to be perfectly happy, but, like every body else it must be in my own way. Greatness will not make me so."

"Strange that it would!" cried Marianne. "What have wealth or grandeur to do with happiness?"

"Grandeur has but little," said Elinor, "but wealth has much to do with it."

"Elinor, for shame!" said Marianne, "money can only give happiness where there is nothing else to give it. Beyond a competence, it can afford no real satisfaction, as far as mere self is concerned."

"Perhaps," said Elinor, smiling, "we may come to the same point. Your competence and my wealth are very much alike, I dare say; and without them, as the world goes now, we shall both agree that every kind of external comfort must be wanting. Your ideas are only more noble than mine.

The dialogue is enclosed in quotation marks.

A dialogue tag is used to identify who is speaking.

The description helps to establish the character's tone.

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What is a speech?

A speech is usually a pre-written informal or formal talk. It is a public presentation, given by an individual to a group or audience. A speech may also be referred to as oration or public speaking.

- A speech may act as an apology, greeting, request, complaint, invitation, compliment, or refusal
- Speeches have many purposes, but they are usually a mix of, persuasion and entertainment
- When delivering a speech, you may to engage with an audience you already know or speak to hundreds of unknown individuals

The conventions of a speech vary depending on the context and purpose of the speech. Let's explore a selection of common conventions below.

Address audience	Inclusive language	Personal anecdotes
In a speech, language is shaped to match audience and purpose. Knowing your audience will also determine the tone and register.	The repeated use of the personal pronouns like 'we', 'you' and 'us' engages listeners and helps them to feel included.	Anecdotes are short stories or accounts about a person or event. They are strongest when they support a specific message or argument. They help create authenticity, establishing trust with the audience.

Transitional phrases	Repetition	Rhetorical devices
Transitional phrases allow you to smoothly move from one point to another. This makes it easier for the audience to understand your argument.	Repetition helps the audience remember and recognise the importance of your message. It also helps the speech to flow as it gives words rhythm.	Rhetorical devices help persuade audiences to accept the speaker's point of view. Common devices include: • Rhetorical questions • Alliteration • Metaphors

Read the extract below from a speech given by Taylor Swift for the Spring Graduation at NYU.
Some common conventions of a speech have been identified.

Image courtesy of NYU

Sharing a personal anecdote helps establish a connection with the audience.

The speaker uses transitional phrases to smoothly transition between different examples and ideas.

I started writing songs when I was 12 and since then, it's been the compass guiding my life, and in turn, my life guided my writing. Everything I do is just an extension of my writing, whether it's directing videos or a short film, creating the visuals for a tour, or standing on stage performing. Everything is connected by my love of the craft, the thrill of working through ideas and narrowing them down and polishing it all up in the end...

The repetition of the phrase "Everything I do is..." is repeated to emphasises her dedication to her craft.

This might sound like a very songwriter-centric line of discussion but in a way, I really do think we are all writers. And most of us write in a different voice for different situations. You write differently in your Instagram stories than you do your senior thesis. You send a different type of email to your boss than you do your best friend from home.

Here, Swift uses inclusive language like "we" and "us" to create a sense of unity and shared experiences.

We are all literary chameleons and I think it's fascinating. It's just a continuation of the idea that we are so many things, all the time. And I know it can be really overwhelming figuring out who to be, and when. Who you are now and how to act in order to get where you want to go. I have some good news: it's totally up to you. I also have some terrifying news: it's totally up to you.

Establishes empathy with the audience by acknowledging potential challenges.

The speech maintains an informal tone which helps create a conversational atmosphere.

Further supports:

Some useful websites/resources to support writing:

[Children's Books Ireland](#)

- Children's Books Ireland's work aims to inspire and enable children and young people to become readers for life. They support authors and illustrators and we inform families, teachers, booksellers, librarians, publishers and other adults who influence children and young people's reading.

[Poetry Ireland](#)

- Poetry Ireland connects poetry and people. We are committed to achieving excellence in the reading, writing and performance of poetry throughout the island of Ireland.

[Taylor Swift's Full Speech at NYU, 2022](#)

- The singer-songwriter was the official guest of honor at the university's spring graduation, taking place this year at New York City's Yankee Stadium. She stepped up to the podium to charge the university's graduates with a 20-minute speech in which she urged them to not be afraid to be enthusiastic and try hard when it comes to the things they love, before reminding them to accept that they will inevitably make mistakes as they go forward with their lives.

[www.writing.ie](#)

- Writing.ie is an online magazine site for writers and readers of all ages