

## **Sensitivity and Diversity in Your Manuscript**

### **Why It Is Important & How to Write Diverse Characters Handout**

Edwina Perkins

#### **The Value of Writing Diverse Characters That Reflect the Real World**

The need for diversity in books has pushed itself to the forefront of publishing in the last few years. Across the nation as the ethnic population continues to grow at a rapid pace, writers are thinking more toward including diversity in their manuscripts. Not only is the need there, but the question arises over and over, **how** does one include diversity in their manuscript with authenticity and also be sensitive to a marginalized community?

#### **Common Reasons for Not Including Diversity in Writing**

“I’m not qualified to write about diversity.”

“I’m afraid of getting it wrong.”

“I don’t want to offend anyone.”

“I don’t want to write about stereotypes.”

“I don’t want to be accused of cultural appropriation.”

“I’m not sure how to write about diversity.”

You should not let these excuses hold you back from exploring diverse experiences and perspectives in your writing!

#### **When including diversity in your book:**

- Research
- Remember: Google does not have all the answers
- Read, Read, Read!
- Read books by individuals from the community you’re writing about
- Get to know people who are not like you
- Utilize your network

#### **Avoid Tokenism**

Tokenism is the practice of including a small number of diverse characters in a story or media product in a way that is superficial or superficial or that serves to fulfill a quota rather than accurately reflecting the diversity of real life.

#### **Recommendations for Writing about Diversity**

1. Be genuine
2. Be consistent
3. Stay away from stereotypes
4. Don't worry about who you're going to offend. Do your research, take your time, pray, and get your story written.
5. Be aware of your focal point. Diversity should not be the focal point of your story unless your story is focused on diversity.
6. No Food descriptions: Coffee, chocolate, toffee, mocha. Words to describe skin tone: golden brown, russet brown, tawny beige. also, keep in mind that you can add modifiers to make partial changes to words. here are a few: dark, deep, rich, cool, warm, medium, tan, fair, light, pale.

### **Skin Color May Not Be Enough**

Describing skin tone isn't always enough to indicate someone's ethnicity. Sometimes more indicators of race may be needed. Such as:

- Physical descriptions
- Engage in their culture
- Use other character(s) to state it
- Organizations they may be a part of/Holidays are just a few ways
- Guidelines for Writing and Referring to People with Disabilities  
<https://adata.org/factsheet/ADANN-writing>

### **Hire a Sensitivity Consultant**

A sensitivity reader is someone who reads for offensive content, misrepresentation, stereotypes, bias, lack of understanding, etc. They create a report for an author and/or publisher outlining the problems that they find in a piece of work and offer solutions in how to fix them. For more information contact me: [harambeepress@gmail.com](mailto:harambeepress@gmail.com)

**Websites** (use discretion when researching some of these websites)

<https://bcbooksandauthors.com/>

<https://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/literature-resources/ccbc-diversity-statistics/books-by-and-or-about-poc-2018/#USonly>

Cooperative Children's Book Center <https://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/literature-resources/ccbc-diversity-statistics/books-by-about-poc-fnn>

[Diversebooks.org](https://Diversebooks.org)

<https://www.edutopia.org/article/22-diverse-book-choices-all-grade-levels/> (covers all grade levels)

<https://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/african-american-christian-fiction>

<https://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/african-american-nonfiction>

<https://www.thecreativepenn.com/2019/03/08/writing-tips-how-to-authentically-write-diversity/>

## WRITING WITH COLOR

<https://writingwithcolor.tumblr.com/post/96830966357/words-for-skin-tone-how-to-describe-skin-color>

<https://writingwithcolor.tumblr.com/Navigation>

Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_AAu58SNSyc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_AAu58SNSyc)

## What's Your Voice?

Hand out

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*Voice is bleeding onto the page, and it can be a powerful, frightening, naked experience.*

*I write only because . . . there is a voice within me . . .that will not be still.*

—Sylvia Plath

### Why do you need a writing voice?

It's the key to writing a good story. Confident writers have the courage to speak plainly to let their thoughts shine rather than their vocabulary.

### Tips to find your voice:

1. Relax
2. Read Aloud
3. Read essays by writers whose voices you admire.
4. Pay attention to writers you like
5. Learn the difference between good writing and voice. Learn and practice the rules of good writing and you'll free your voice. Good writing is learning the craft. Voice is learning yourself.
6. Tape yourself capture the nuances of your personality before writing it up as a draft.
7. Caption On watch TV with the captions on.
8. Stop comparing yourself to other writers. **Pick a consistent voice for your narrators.**
9. Honest critiques. Use sensitivity readers to help.
10. Pay attention to the things that make you unique
11. Don't be afraid to experiment

### Exercises for Finding Your Voice

1. Describe yourself in three adjectives.
2. When you write, consider if it reflects how you naturally speak. Take note of your favorite artistic and cultural influences and reflect on whether you use them as references in your writing or avoid them assuming lack of understanding.
3. Visualize your ideal reader and tailor your writing to resonate with them. For example, imagine a specific person, their values, and what they seek in writing.
4. Jot down books, articles, or blogs you like to read. Spend some time examining them. How are they alike? How are they different? What about how they're written intrigues you?
5. Seek feedback from friends and family on the strengths of your personality.
6. Engage in free-writing and then assess if your work reflects your natural voice. 'Do I enjoy what I'm writing as I'm writing it?' If it feels like work, you may not be writing like yourself. (Caveat: Not every writer loves the act of writing, but it's at least worth asking.).
7. Embrace vulnerability in your writing and consider writing something that challenges you.

## **Final Thought**

*The voice in your head has the same tone and cadence that makes it past your lips. In your voice, your readers should be able to hear the contents of your mind, your heart, and your soul. Flow that cadence and tone and word structure through your fingertips instead of your lips.*

Recommended reading:

*Unleash the Writer Within* by Cecil Murphey

*The Elements of Style* by Strunk and White

*The Sound on the Page* by Ben Yagoda

*Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott

# **The Importance of Fiction Techniques in Your Nonfiction**

Handout

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Authors of narrative nonfiction connect with their readers on multiple levels and, ideally, help them gain a more thorough understanding of the topic at hand.

Narrative nonfiction is a broad genre of writing that uses literary techniques to present facts in a story-like style. It can cover a wide range of topics and formats, including media and literary works. Some common forms of narrative nonfiction include:

- Articles: Such as magazine and newspaper articles, online essays, and Medium posts
- Essays: Such as personal essays, which can take an individualized approach to a scholarly subject
- Books: Such as memoirs, biographies, and novels
- Podcasts: Such as travel writing and podcasts
- Series: Such as true crime, which explores real-life criminal cases and often focuses on the psychology of the perpetrators and the impact on victims

## **Memoir**

The word memoir has developed cache in today's market, which has resulted in many industry professionals using it as a catch-all word to communicate a personal story. But memoir is a subcategory of narrative nonfiction.

Explore different types of nonfiction genres at [WRITERS.COM](http://WRITERS.COM)

## **Both narrative nonfiction and memoir share these qualities**

- The manuscript is told as a story
- with characters (actual people)
- a protagonist (generally the author or the subject of the book)
- a character arc
- fleshed-out scenes
- and a story arc. ARC is king

Both memoir and narrative nonfiction use fiction techniques to put the reader into the moment of the story.

## **The Best Narrative Nonfiction Writers Are**

Avid readers

Focused on the heart, but not preachy

Precise

Your story should be factual, relevant, and interesting

Rule followers

Creative

## **Nonfiction writers remember to**

- a. Bait your audience
- b. Use emotional language
- c. Surprise the reader

## **7 elements *must* exist in a story**

- Theme
- Characters
- Setting
- Point of View
- Plot: What's happening
- Conflict: If there is no conflict, there is no story
- Resolution

## **Memoirs**

Reasons for writing memoirs:

- To recall and cement the memory of a certain time in your life
- To leave behind an important story or lesson for your family
- To document your travels or a once-in-a-lifetime trip
- To open up about something painful or difficult; or simply
- To tell a powerful story that will resonate with readers

If there's someone out there who will benefit from reading your story — whether it's millions of fans or your immediate family — you may find that to be enough of a reason to pick up your pen and start to write.

Like novels, nonfiction books must use details. Richly described detail is important for any book, fiction or nonfiction. Placing the reader **THERE**. Use of the 5 senses. The 5 W's: Who, what, when, where, why. Detail is your shining light.

Setting/Scene is important when writing nonfiction/memoirs. Scene is more entertaining less likely to lose readers' attention.

Hurdles/Problems The main character should have learned something by the end. Become different in some fundamental way.

There should be an external thing and a deeper internal yearning/longing/need/desire that is driving through the story.

### **Hurdles for your POV "I" narrator in memoir**

- What is the deeper drive/motivation pushing your "I" narrator?
- Under the external thing, what did you truly want?
- What is stopping you emotionally? Physically?

Plot: Things need to happen. This seems counterintuitive since the word "plot" brings to mind "made up." you must be telling the truth.

Voice: Every nonfiction books must have a strong voice. There is no real way to "teach" voice. It's in you and needs to be cultivate it.

How do you cultivate your voice? In the same way that you gain confidence with anything in life.

- Write every day or as often as you can.
- Read as often as you can to take in other writers' voices.
- Gain life experience so that you feel like a personal expert.
- Do this for long enough and your own natural voice will begin to seep out onto the page.

Character development: You need strong, fully developed characters who feel authentic to readers.

**Make readers care about you, the author.** No doubt your memoir is important to you. It's your past. Your life. **But.** This doesn't necessarily mean it's going to feel relevant or important to the average reader. Just about everyone has "a story." You need to have the ability to write that story well. (Which means you'll need help from other people.) Also can you answer these 3 questions:

So what?



Who cares?  
Why you?

Write your story. Self-edit. Hand it off to some trusted readers. Get feedback. Revise. Self-edit again. Repeat.

Plot out your story before you start writing. After a while you may abandon the outline but, more than fiction, I think this is helpful for memoir. Start by jotting down notes of the time you want to cover. Then carve an outline from that material of what happened, what you feel you want/need to include, people involved, actions that occurred, etc. This can really help you frame the story in your mind.

### **Tips for incorporating fiction techniques in your nonfiction book**

1. Engage the reader from the first word.
2. Translating experiences in your nonfiction book into something the reader can engage with and inhabit themselves. The best way to ensure that your first draft isn't dull is to pack your book with vivid details, using all of your senses to tell your. Bring emotions out of the reader.
3. Lead with a laugh. The reader will respond to a range of emotions and likely won't want to feel down throughout an entire book.
4. Open with a dramatic moment. Describe that opening scene with vivid sensory details.
5. Story structure Create a story structure with a strong opening, middle, and end to string out a story the reader knows how to follow.
6. Write for the reader as well as yourself. Remember you have an audience. Always keep the reader in mind.
7. Be honest. **In writing a memoir**, you promise the reader that what you're telling them is an honest account of your own life from your perspective. Censoring yourself is easy if you're retelling stories that involve other people and family members who may remember things differently. Stay true to your narrative while respecting their right to privacy; for instance, maybe you change their names or use initials. Only you can decide what stays and what goes but remember to deliver an honest story.
8. Don't start at the beginning. This technique will help pique the reader's interest from the very beginning.
9. Write the opening last. Start writing the part of the story that most inspires you, then come back to your beginning after you finish your first draft. In the course of your writing, you'll discover the perfect opening.
10. Collapse your characters and events. Focus on who and what will help move your nonfiction book forward. Everything is not needed.

## **Helpful Websites:**

Explore different types of nonfiction genres at WRITERS.COM

<https://www.masterclass.com/articles/a-complete-guide-to-writing-creative-nonfiction#6BCvsHdXagn6PgdQperULV>

<https://www.masterclass.com/articles/how-to-start-writing-a-memoir#3T91ZTIK3cs4RyIvFKhnoL>

<https://jerryjenkins.com/creative-nonfiction/#:~:text=Unlike%20academic%20and%20technical%20writing,tell%20a%20compelling%20true%20story.>

<https://www.thecreativepenn.com/2018/03/09/fiction-techniques-writing-memoir/>

<https://www.booksandsuch.com/blog/genre-confusion-memoir-vs-nonfiction-narrative/#:~:text=The%20word%20memoir%20has%20developed,a%20subcategory%20of%20narrative%20nonfiction.>