
UNIT 2 HOW TO ACHIEVE LUCIDITY AND DIRECTNESS

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2.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Readability, clarity, lucidity, or directness (call this quality by whatever name you will), is one of the **most** important values to be cherished in creative writing, for all writing is **aimed** at a reader who must understand what you are saying. Otherwise communication, which is the purpose of all writing, will not be possible. This fundamental principle of writing is so important that it has been stressed in other Units of your syllabus as well, so that when you write you can aim at meaning, not obscurity, which is unmeaning. You have to remember that

- to achieve clarity you must know, thoroughly and competently, what you want to be clear about. Until your mastery of the subject is complete you will neither know its broad pattern and its **details**, nor will you be able to define for **yourself** what you want to say on the subject; to be able to do so you must have a deep interest in the **subject**. Creativity can emerge only from **this**—so also **transparency**, which is spontaneous and illuminating. Great scientists or great artists have this quality of creative expression; and
- mere rigidity of academic discipline cannot help anyone to attain it; clarity relates to the response of your listener, your reader. If your writing fails to communicate, it has no meaning; but
- clarity is not facile comprehensibility—a mere simplicity of statement. It applies to complex and highly sensitive thoughts also; hence the difficulty in achieving clarity; to achieve clarity one **has** to be a master of language, for it is only by manipulating language **skilfully** that one can express great and complex thoughts **effectively**; such manipulation is called technique, in which the mastery of syntax is **as** important as **a competent** use of vocabulary;
- all this will help you achieve directness and clarity, which make for readability.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This is the second Unit of **Block 1** of your course. In the first Unit—an introductory one—the genesis of **writing**, the types of writing, the essential aspects of a literary work, tips to an aspiring **writer** like you, and some helpful **Do's** and **Don'ts** were discussed, as also question like 'Why does one write?' and 'Why should one learn to be one's own critic or **seek** others' opinions?'

In this Unit, the importance of the qualities of clarity and directness, which impart value to your work, are explained—qualities which have already been referred to in the previous Unit. Indeed, **their** importance cannot be over-emphasised because, whatever be the theme of **your** work, it will not appeal to the reader if it suffers from opaqueness or obscurity. As pointed out in the previous Unit, the one distinguishing quality of all great literary works is clarity—clarity of thought and clarity of expression.

2.2 THE DIMENSIONS OF CLARITY

What do you want to be clear about? **Who** do you want to address? **What** is it you want to make clear?

2.2.1 Decide what you want to make clear

What you want to make clear is the subject that you have chosen. You cannot be clear about the **smallest** detail without being clear about the whole field, or the subject of which it is a part. Civil liberties, for example, are concerned with the **Constitution**, the judiciary, the widespread knowledge of law in society, the expenses of legal action and an abiding faith in the fruits of the judicial system based upon actual experience. The protection of consumers is linked with the entire market **condition**, and the spending mentality of people in an inflationary situation, where it **seems evidently** more gainful to spend money immediately.

2.2.2 Clarity depends upon proper education

Clarity depends upon an **adequate**, competent and **relevant** education. If you have not mastered your subject, you can only flounder about; and in trying to clarify, you may make it all the more **confusing**. Do not try to explain anything which you do not know. Go back to the subject itself, take an all-round and distant view of it, and just as you can see the fields and water and forests in patterns from the air, you will find things falling **into** a **design**. Clarity requires not only a little time and distance from the matter you are dealing with, but also demands wide acquaintance with it.

2.2.3 Clarity requires a concrete definition of your subject

Since nobody knows, nod can hope to know, everything, clarity needs a distinctive definition of what your **subject** in hand is. Brash confidence of the 'I know what I want' type is not enough, you have to know what you want to say. If you are presenting routine **information** it is one thing, but it is quite another thing if you are using it for creative **writing**, since what is needed here is an identification **with** the subject. As soon as the **other** man knows that you are not **talking** about something he already knows, but of **something** which you know in a special way, he **will** listen to you.

2.3 YOUR WRITING MUST BE ENGAGING

A subject which can **form** the matter of creative writing must be interesting: interesting to you and **also** interesting to the people who are going to read your work. Making **things interesting** is a skill, and there are exercises which purport to teach you how to do it. These, however, are merely guidelines and cannot teach you creative writing itself. You may succeed in **making** your writing merely interesting but you **know** what you **are** doing, and so does the man at the receiving end. You

2.5 RIGIDITY MAY AFFECT CLARITY

Most subjects, even topics, **academically** speaking, have a rigid outline—academic disciplines require and produce a certain controlling of the **mind**, and so far as clarity in creative **expression** goes, **this** rigidity hinders and may even **damage** it.

You yourself are **the basis** and source of clarity. Clear expression must be free, spontaneous, **plastic—sensitive** to the relation **between** you and the people to whom you speak. We seem to **be** very little concerned about clarity when we express ourselves. We seem to **think** that it is the importance of the subject matter that will automatically achieve **clarity**, or that it is the duty of the reader to extract clarity out of whatever we choose to say, in whichever manner we like. In fact, it is one of the advantages of writing, a **different** from speech, that questions are not asked of you right there. But never **imagine** for a moment that because you are writing, questions cannot be asked of you. That kind of feeling or **assumption** is the enemy of clarity. Some of the best **writers** are involved with themselves, **making** their statements, asking their questions, **answering** them themselves. In such cases, there is no clarity, but only rhetoric, **which** is a **confining** of expression. Some of **finest** creative work may eventually **come** out of it but this does not usually happen. Complete self-involvement is not a condition in which you can attain clarity within yourself about what you are **saying**.

2.6 CLARITY IS NOT FACILE COMPREHENSIBILITY

Clarity does not mean **putting** everything at superficially comprehensible levels. A great deal can be said **very** clearly by omitting its essential complications and it is sometimes useful, as an **evaluation** of clarity, to see what the losses are in achieving this kind of clarity! Such evaluation acts **as** a salutary check on unclear, complicated expressions we may have used.

2.7 CLARITY IS NOT SIMPLICITY OF STATEMENT

If we consider Henry **James's** novel, *The Portrait of a Lady*, we will have to modify our view of clarity. **Clarity** is not limited to dealing only with simple matters, simple statements, simple **human** beings or simple human experiences. If that were so, clarity would set a **frustrating** limit on complex and highly sensitive creative writing. In this novel, Isabel **Archer**, Madame Merle, Osmond, and **Ralph** are not simple human beings. The **hopes** and unions with which *The Portrait of a Lady* begins and the disillusionments which it **reaches** do not represent a simple movement of disappointments; yet the creative art of Henry James lies in the achievement of clarity and **intricacy**. The intricate is so presented to the mind's eye that it is lit up by a luminous clarity. This brings us to the point of saying that clarity has a principle of delight in it which **makes** it creative. If clarity does not require accuracy of vision, if it does not involve the **difficult** exercise of precision in conveying this accuracy of vision, it would not be **the beautiful** thing that it is. It is the difficult thing and not the easy thing that is **beautiful** when rendered appropriately so.

2.8 ALWAYS KEEP YOUR READER IN MIND

The Victorian **convention** of addressing the reader may have **vanished**, but the reader is still very **much** with us. The clarity of writing—because clarity is a result, an **effect**, not a quality **as such**, depends upon our knowing **clearly** who our reader is. The reader **decides** our **choice** of language. Every writer has his preferences, and

this may, of course, make him choose his readers, but there is no reader **absolutely** made for the language which is the chosen language of the writer. The writer of the **age** of Shakespeare knew the love of language his audience had, and made his reader love his **language** by **leading** him further in the same direction. T.S. Eliot did not **have** readers readymade for the language, knowledge, skill and potentiality, and yet **he** drew upon these. His readers found him difficult, but they loved the **difficulty**; they knew where he was going and were prepared to go along with him and also had **the** resources for doing so. One indeed not only seeks one's audience, but also 'creates' it as it were, which is not possible for every writer.

2.9 RELATION BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND CLARITY

Language, being the medium for a diversity of human communications, has to be **individualised** every time it is used. That is why dialects, slang and changes of idiom **are** so essential to creative writing. An abstract standard of language with its prescriptions of correctness and grammar is never enough for creative writing. **There** is a kind of clarity which correctness and grammar may bring about—but **beyond** that we need a community of expression which binds all of us together and **mobilises** the entire resources of the language. **Aristotle**, in his definition of the classic style, defines it as **thinking** the thoughts of the wise and speaking the language of the **common** people. Wise thoughts need not necessarily be expressed in **difficult** language. The language used by common people can be extraordinarily rich in **expressions**. Most people **recognise** the qualities and potentiality of their speech and **are** able to use it with a sense of creativity, pleasure and competence. As soon as the **writer** gets into active touch with the **man** for whom he wishes to write, he has found the key to clarity—and the response is not only of **understanding**, but **also** of that **delight** in the catholicity of experience, which is the field of art. Then the **struggle** for clarity is over and a new world of delight opens.

2.10 DIRECTNESS

There are great examples of directness of language both in life and in literature; in fact, the one leads to the other. **Shaw**, himself a consummate stylist, said, 'Force of **assertion** is the alpha and omega of style'. Oliver **Cromwell**, speaking to the Rump, said, 'You have stayed in this place too long, and there is no health in you. In the **name** of God, go!' One characteristic which all these share is a strong conviction, a **purposive** direct need of and drive for, **meaning**. Strong convictions men have, or they acquire them, and it is not relevant here to speak of the roots and modes of such convictions. But it should be evident that men might have strong **convictions** **and** yet remain inexpressive, tongue-tied. The convictions might thus falter, remain unexpressed, and come out **as** anything but direct.

2.10.1 How to achieve directness: technique

Directness, therefore, has to be forged by technique. However simple it may look **when** achieved, it is the result of continuous exercise, application and refinement. **Syntax** is the muscle of language, and exercise of syntax brings out the inherent force of the language. A writer has to experiment with the language to discover and adapt **its** syntax to bring out the compelling force which drives him. Few writers have achieved such creative power with directness in **modern** times as Ernest **Hemingway**. 'The Killers' is a story one **can** go over again and again to see what can **be** done with the bare bones of syntax.

'He must have got **mixed** up with something in Chicago.'
'I guess so,' said Nick.
'It's a hell of a thing.'

(Then there is a **pause** during which George takes out a towel and wipes the counter.)

I wonder **what he** did? Nick said.
'**Double-crossed** somebody. That's what they kill them for.'
'I am going to **get** out of this town,' Nick said.
'Yes, that is a **good** thing to do.'

'A hell of a thing', 'an **awful** thing', 'a good thing to do' are straight out of the syntactical forms **worn** bare by constant usage and yet, isolated by the variation in rhythm, surrounded and spaced by silence and laconic speech, they expand with a burden of meaning, a pressure of **direct** experience that does not bear thinking about.

2.10.2 Clarity and syntax

Syntax has a **structure** to which you can return after letting it stand by itself for a time, so that it can **reveal** its outline of meaning. There is a length of time between 'He must have got **mixed** up with something in Chicago', and 'I wonder what he did?' But once we have that ominous vagueness of 'mixed up in something' it is amplified into 'double-crossed **somebody**'. Again, we return to the anonymous public kind of syntax of statement 'a hell of a thing', 'an awful thing' **till** we reach the consequence, 'That's what they **kill them** for'.

2.10.3 Clarity and vocabulary

The directness of **syntax**, used with a structural rise of force, is combined with bareness of vocabulary. The accumulation of meaning which can be carried by the **simplest** of words, '**thing**', is sharpened by the structural use of **syntax**. Lest we should think that this **can** be done only with dialogue, let us look at a piece of description **from another Hemingway** masterpiece, 'The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber'.

'He's dead in **there**,' Wilson said 'Good work,' and he turned to grip Macomber's hand and as they shook hands, grinning at each other, the **gunbearer shouted** wildly and they saw him coming out of the bush sideways, fast as a crab, **and** the bull coming, nose out, massive head straight out. . . coming in a charge, his little pig eyes bloodshot as he looked at them.

2.10.4 Directness

Directness, with sharp changes in action, needs abruptness. From the chumminess and relaxation of **mutual** congratulation, we are back to the turmoil of action. Some of the key words are '**wildly**', 'fast as a **crab**', 'bull' and then the anthropomorphic transition to the '**killer**' image, 'nose out', 'head out' and **finally** the primitive intention, 'little pig eyes **bloodshot** as he looked at them'. It is characteristic of the energy of directness that it leaps over differences, going **straight** for its point and we are not deflected, diverted or **confused** by any of the peculiarities of expression that are subsumed in the **directness**.

In one animal **description** we have bull, crab and pig—but they are kept to their distinct purpose of use, not **spilling** over into the whole image, which is one of instantaneous danger. Directness, even in **Hemingway**, the master of the short, simple sentence, does not limit itself by rigidly adhering to that mode of syntax. The details are broken up: clear, vivid, but structured together into the combined moment of **catastrophic** recognition.

Activity 2

Examples of clarity in creative writing have been given in this Unit. There are also two excerpts from **Hemingway**. Quote two short passage from any two other writers as examples of clarity. **Also** discuss, in not more than 70 words in each case, how the effect has been **achieved**.

(Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit)

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2.11 SUMMING UP

- Clarity and directness are the most important qualities of creative writing.
- Clarity has three dimensions—what you want to be clear about, what you want to make clear and to whom **you** want to be clear.
- To achieve clarity you must have mastery over your chosen subject, **i.e.**, you **must** distance yourself, think over the matter and get well acquainted with it.
- You must be actually interested in the subject and must identify yourself **with** it. Only then will you be presenting even a familiar matter in a special way so as to hold the reader's attention.
- **Making** things interesting to **all** concerned is a skill which can be learnt. But it is not enough for creative **writing** which has the power to move others and to make things **luminous**.
- Clarity is associated with **transparency** which implies **an absorption** in what is being presented—for example the lecture on radar, Shakespeare's **Sonnets** or **Tolstoy's** War and Peace.
- It is you who are the source of clarity. The reader should not be expected to extract clarity from what you present to him. You should yourself anticipate and tackle questions which the reader may ask. But total self-involvement does not, by itself, ensure clarity **within** yourself about what you are saying.
- Clarity does not mean mere comprehensibility, since to make a thing comprehensible one may sometimes omit its essential complexities or complications.
- Clarity does not come **from oversimplified** statements alone.
- One not only seeks an audience but also creates it, as it were.
Clarity has a great deal to do with language. In a literary work, it is not enough to achieve grammatical correctness in the use of language for it needs to be **individualised**. Rather, you should aim at the expressiveness and distinctiveness which sometimes **characterise** the speech of the common people.
- Strong, **unfaltering** convictions may help in achieving directness of language, but you need continuous and constant experimentation with language to **realise** its inherent force.
- The manipulation of syntax makes for clarity. Skilful, **structural** use of syntax may lend new **meanings** to words.

2.12 ACTIVITIES: AIDS TO ANSWERS

Activity 1

- i) Without mastering **one's** subject one might fumble or make **all** the more confusing what one **wanted** to make clear. Further, one has to be clear about the smallest **detail** of the subject to be able to project it accurately. This should enable the writer to **hold** the attention of the reader.
- ii) Transparency is **associated** with clarity. It involves concentration on the subject, without **which** clarity cannot be achieved. The author has illustrated this by his experience of Dr. K.S. **Krishnan's** lecture on the radar. Unless you master your subject, you are likely to lapse into confusion. Further, a writer should closely observe the use of every little detail in order to make his writing clear and complete.

Activity 2

Hints

Here are four possibilities for you to consider

- i) vividness
- ii) expressiveness
- iii) original use of words and syntax
- iv) facts made luminous.

2.13 GLOSSARY

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

Anthropomorphism: Animals and objects are given human form and qualities.

Clarity: One of the three **essential** qualities of expression. It is associated with (1) grammatical **construction**, (2) correspondence with fact, (3) **logical ordering**, and (4) graphic **imagery**.

Epiphany: In literature, epiphany means an intuitive and sudden insight into **the** reality and basic **meaning** of an event.

Rhetoric: The body of **principles** and **theory concerned** with the presentation of facts and ideas in clear, **convincing** and attractive language, whether spoken or written