
UNIT 1 INTRODUCTION

Structure

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1.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Writing is an art, and more so creative writing, which is an expression of your creative urge. You will find this course not only informative but also stimulative of your creative impulse, in which respect it differs from all other courses. This course not only discusses the various aspects of creative writing, but also helps you **mould** yourself into a writer.

In the first Unit on your creative writing course, certain fundamental ideas are discussed. It starts with the assumption that writing is a social act, and that man writes because he must share with others what he thinks and feels. Further, it informs **you** that

- the distinction between creative and non-creative writing is that between **informing** and **revealing**;
- the content of writing chooses the only form appropriate to it;
- the essence of content is experience transformed in the mind of the writer;
- structure is **basically** the ordering of **material**;
- style is that handling of language which expresses the content best;
- an aspiring writer should
 - i) read extensively and with discrimination,
 - ii) allow his experience to mature,
 - iii) strike out his own path, **i.e.** write something individual, different;
 - iv) **begin** with keeping a private diary of thoughts and experiences;
 - v) then **visualise** the course of the work clearly; and
 - vi) try to achieve **maximum** clarity, precision, directness, and a **sense** of economy.
- You must not only be your own critic, but should also submit your **work** to discerning friends for **criticism**.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Man is a social **animal**. Once his primary needs such as food, shelter and clothing are met, it becomes **necessary** for him to **fulfil** the social need of communication. He must communicate with other human beings not only to seek and impart information, but also to share with them his experiences—his joys and sorrows. The signals man **makes** through speech, action or artistic creation, have **all** this common **purpose—to** be understood by others.

Early man expressed himself through gestures with his hands and face. This was the first mode of communication available to him. Man could also produce mutually unconnected grunts and groans to express his basic emotions like anger and satisfaction. This **was** another mode of communication for him. With the passage of time, with developing intelligence, he began to connect one sound with another and turn his grunts and groans into sound **patterns**. These sound patterns, with specific meanings attached to each and understood by all in the group, became speech.

However, both gestures and speech had severe limitations. These could be useful only when members of the group were in close proximity.

1.2 THE BIRTH OF WRITING AND ITS IMPORTANCE

Imagine a situation like this: a woman with her children is away collecting wood for the fire and her man, resting in front of the cave, suddenly spots a wild boar which he has to chase away or hunt. How will he tell his woman where he has gone?

Out of such a **situation** came the first cave drawings, and from these the ideograph. When **these** were found inadequate, alphabets which could reproduce human speech **phonetically**, were gradually devised. Herein lies the genesis of writing, which can broadly be defined as 'a system of human intercommunication by means of visible conventional markings.'

The **earliest** efforts at **writing**, about six thousand years ago, were made in Egypt and Mesopotamia. They are etchings on clay tablets called '**cuneiforms**'. Starting with them, man continued to improve his methods of writing. He **devised** several other things like parchment, birch-bark and finally paper. If the entire span of time, from the birth of the first well-defined Neanderthal Man **300,000** years ago to the present **time**, is reduced to a **time-scale** of 50 years, writing has been in vogue **only** in the last one year or less. Yet, the strides which human **civilisation** has made in this one year of time-scale have been greater than in the rest of man's **history**. If it is so, the **credit** for it must go to one single factor, that is, **writing**, for writing means communication and communication means progress. In the whole of human history, there has been nothing more glorious than writing to explore oneself, and to express oneself. If writing had not been invented, we would not have known anything of the past, anything of other places or people. We would have continued to live in utter ignorance of one another in our isolated little holes.

Why does one write? There could be some easy yet inadequate answers to this question, such as **money**, vanity, or drive for fame. **All** these might be true to some extent. But, basically and more importantly, the answer lies in the urge of the writer to communicate a thought or a feeling—that is, to express himself. As T.S. Eliot has said, '**You** write because you feel the need to free yourself of something'. This **means** that it is psychological and aesthetic compulsion. It also becomes a **social need** when you write about and for other people, as in a novel or a short story, so as to be able to establish a bond with them.

1.4 THE SUBSTANCE OF WRITING

Every literary work, big or **small**, essentially consists of four aspects

1.4.1 Content

The essence **of content** is **experience**. Experience is what one acquires from **the** life around, **through** one's **senses**, by **observing** things that happen. No writer can possibly write in a **vacuum**. He **would have** seen life around **him** in its various situations, happy and sad, **harsh** and poignant, and he would have made mental notes of everything. When, suddenly, it occurs to **him** to **write** a **story** with a **certain** event as its centre, **with** a particular set **of characters**, the right **elements**, which he had once accumulated in **his** mind and which have in the meanwhile undergone strange **transformations** **within** him, **will begin** tumbling out of their own accord and take a new life **on** paper. Even when **one** invents a story, its **elements** would somewhere resemble **the real**. Otherwise, **the** writing will lack credibility and **authenticity** (**which** are discussed in Unit 3 of Block 1). A well-written work should always **give the reader the feeling** that it is real; it should never make him say, 'Oh, how could this **ever happen**?' Hence, it is necessary for a writer to keep his eyes and ears open and **closely observe** the life around so as to be able to stock those images for use in **future**.

1.4.2 Form

Form has two meanings: **Firstly**, literary **form** and secondly, structural form.

As for literary form, the **content** itself generally decides what form it **should** take. Whether a particular **insight** should come out as a story or a novel, or its nature and quality are such that **nothing** but a poem express it full is not generally decided consciously. It comes on its own with the idea of writing itself. **Occasionally**, the writer may be in a **dilemma** and has to decide, taking all **factors** into consideration, which form to **choose**.

1.4.3 Structure

As for its structural **sense**, **the** guiding principle should be easy communication for easy **comprehension**. In **order** to achieve a good structure, **the** writer should first of all order his material, **that** is, decide—(a) how much of what should be in the work, and (b) in what order. **Logic**, commonsense and experience, **drawn** from one's wide reading, will help here. Just as a 500-page novel cannot be **managed** with only two characters, an **eight-page story** cannot have two dozen characters, unless the writer is a genius. One cannot go **on** describing the locale of the story for seven pages, **reserving** all the action **and** its denouement to the last page. As for the order, the Aristotelian 'beginning-middle-and-end' is a time-tested sequence. But a gifted writer **can** always make variations. Literary tradition has provided us with several acceptable models; but if the writer is innovative he can create newer models. It is important to bear in **mind**, however, that ultimately structure is only a means to an end, and one should **choose** only that in which the content comes through best.

In its totality, a piece of writing is like a work of architecture, where every stone is well-cut and fits into **the** other as if the two are one piece. Nothing in it should stick out. The total structure **should** make an aesthetically **satisfying** whole. The stone metaphor above **applies** to every single element of writing—first the word, then the sentence, the paragraph, the chapter and finally the book itself. Each word in a sentence should work like the right musical note, and each sentence like a bar and the book as a **whole** like a symphony, harmonious in its total orchestration.

1.4.4 Style

Then comes style. It is possible that two works written on the same subject, or with the same theme, **should** both be structurally satisfying, yet stylistically one may be better than the other. **Style** is a manner of expressing one's thoughts and **feelings** in words. It is the result of long-cultivated awareness of words and sentences, of the way a writer connects one sentence with another. For one writer, '**succour**' may be

what others have written. When we talk of reading, we do not mean reading casually for entertainment, or because there is nothing better to do. What really matters is reading **critically, analysing** for oneself every detail of the work, asking questions at every step as to why the **writer** has devised his plot in a particular manner, or has made the characters act the way they do, and whether it could have been done in any other way. Long years of close reading in this manner builds up a writer's equipment. It increases his vocabulary. It often provides ready answers to the questions which crop up in the process of writing.

The subject for writing should occur to the writer spontaneously, either coming from inside, or as a sudden reaction to something encountered in the outside world. This is what makes for **inspired** writing. You should not sit down to write with a question like 'What should I write?'.

1.5.2 Allow your experience to ripen

The experience which you draw from the life around you should not be put on paper as it is. That would make it a mere matter-of-fact, hackneyed piece of journalism. You should learn to make that experience your own, by **internalising** it. You should allow it to gestate within your mind, in the process of which you may reject a few details and **add** a few others from similar experiences. This kind of gestation **will** also make it personal, intimate and authentic. Hence, it is not desirable to rush for pen and paper as soon as **there** is a desire to write. We have used the word 'gestation'. The act of writing is like giving birth to something. It should come of its own, after it is ripe enough and when it can no longer wait. It serves no purpose to wrench it out by force.

1.5.3 Write about your experience differently

Before writing about **anything**, you should ask yourself whether it is something trite which others have already written about, or something new. If it is new, there is nothing like it. It is not **that** a writer can always hit upon new things to write about. Life does not have a new theme to offer everyday to everyone. It is the same birth, the same hunger, the **same** love and the same death—always. But though the themes are few and limited, their variations are unlimited. Here lies the scope for an imaginative mind. You will have to ask yourself whether you can write about the same old thing differently, bringing your own insights and perceptions into it.

1.5.4 Start with your diary

Before launching out on **more** ambitious projects like short stories and novels, it is best to **start** with your own diary and reminiscences. A few months of consistent writing of the diary, for **your** private reading, will give you confidence to undertake **more difficult** types of **writing** later on.

1.5.5 Visualisation, outline and design

Once you have the basic idea of what you want to write, and you are convinced that it **will** make a fairly good literary work, keep thinking about all its aspects, such as the theme, plot, situation, characters, dialogues, etc. Jot down every small detail that occurs to you. Then **put** down **everything** sequentially and prepare an outline to show how it will start, develop and end. Before finally putting pen to paper, you should have a clear picture in your mind of the entire work. This is called visualisation.

There are many gifted **writers** who, at the time of starting, have only a vague idea of what they are going to write. But as they proceed, the unconscious mind takes over and the writing takes **very** different turns and twists to produce very interesting results. This method may not be advisable for the beginner.

The beginning and the end of a work are vital as in a musical piece. The first few pages are like a **leash** and you should be able to hold the readers with it and lead them on. In fact, there **are** some readers who, if they do not **find** the first and last few paragraphs **interesting** enough, would **just** put down the book.

1.5.6 Some do's and don'ts

- i) If there is any one **single** quality which distinguishes most great works, it is clarity—clarity of thought and clarity of expression. Your writing should not be dense or dull, but should shine like a mirror.
- ii) Precision is another such quality—precision both in respect of your thoughts, and the words you use to express them. Word is God. Take your words seriously. Do not waste them. When you use a word, make sure of its precise meaning. Tools like the dictionary, thesaurus, etc., will help you to understand the correct meaning of words and their usages.
- iii) Do not overwrite. The days of ornate prose are over. It is possible to achieve miracles even with simple sentences. No **wonder**, the Bible is still considered a model of good writing.
- iv) Similarly, avoid being pompous. Don't be very flippant either. Choose your words and expressions according to the mood of your work.
- v) Also avoid archaisms, **i.e.**, words no longer in vogue, slang, **cliches** and jargon. Write, as it comes to you, effortlessly.
- vi) Length, **i.e.**, how much to write, is yet another important factor. The length will be determined by the scope of your subject. If you are clear in your mind about what you want to say, the end will come where it should.
- vii) Do not try to explain too much. Leave something to the reader's imagination also.
- viii) **Let** your writing be sprightly. A touch of humour, if it is not against the basic mood of your work, is **always** welcome.

1.5.7 Learn to be your own critic

After you have written a piece, read it aloud to yourself to test it on your ears. You will **find** several false notes, both in your statements and expressions. You will be surprised that quite a few things which you found exciting when you first put them on paper now seem band. Remove them mercilessly. Every writer should learn to be his own critic.

Once your first draft is ready, put it aside till such time as it is out of your mind. It may have to be for a week, a fortnight, or a **month, or more**. Now **read it** again. You will then see it in a fresh light. At places, it may even make you wonder how you could have been so silly as to write certain things. There will be more work for you, and the typed pages will be filled with corrections. But you should not be dismayed.

1.5.8 Seek others' opinions

For every writer, it is important to build up a close circle of creative writers and discriminating readers who are on the same wave-length and who can read through his manuscript patiently and give an honest, unbiased opinion about it. It is necessary to shed one's shyness to be able to show one's work to others and also curb one's ego to consider their criticism, however drastic it might be. But, in the end, it **will** be good for the work. If even after all **this** a work fails to pass muster, better forget about it rather than hunt for a publisher. The world will not be the poorer by that one work which failed to come off. You can always make it up with your next work.

Activity 3

Did you ever feel the urge to **unburden** yourself of any experience, pleasant or unpleasant, in your life?

Write about it in not more than 200 words.

(See the hints given at the end of this Unit).

1.7 ACTIVITIES: AIDS TO ANSWERS

Activity 1

- i) Man, being a social animal, has an innate compulsion to communicate with other human beings, not only to **inform them** or know anything from them, but also to share his experiences with them—his joys and sorrows. It is a means for overcoming loneliness and for fulfilling his social urges.
- ii) The forms of communication like gestures, sounds, speech and even signals, all have severe and obvious limitations which early man must have experienced. To overcome their limitations he must have resorted to cave drawings from which the **ideograph** came to be developed. But when they were found inadequate or unhelpful, he must have devised the alphabets which could reproduce human speech. The earliest attempts at writing (in Egypt and Mesopotamia) were **etchings** on clay tablets (cuneiforms) which were followed by those on parchment, birch-bark and **finally** on paper.
- iii) A possible answer is money, vanity or desire to win fame. But the **chief** reason why one writes is to **fulfil** one's urge to communicate a **thought/feeling**, or to relieve oneself of pent-up feelings or other such tensions. There is always a psychological and aesthetic need for a writer.

Activity 2

- i) Non-creative writing **informs** while creative **writing reveals**. The distinction between the two becomes blurred when a non-creative writing is expressed in poetic language and moves the reader as any creative writing does.
- ii) Form and content; no, if it is a mere transcription of actual experience, it becomes journalistic writing. The facts, whether 'real' or 'invented', undergo transformation **in** the **writer's mind** before they are presented in the form of a story; a novel or a poem. Only then **will** they interest and move others.
- iii) Structure means the ordering of the story material, as in architecture. It applies to every element—plot, character and language.
- iv) Critical reading of the best books of literature—not merely reading them for **entertainment**—is necessary for an aspiring writer. It helps not only in developing his vocabulary but also in suggesting answers to questions which he encounters in the course of his writing. It may act as a **catalyst** to his own creative efforts.

Activity 3

Hints

- i) Write in the first person 'I' form.
- ii) Your vocabulary should include a large number of words and phrases describing your feelings, thoughts and emotions.
- iii) You can use abbreviations, slang and figures of speech.

1.8 GLOSSARY

You **will find** in the glossary a short list of the words used in this Unit.

Aristotelian beginning-middle-and-end: According to **Aristotle**, every form of creative writing should have a clear design—a beginning, a middle and an end.

Character: The aggregate of traits and features that form the nature of a person is referred to as character.

Denouement: The untying of the complications of a plot; the catastrophe of a tragedy or other event, immediately after the climax, that brings to its end the dramatic conflict.

Form: In a literary work, form refers to its shape and structure, and to the manner in which it is made (see **style**), as opposed to its **substance** (content), or what it is about. Form and substance are inseparable but they may be analysed and assessed individually.

Ideograph: A **written symbol** that represents an idea or an object rather than a particular word or speech sound. The Chinese and Japanese languages, for instance, are **ideographic**.

Phonetics: It is the study of speech sounds: their production, transmission, and reception. It also involves the analysis, transcription and classification of the sounds of speech.

Plot: It is the plan, design, scheme or pattern of events in a play, poem or work of fiction. In order to discover the plot you **ask** yourself such questions as: Why did that happen? Why is this happening? What is going to happen next—and why?