



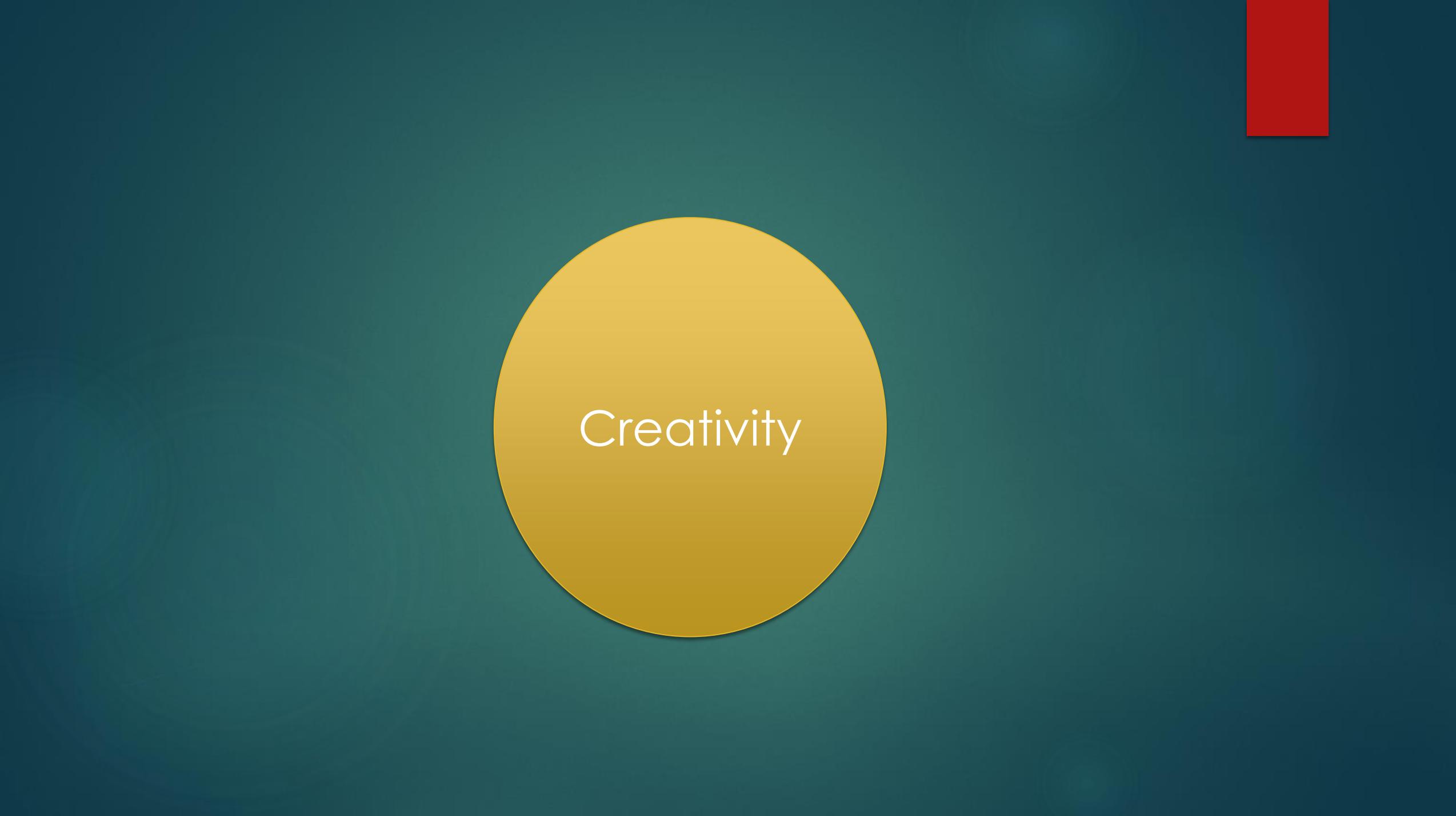
Short Story Writing Competition Guidance Notes

Lesson 1: Introduction

Principles of Creative Writing

1. Good writers are good readers. Think about and explore stories you have read and the emotions and experiences associated with them.
2. Be a critical and conscious writer and continually evaluate yourself.
3. Show how ideas, actions, questions, fantasy, conflict, etc. come together to form a cohesive narrative. It is a journey for the writer as well as the reader and it needs to be both accessible and engaging.

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4. Good stories are rooted in real experience. To make your story believable, incorporate elements of your own experience and create spaces that are believable.
 5. Break expectations. Don't have an overly obvious plot that the reader can guess from the first couple of paragraphs.
 6. Show, don't tell!



Creativity



Take a moment to familiarize yourself with the prompts.

A. Creative Writing

What is **creativity**? On the most basic level, it is the ability to cause something to exist. However, when we expand on this idea, we need an element of reflection – a reflection upon the human condition and curiosity towards life. Here creativity centers on the desire to explore the world and contribute to it. To do this, try to be 1) self-aware and attentive to things around you, 2) curious about new things and perspectives, and 3) able to play.

Exercise 1 – Emotional Reactions

To explore how you view the world and how you can look at things from different perspectives and play with ideas, write down your first response to these words or phrases:

- A black cat
- A white, torn dress
- When the doctor opened the door, she saw . . .
- The president's biggest challenge was . . .

Exercise 1 (cont.)

Next, ask yourself why these were your first responses. What cultural expectations are at work? What other ways can you approach them? How can understanding your reactions lead to more creative possibilities?

Doing this exercise will help you

1) Experiment with **expectations**

- How might your expectations be similar to or different from your reader's?
- How can you use this to your advantage?

2) Translate **feelings** into words. This is the raw, flexible material that can be used to build up the story.

Exercise 2 – Free Writing

Free writing, or stream-of-consciousness writing, allows you to get your ideas out without your social filter getting rid of potentially interesting story elements. Choose one of the pictures on the board that grabs your imagination. Next, write freely for 5 minutes about anything that comes to mind. This does not need to be organized. Think about the feelings, relationships, and perspectives that the picture evokes.

Alternately, pick a picture from *The New York Times*' "A Year of Picture Prompts" found here:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/01/learning/lesson-plans/a-year-of-picture-prompts-over-160-images-to-inspire-writing.html>

Exercise 3 – Organized Description

Take one of the elements from your free writing and reflect on it in a more detailed, organized manner. Explore why you feel the way you do about it and how you can use this for a story.

B. The Story

A short story is a *slice* of life, so you should narrow down the time frame and plot to ensure that it is not too much for 2,000 words. There are many ways to start building a story, but here are two approaches:

- 1) Create a setting or character and build up a world around it
- 2) Start from the turning point or climax of the plot and work backwards



The opening scene of a story is important as it creates the energy and intrigue needed to fuel the plot. This will make the reader unable to turn away until they have satisfied their curiosity. This is done through a dramatic event, a question, or a mysterious/tense situation. Any situation that needs to be resolved is a good starting point.

Exercise 4 – Horizon of Expectation and Questions

Look at prompt 3. What expectations do you have when you read it? What makes you want to read on? How could your expectations affect the story? How can you break those expectations to make the plot more interesting? Discuss your ideas with your partner.

Exercise 5 – Tailoring Intrigue

Choose two images from Prompt 1. Then, write an opening to engage your reader and make them curious. What expectations (with setting, characters, interactions, etc.) can you play with?

Exercise 6 – Choose Your Prompt

Which of the prompts would you prefer to work with and why?