

## Sample exercises from A215 *Creative Writing*

Here are some ‘taster’ activities from early parts of the module on ways of stimulating imagination and on writing fiction.

The purpose of this set of exercises is to develop your powers of observation and memory so that your writing will contain vivid and authentic details.

1. Close your eyes for a few moments and think of the room or place around you. Think of the details that you would include in any description and make a mental note of them. Open your eyes and, without looking around, write down what you thought of. Now look at your surroundings and write a paragraph (no more than 150 words) describing them, picking out at least three things that you haven’t noticed recently – things you didn’t think of when you closed your eyes.

The details you noticed may have come in various guises. You may have seen some dirt on the floor, something that isn’t usually there. You may have noticed an ornament that you haven’t looked at for a while, an object that’s always present but not always seen. You may have picked up on the colour of a wall, the handle on a door. Some of these things will have changed since the last time you noticed them – maybe the wall colour has faded. Some things will not be quite as you thought they were – maybe you didn’t remember the door handle being made of metal. It is useful to do this sort of perceptual exercise at regular intervals. In this way you will revive the way you see the world – by defamiliarising your perceptions you will reinvigorate your writing.

Here are some similar follow-up exercises that you can try when you get time. Try the same exercise on a different, but still familiar, place. You can also try it with familiar characters in your life – describe them in their absence and then take note of the things you didn’t recall.

Think of the details of a short journey – say to the shops, to work or even to another part of your home – a journey that you make regularly. Jot these details down. Now make the journey, making a point of looking for things that you haven’t noticed recently. Write a paragraph about the journey using the new details. Write a paragraph describing a simple action that you do every day – for example, washing, cooking, shaving, putting on make-up, feeding the cat. When you next perform the action, notice everything about it and afterwards note down details that weren’t in your original paragraph.

2. The purpose of this exercise is to give you practice in creating a character through thinking about their possessions, especially items that are important to the owner.

Here is a list of ten objects:

withered poinsettia;  
business card;  
dusty radio;  
silver locket with inscription;  
bottle of herbal medicine;  
auburn hair dye;  
fortune-telling cards;  
jar of sharpened pencils;  
brand new laptop.

Invent a character who owns these things. Write up to 250 words about the character, incorporating some of the objects into your description.

3. The purpose of this activity is to give you practice in carrying out research (interviewing a friend or relative about their workplace) and in creating a strong setting for your character and story.

Ask a relative or friend to describe his or her workplace to you, including any machines, special furniture or equipment used. Incorporate some of the details into a scene in which a character is tired of the same job and longs to leave it. Don't overload your piece with what you have learned – use just enough to give an authentic atmosphere: for example, the look of the post office sorting room at 4 am; the sounds of ailing rodents and Rottweilers in the vet's waiting room. Use up to 500 words.

If you enjoy these writing activities, you can find out more about the module by reading the chapter 'Writing What You Know' from the Workbook, which is available online (<http://openlearn.open.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=2799> ).