

Exploding the Moment - Using Slow Motion Writing

Often the best narratives focus on a short period of time and work to develop the details, emotions, and significance of that specific moment. One strategy for this is to explode that moment or write about it as if it's happening in slow motion. Slow motion writing lets the reader know that this moment is important. It also gives the reader time to really experience and visualize the event. On the other hand, unimportant moments should speed up to keep the story moving along and keep the reader interested. If there is a part in the narrative that gives important background information but is not a truly significant moment, the writing should be sped up there. Good writers touch on that information briefly, but then get the reader back to the heart of the narrative. Good writers also focus most of their writing on the really important and interesting stuff when creating an effective narrative.

Strategies for slowing and developing your writing:

- Give lots of specific sensory details to help the reader visualize the entire scene.
- Linger on important descriptions and use similes and metaphors to develop them.
- Delve into your thoughts and tell us what you were thinking and feeling at the time.

Notes on Sensory Details and Descriptions

Good sensory descriptions are multi-layered. Good writers try to incorporate multiple senses and visual images, comparisons, and figurative language (similes, metaphors, personification, hyperboles, etc.) to describe the entire scene. Slow motion writing allows the reader to look around and take everything in as the action unfolds. Good writers achieve this by focusing on all the details they noticed during each second of this important moment. Below is an example of an underdeveloped description with its more descriptive revision:

Underdeveloped: The sky turned gold and purple as the sun sank behind the trees.

It's a visual description of what the writer saw, but this one sentence doesn't really capture the beauty of the sunset that the writer was trying to describe. The writer needed to take the reader through the whole experience of the sunset and expand on what he or she saw by describing several different visual details. After revising, the writer ended up with this sensory description, which does a much better job of creating a visual image for the reader.

Revised: The sky was clear and blue, like my grandmother's china. Wispy white horsetail clouds dotted the horizon and turned slowly gold as the afternoon sun sank behind the trees to the west. In the east, the china blue sky took on a hint of deep purple. The dark color rose steadily in the sky, like blackberry juice soaking up into a light blue cloth. As the sky darkened to twilight, the woods began to sparkle with fireflies blinking on and off.

Notes on thoughts and feelings:

Brief announcements of the writer's thoughts are not as effective as a well-developed *train of thought* that allows the reader to truly understand what the writer is thinking. In a narrative essay, the writer's thoughts are important. Good writers work to develop those thoughts so that the reader can hear their voice on the page. Good writers connect with the reader by revealing something about

themselves so that the reader understands a little of who they are and why this experience matters to them. Below is an example of an underdeveloped thought with its more descriptive revision:

Underdeveloped: The night before the Trivia Bowl, I was so nervous.

Revised: In school, I did not want to stick out in any way, especially for anything that could be considered dorky. Problem was, I was captain of the Trivia Team. The night before the Trivia Bowl, I was freaking out. I imagined that if we won, they would proudly announce it over the intercom to the entire school during homeroom. I imagined all the kids pointing and laughing at the trivia dork. This prospect terrified me beyond words. And yet, another part of me desperately wanted to win the Trivia Bowl. I loved trivia and, even more, I loved winning at stuff. It was a terrible dilemma. (From "The Day I Threw the Trivia Bowl" by Robert Siegel)

Read the following examples of exploded moments noticing how all the elements come together to create one descriptive slow motion scene.

"Spilled Milk" from *Exploding a Moment* by Barry Lane

I watched myself begin this horrible deed. My hand seemed to suddenly have a will of its own. It picked up the milk carton. The spout was already open. My arm extended over Carol's head, tipping the carton. The liquid poured in a slow, steady, thick, unending stream down through her long blonde hair, soaking the back of her clothes and running onto the floor. As the milk reached the floor I shifted the spout slightly to begin another long milky journey down the front of her. It poured over her forehead and into her eyes, running in rivers down each side of her nose, converging on her chin and splashing onto her plate. Her food was soon awash and the milk poured over the edge of her plate and ran into her lap. And still I poured on—it was too late to stop now. The rapture of it all; oh, sweet revenge.

Carol was shocked into absolute silence, her milk-washed eyes staring at me in total disbelief. What had I done? I only meant to pour a little to scare her and now it was all over—everywhere. Her chair was a four-legged island in the middle of a giant white pond on the kitchen floor. How could one quart of milk go so far? For a second or two she didn't react, and I had a brief but fleeting prayer that she was stunned speechless. But not for long.

"Daddeeeeeee!" she screamed at the top of her lungs. The sound of cocktail glasses being knocked over on the living room coffee table and my father charging around the corner happened almost simultaneously. In an instant he took in the whole scene: horrible big sister pours milk over innocent little sister's head. I simply couldn't have looked much worse. It didn't take any smarts to realize that. I knew there was no hope of explaining my way out of this one. "Guilty" was the immediate verdict of the judge.

from *Walk Two Moons* by Sharon Creech

When the man drove off, I crawled beneath the railing and made my way down the hill toward the bus. In the east the sky was smoky gray, and I was glad for the approaching dawn. In the year and a half since the trail was hacked out, the brush had begun to grow back. Wet with dew, straggly branches slapped

and scratched at my legs and hid uneven ground so that several times I tripped, tumbling and sliding downward.

The bus lay on its side like an old sick horse, its broken headlights staring out mournfully into the surrounding trees. Most of the huge rubber tires were punctured and grotesquely twisted on their axles. I climbed up onto the bus's side, hoping to make my way down to an open window, but here were two enormous gashes torn into the side, and the jagged metal was peeled back like a sardine tin. Through a smashed window behind the driver's seat, I saw a jumbled mess of twisted seats and chunks of foam rubber. Everything was dusted with fuzzy green mold.

I had imagined that I would drop through a window and walk down the aisle, but there was no space inside to move. I had wanted to scour every inch of the bus, looking for something—anything—that might be familiar.