



Teaching Notes – Plausible Plots and Structures

Introduction

Writing a plausible narrative is critical in demonstrating a control of ideas and an awareness of the potential effect of a text on a reader. A student's narrative may demonstrate certain skills with language (explored further through these units) but the introduction of illogical and confusing details and events can spoil an otherwise effective text.

Although the creative response is written for assessment in an examination, writing for the 'reader', rather than the examiner, should be the focus of students.

Why focus on plot and structure?

The reader (i.e. the examiner in the case of an external assessment) is led by the author's choice of plot and structure within a text. The feelings of the reader are manipulated by the writer's choice of form, narrative voice and stylistic devices.

The student can learn how to become a more effective writer through critically analysing a range of features within other texts. Becoming consciously competent at using specific plot and structural features within narrative takes time and practice. Wide reading across genres and different contexts can be drawn on by both teachers and students for practical examples as well as learning what makes 'good' writing from the perspective of a reader.

The units in this section aim to create writers who are increasingly aware of the readers who will engage with their text.

Practice - Key Outcomes

Teachers should prepare students to understand the impact of a well-constructed plot and effective structural features so that the following **key outcomes** are evident in all or most students' writing by the time of the final assessments:

- an understanding that 'plot' is a term used to describe the main events in a narrative and that plots need to be carefully planned
- an understanding that 'structure' describes the methods chosen by a writer to present the plot to the reader and an awareness of how to use different structural features
- ensuring that the reader is not presented with implausible/illogical shifts in plot which damage the overall coherence of a narrative
- using a narrative 'voice' that engages the reader and is appropriate for the subject-matter of the plot
- having the confidence to use a subtly chosen range of literary/linguistic features to support the maturity of 'voice' and tone of the text

All the practice in writing plausible plots and structures that meet these outcomes should lead to students being able to draw on previous practice to develop spontaneous texts under the pressure of the final assessment.



Resources – potential activities

[Learning Focus 1](#) – Keeping It Plausible

Learning Outcomes

- being able to write an original and plausible original narrative that intrigues readers through subject matter that is compelling
- ensuring that plot developments are convincing and believable
- understanding that suspense and surprise are acceptable as long as the reader can make plausible connections to/within the rest of the narrative

Resource 1 – Can You Believe It?

This resource focuses on helping students to understand how narrative writing can become far too implausible if the writer leaves too many questions unanswered or too many points unexplained.

Teaching suggestions

- Ask students to discuss films where something happened that was so unbelievable that they lost interest or just started thinking that it was funny?
- Gather feedback – dig deeper and ask if the implausibility made the film become almost predictable? Suggest classic horror-film situations, e.g. people going into dark haunted houses alone etc.
- Explain that some students rely on film narrative plots when writing ‘creatively’. Explore what can happen with this approach.
- Use **Resource 1** with students. Discuss the issues arising from the resource between exercises.
- Pay particular attention to what has been learned about plausibility v suspense in plots. Refer also to **Learning Focus 5** of **Opening Paragraphs**, which looks at ways to hook the reader by leaving some questions unanswered at the beginning of a narrative to create interest and suspense.
- Refer to this resource if students ever slip into using the narrative plot problems that are exemplified!

[Learning Focus 2](#) –Structure

Learning Outcomes

- being able to create narratives using interesting structures that support strong plots
- understanding that using shifts in time and perspective is an effective way to present plots
- being able to plausibly and consistently apply a chosen structure to a narrative

Resource 2 – Choosing an Appropriate Structure

This resource explains the difference between plot (focused on in **Resource 1**) and structure (i.e. the presentation/sequencing of the plot).



Teaching suggestions

- Students can be asked why structure is different to plot. Ensure that they understand that structure is the way that the plot is presented to the reader. The easiest way to describe this is as the sequencing of events and how this affects the whole text.
- Students should work through **Resource 2**. Stop at chosen points to discuss feedback and to check understanding. The sequencing task will almost certainly produce diverse results – discuss the reasons / merits of different sequencing. Ensure that the students realise that there is not always a ‘perfect’ order but that the sequencing must make logical sense in the context of the whole narrative.

Learning Focus 3 – Narrative Voice

Learning Outcomes

- being able to write successfully from the perspective of the introspective first-person narrator
- understanding that a third-person narrator can act as the omniscient observer and can present different perspectives from a more detached position

Resource 3 – Different Voices - First or Third-Person?

This resource helps students to understand the main differences between using the first or third-person voice as narrator in creative writing.

Teaching suggestions

- Identify how much students know about the differences between writing in the first and third person from a grammatical perspective.
- Discuss the same issue but by looking at the differences in the way the narrative may affect the reader.
- Use **Resource 3** to develop the points made in class.
- As students complete the tasks, discuss the issues that arise.
- Encourage the informed analysis and the practice tasks.
- Ensure that students do not feel that one perspective is ‘better’ or that there is more chance of higher marks with one rather than the other.
- Students should feel confident enough to be able to choose to use a first or third person perspective in their narratives (combined with all the other advice given through these units).

Learning Focus 4 –Effective Cohesion

Learning Outcomes

- understanding that effective cohesion supports the overall coherence of text
- being able to write coherent texts that make logical links between phases within the narrative
- being able to use effective cohesion through reference chains and connective language within sentences and paragraphs



Resource 4 – Linking it All Together

This resource supports students' understanding of how cohesion within a text can be managed through the appropriate use of effective reference chains and well-deployed connective language.

Teaching suggestions

- Connective language and reference chains are better dealt with in detail in discrete sessions. However, they can be revised/introduced in a general discussion about cohesion in texts.
- Discuss what students understand about *cohesion*. This could be exemplified by a short text presented on an IWB with underlined connective language.
- Students will be well aware of most connective words and phrases but can develop their understanding through the exercise in **Resource 4**.
- The exercise developing students' understanding of reference chains may be a newer concept to discuss in a lesson. Most reference chains are written without the writer deliberately including them – they are part of the awareness of a skilled writer. However, for students who struggle to link or maintain ideas in a text, it will be useful to practise collecting words/phrases together in the way that they are used in the exercise.

Learning Focus 5 – Stylistic Features

Learning Outcomes

- understanding the effect of particular stylistic features in narrative writing
- being able to select and successfully use a range of appropriate stylistic features in a narrative

Resource 5 – Making Language Memorable?

This resource helps students to understand how a range of stylistic features can be effective in creating a particular mood in narrative writing.

Teaching suggestions

- Discuss the range of stylistic features that students feel they are confident and competent to use effectively in narrative writing.
- Make a list on the IWB of all the features gathered from the group discussions. Assume that using a variety of sentence structures is understood / accepted by students.
- Use **Resource 5** and compare the list of stylistic features given here with that gathered by students.
- After students complete the exercise, check their understanding of the effect of the features in their own writing.
- Ensure that students understand that all these stylistic features are not a list of expected criteria needed to achieve higher bands in the assessment. They are part of the writer's 'toolkit' and are to be used when the writer decides that they are appropriate for a particular point in the narrative.



Learning Focus 6 – Adapting Personal Experience

Learning Outcomes

- being able to match personal experience to the type of narrative task set in Component 1
- adapting actual personal experience to create an original and plausible narrative
- being able to blend actual and imagined experience within a narrative

Resource 6 – Using Personal Experience in Narratives

This resource helps students to understand that using personal experience in narrative has to be dealt with carefully. The task is designed to show that event-driven personal experience without an authorial voice exploring thoughts and feelings is not the basis for effective narratives.

Teaching suggestions

- Discuss how personal experience is the basis for a lot of novels and that most published writers will always use personal experience at some point in their work. However, they will usually present this experience through another persona/character.
- Ask students to discuss what they feel may be the main personal experiences written about by students in creative writing. (Use the list in **Resource 6** as a guide).
- Ask groups to consider what may be the benefits/pitfalls of writing about personal experience.
- Use **Resource 6**. Assess how students respond to the task and how much they have grasped through what they have concluded as the 'key' points they have learned.

A05 - Self-Assessment Grid

- The self-assessment grid helps students to match their current skills against the skills required to be awarded a mark within a particular band.
- With the support of teachers, students will also be able to set realistic targets for the next stage of development.